

The Taiwan Strait Crises: a comparative analysis of  
American extended deterrence policy

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## **Introduction**

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Since the retreat of the Kuomintang to the island of Taiwan in late 1949 three crises occurred between the ROC (the Republic of China controlling Taiwan) and the PRC (the People's Republic of China controlling mainland China) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both the First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-1955), the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis (1958) and the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996) had the same three key actors with the USA and the ROC standing against the PRC. These crises will be collectively referred to in this paper as the Taiwan Strait crises. For the sake of convenience shall the ROC hereafter be referred to as Taiwan while the PRC shall be referred to as China. The Taiwan Strait Crises are excellent cases to study the extended deterrence policies of the US with and this policy will be the central point of attention in this research paper.

### Theoretical and practical significance of Taiwan

The expulsion of the KMT to Taiwan didn't remove the underlying basis for conflict as technically both Taiwan and China have a historical right to the Chinese mainland (Chen, 2012, pp. 42-43). Both regimes therefore had the successful destruction of the other as a core national objective (Fung, 2008, p. 12).

Moreover, as China considers Taiwan a breakaway province a revocation of the goal of unification or declaration of independence by the Taiwanese leadership would imply war (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 45). Thus, though it fulfils nearly all criteria of a *de facto* independent state, Taiwan is prevented from *de jure* independence by military threats from China (Fung, 2008, p. 23).

The situation grows more complicated as China can't stop the US or the international community from getting involved. Despite American refusal to acknowledge whether Taiwan has sovereignty and the official recognition of China in the 1970's, the US has a deeper relationship with Taiwan than with most countries (Fung, 2008, p. 11; Tsang, 2006, p. 36).

Originally, Taiwan was part of the 'chain of islands' as a defence against Soviet aggression in the far East and although military strategists decided against permanent and 'overt' US military presence on the island the US sought to support the KMT (Zhang, 1992, pp. 50-52). Thus, as long as the American forces weren't overstretched or otherwise incapable the US could respond forcefully and shield Taiwan from a Chinese attack (Tsang, 2006, pp. 1-4). However, as the military relationship between China and Taiwan grows more asymmetrical and the dependency of the defence of Taiwan on the US increases, there are

growing fears that the US may either abandon Taiwan or be pulled into a war with China (Tsang, 2006, p. 42).

Nonetheless, as a war between the US and China over Taiwan would be incredibly devastating for all parties involved, the US is forced to balance its relationships with both China and Taiwan (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, pp. 162-163). Taiwan is therefore a critical issue in global international relations and within US deterrence policy. Moreover, the special nature of the conflict between Taiwan and China and the American interpretations of it makes it a special case from a theoretical perspective as well, specifically from the theory of extended deterrence.

#### Theoretical scope: theories and research findings

Extended deterrence can be defined as the threat to use retaliatory force in response to an attack on a third party by another state, thus heightening the cost of attacking this third party and dissuading the state to attack (Hooper, 2015, p. 129; Huth & Russett, 1984, p. 496). In the case of Taiwan, the US seeks to preserve the status quo and threatens retaliatory force against China should it attack Taiwan.

However, Taiwan is an exceptional case of deterrence as both China and Taiwan are capable of disrupting the status quo. US policy around the Strait thus depends on a model of dual deterrence in order to prevent both China and Taiwan from doing so (Fung, 2008, 79-80; Pinsker, 2003, p. 356). In broad terms this means that in order to preserve the peace the US has to constrain Taiwanese initiatives for independence while simultaneously prevent Chinese military reactions against these initiatives (Clark, 2004, p. 27; Fung, 2008, p. 37).

Consequently, this has resulted in a deterrence policy where on one hand the US must appear fully committed to respond to Chinese military threats while its deterrent must be credible enough to sufficiently deter China from attacking Taiwan. On the other hand, the US commitment must also remain flexible enough to abandon Taiwan in the event that they exceed their boundaries in their quest for independence (Chen, 2012, pp. 45-47; Tsang, 2006, pp. 46-47).

Furthermore, the US prefers to avoid for Taiwan to be under the impression that the US will support Taiwan under any circumstance as this could cause Taiwan to be less inclined to strengthen their own defences (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, pp. 163-164).

Thus, due to the necessity of dual deterrence the US can only invoke a vague and unclear stance on its defence of Taiwan, a phenomenon called 'strategic ambiguity' (Fung, 2008, pp. 39-40). Due to strategic ambiguity the US is able to adjust its level of support for

Taiwan depending on how destabilizing Taiwanese actions are (Pinsker, 2003, pp. 353-354; Zhonqi, 2003, pp. 388-389), bolstering stability, and as long as the US states this adjustment beforehand the credibility of its threat will not be diminished (Fung, 2008, pp. 73-75).

All in all, the US aims to deter China from attacking Taiwan but to do so it has to walk a fine line between committing itself outright to the defence of Taiwan on one hand and to remain ambiguous about this commitment in order to refrain Taiwan from provoking China on the other.

### Discussion

Literature concerning American policy across the Taiwan Strait usually refers to the Taiwan Strait Crises as cases of American extended deterrence. As it has always been a very clear ambition of the US to prevent a Chinese attack on Taiwan it appears reasonable to define the Taiwan Strait Crises as cases of American extended deterrence (Chan, 2003, p. 109; George & Smoke, 1974, p. 370; Ross, 2001, pp. 48-50). The only voices opposed to defining the crises as cases of successful or partially successful American deterrence are raised by scholars who argue from a more constructivist point of view. They argue that China didn't aim to threaten Taiwan's survival and that the Taiwan Strait crises therefore don't qualify as cases of deterrence (Lebow & Stein, 1990, pp. 353-355; Pinsker, 2003, p. 365).

Contrary to the debate about the theoretical aspect of American deterrence the more practical debate about the usefulness of strategic ambiguity as a deterrence policy for the US is recurring continuously.

On one hand, there are those who argue that strategic ambiguity has lost its effectiveness and should be abandoned in favour of an unambiguous US policy. These scientists argue that the lack of clarity about US intentions could lead one or both parties to different conclusions about American support or their adversary's power, creating overconfidence or misleading perceptions (Fung, 2008, pp. 75-77; Tsang, 2006, p. 31). A distinct argument against ambiguity is the impossibility for the US to effectively assure China of preventing Taiwanese independence, causing China to signal its resolve to unification continuously via threats (Wedeman, 2001, pp. 227-229).

On the other hand, strategic ambiguity is supported by those that argue that despite its flaws it's the only deterrence policy that allows for the preservation of stability as it grants the US the flexibility that it requires to control violence across the Strait (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 187; Fung, 2008, p. 20). Both China and Taiwan want to change the status quo but, as they

are only willing to commit to change if the benefits outweigh the costs and as neither power is currently capable to reach that, they both also have an interest in perpetuating the status quo (Wedeman, 2001, pp. 222-3). Consequently, US ambiguity allows both China and Taiwan to avoid their own worst-case scenario for the Taiwan issue (Pinsker, 2003, pp. 353-354) while they are inclined to offer concessions as they now need to sway their antagonist in a peaceful way (Chen, 2012, pp. 46-47).

### Research question

To conclude, due to the significance of the Taiwan Strait in global politics and the implications of a crisis US deterrence across the Strait forms a critical issue in both theoretical and practical terms.

It would therefore be useful to have a detailed and comprehensive review of each Taiwan Strait crisis as these crises are the instances that provide the clearest view of the mechanisms and effects of US deterrence across the Strait. Besides granting us a greater understanding of the situation across the Taiwan Strait an analysis of each crisis also allows comparisons between the crises to be made.

Such a comparison would reveal the similarities and differences between the crises as well as illustrating the role and effectiveness of extended deterrence theory concerning the Taiwan Strait. In light of these aims the research question applied in this paper would be: ‘What are the differences (or similarities) between the three Taiwan Strait Crises?’

## 1. Methodology

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As the primary aim of this research is to analyse the differences and similarities between the Taiwan Strait crises the research method should be able to achieve three objectives: to capture the individual developments during each crisis, to account for the similarities between the crises and finally, to allow a comparison between the crises to be established.

Considering these objectives, the preferred research method would be a comparative analysis of the Taiwan Strait crises as this method allows individual developments to be described on one hand and while comparing these developments analytically on the other. Such a comparison of the differences or similarities between the Taiwan Strait Crises would first require a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the developments during each individual crisis. Only after this analysis has detailed each individual crisis can a comparison be made

The great advantage of this method is that on one hand by capturing the uniqueness of each crisis possible changes in American deterrence policy can be uncovered while similarities can reveal generalisations or patterns between the crises. Besides, it's notable how the first two Taiwan Strait Crises took place in the 1950's while the third crisis took place in the 1990's. A comparative analysis could be interesting considering the geopolitical changes between the crises.

Thus, this research is twofold as one section aims to analyse each crisis in detail while another section comprises the comparison of these crises with each other. Therefore, in the parts 2 to 6 a chronological summary of each crisis will be established containing the background to and the developments during each crisis. As the 1954-1955 crisis and the 1958 crisis followed each other relatively soon and the basic strategic structures hadn't changed between them (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 371-372) no background will be provided for the 1958 crisis.

In part 7 the comparative analysis will be construed using the summaries of the individual developments from previous parts.

## **2. Background to the crises in the 1950's**

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Both Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950's occurred during the term of President Eisenhower (1953-1961). The US interventions during the crises under his leadership proved to be one of the most successful records of deterrence-through-force in recent history (Tsang, 2006, p. 18). However, in order to properly understand the origins of the Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950's it is helpful to sketch the most important concepts of US Taiwan policy in the last years of Eisenhower's predecessor, Truman.

Truman's position on US support of Taiwan was impacted heavily by the Korean war. In early 1950 Truman made clear privately that he would allow Taiwan to fall (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 189) by announcing that the US would not occupy or defend Taiwan (Zhang, 1992, p. 55). Thus, Truman went against Chiang Kai-shek who, as he saw how US guarantees of protection were made to South-Korea, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, demanded a similar guarantee with assurances that covered not only Taiwan but also its islands right before the mainland's coast (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 188).

However, the outbreak of the Korean war on June 25, 1950, made Truman reconsider his Taiwan policy as he feared the war could distract the US from Taiwan and allow China to take the islands unopposed (Zhang, 1992, p. 55). To this end Truman sent the 7<sup>th</sup> US fleet to the Taiwan Strait on June 27<sup>th</sup>, effectively preventing China from attacking Taiwan (Kissinger, 2011, p. 153).

Still, in order to prevent being pulled into a war with China the US prevented Taiwan from attacking China as well, essentially freezing the conflict by neutralizing the Strait (Zhang, 1992, p. 59). The stationing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the Taiwan Strait was the first explicit measure of deterrence across the Strait (Zhang, 1992, p. 61). The measure was supposed to be temporary (George & Smoke, 1974 p. 268) but was passed down to Eisenhower when the Taiwan issue remained unresolved.

Immediately after his inauguration on January 20, 1953, Eisenhower was confronted with the necessity of ending the Korean war as it was unpopular in the US and fiscally untenable (Zhang, 1992, pp. 120-122). Thus, to force China into negotiations Eisenhower declared in his first State of the Union on February 2 that the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet would no longer shield China from Taiwanese attacks (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 269-270; Kissinger, 2011, p. 153). Although a final ceasefire to the Korean war was achieved on July 26, 1953, distrust between the US and China remained high and tensions lingered (Zhang, 1992, pp. 141-148).



Resolving tensions across the Strait proved difficult for the US for several reasons. Firstly, in the 1950's both China and Taiwan saw themselves as the rightful government of China and the other as an illegitimate force occupying parts of China. As recognizing both governments wasn't accepted by either Taiwan or China and therefore not an option, the US only recognized Taiwan (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 151-152).

Secondly, according to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, a direct alliance with Taiwan was unfavourable for the US as a potential conflict with China would be too costly and unfavourably timed while the US wouldn't be able to control such conflict. Therefore, against the wishes of Taiwan, Dulles argued against extending US defence to the offshore islands (Zhang, 1992, pp. 201-204). Instead the US advised Chiang Kai-Shek to strengthen Taiwanese defences on the islands himself (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 270).

Thirdly, the Eisenhower administration found Taiwan too risky diplomatically to jeopardize the stability of newly created systems such as SEATO and alliances with Japan and South-Korea (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 158-159).

Thus, the Eisenhower administration found it best the US didn't alter the Taiwan policy in early 1953. The 7<sup>th</sup> fleet kept the Strait 'neutralized' and US foreign policy focussed on preserving Taiwanese independence mainly through economic and military aid, although the latter was limited to Taiwanese self-defence (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 268; Zhang, 1992, pp. 200-202).

Meanwhile, China perceived the US relationship with Taiwan as part of a plan to establish a chain of islands surrounding China's coast that could function as beachheads in the American subjugation of Asia and contain China. Though Taiwan was excluded from it, the large-scale US alliances-building such as SEATO in 1954 were viewed from the same perspective (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 274-275; Zhang, 1992, p. 203).

In the latter half of 1954 US-Taiwan negotiations about a defence treaty were already advanced (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 271). However, Mao knew a defence treaty between the US and Taiwan, if it were to happen, would cause a permanent separation between China and Taiwan (Chen, 2012, p. 48).

Still, after what was perceived as a win in the Korean war the Chinese leadership was quite optimistic about their military forces. Furthermore, Mao thought the Chinese advantages in its geography, demographics, morale and strategy in the event of a war between the US and China would give China a good chance to counter an American attack (Zhang, 1992, pp. 22-

24, 150). Thus, although China considered its military capabilities adequate it judged it would be best if the US-Taiwan relationship were to be broken before a defence treaty could be agreed between them.

### **3. The First Taiwan Strait crisis (1954-1955)**

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On September 3, 1954, China goes over to action and subjects the island groups of Quemoy (Jinmen) and Matsu (Mazu) to heavy artillery bombardments. Dulles is at that moment in Manila for the formation of SEATO (Kissinger, 2011, p. 154).

In deciding whether or not to defend the offshore islands Eisenhower had to consider the military and political aspects of the situation. Militarily, the offshore islands were decided insignificant as they weren't essential for the defence of Taiwan itself (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 284). Besides, the US remained under the impression that Taiwan wasn't under threat as China lacked the capabilities to carry out the enormous amphibious attack such a threat would have required (Zhang, 1992, p. 205). Still, US officials started planning for the possible use of tactical weapons in case of escalation (Kissinger, 2011, p. 154).

Politically however, in the weeks directly following the bombing of Jinmen several high-ranking US officials and institutions regarded the potential loss of the islands as greatly damaging to US prestige, thus enhancing Communist standing while bolstering Chinese military positions (Zhang, 1992, pp. 206-207).

At first the US sought to avoid military conflict and, desiring to be seen as the reasonable party to the rest of the world, involved the international community. On September 27 the US convinced New Zealand to propose a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire (Zhang, 1992, p. 211) despite Taiwanese objections claiming that it would endanger Taiwan's sovereignty (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 284).

Unsuccessful in de-escalating the situation the US and Taiwan sign a mutual defence treaty on December 5, denounced by Zhou Enlai on the 8<sup>th</sup> (Chen, 2012, p. 48, Zhang, 1992, p. 212). However, the treaty only applied specifically to Taiwan and the Pescadores. US commitment to defend island groups such as Quemoy and Matsu, the territory under attack, was to be 'determined by mutual agreement' in the future (Chen, 2012, pp. 225-226). This treaty is therefore reminiscent of the security treaties the US made with other East-Asian

states in this period, which didn't detail specific US responses to an attack or what precisely constituted as an attack in the first place (Hooper, 2015, pp. 131-132).

The December treaty didn't prevent conflict however, as in January 1955 large-scale Chinese offensives were launched against several other Taiwan-controlled island groups, the Yijiangshan and Dachen. While Yijiangshan was captured on the 18<sup>th</sup> the US persuaded Taiwan to withdraw from Dachen, which fell shortly after to China (Kissinger, 2011, p. 156; Zhang, 1992, pp. 218-219).

It was clear that a deeper clarification of American support was necessary. The Formosa Resolution, enacted on January 29, authorized the president to defend Taiwan and its islands as the president considered was required for the defence of Taiwan (Chen, 2012, p. 49). Meanwhile, the US privately assured Taiwan that it would defend Quemoy and Matsu islands (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 285-287).

Even the Formosa Resolution proved inadequate in forcing an immediate ceasefire however, as the Chinese military build-up across the Strait continued. As it was feared that a Chinese attack might occur before Taiwanese defences were capable the US resorted to a stronger deterrent, the nuclear threat (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 290; Zhang, 1992, pp. 213-215). On March 15 Dulles announced that the US was prepared to counter any Communist offensive with nuclear weapons, confirmed by Eisenhower the next day (Kissinger, 2011, p. 156, George & Smoke, 1974, p. 291).

The Chinese leadership took the nuclear threat seriously and reconsidered. On April 23 Zhou Enlai stated that China wanted to avoid war with the US and was willing to negotiate. A week later China ended the shelling in the Strait. The US responded on July 13, announcing that it was willing to sit down with China at Geneva, thus ending the crisis (Kissinger, 2011, 157; Zhang, 1992, pp. 216-222).

#### **4. The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis (1958)**

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Though the first Taiwan Strait crisis has resulted in prolonged shelling on Taiwanese controlled territory and had nearly brought the US into war with China it failed to convince the Taiwanese leadership to abandon all offshore islands as this might have taken away the cause of future conflict. As such, another shelling campaign began on August 23, 1958, targeting again the island groups of Quemoy and Matsu (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 266-267; Kissinger, 2011, p. 172).

In the days after, on August 24 and 25, Chinese and Taiwanese forces clashed on Dongding, an island under Taiwanese control. The US reacted on the 26<sup>th</sup> by placing the 7<sup>th</sup> fleet on alert and reinforced it with two aircraft carriers and several other ships and aircraft (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 381-382).

Between September 2 and 4 the US realised that Quemoy and Matsu were vital to Taiwanese security and could not be lost to a blockade. Thus, on September 4, Dulles publicly reiterated that the US was committed to defending Taiwan with nuclear weapons if necessary, including Quemoy and Matsu (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 364; Kissinger, 2011, pp. 174-175).

The strongly worded statements convinced the Chinese leaders that, although Eisenhower didn't invoke the Formosa Resolution, US commitment to defending Taiwan and the island groups was sufficiently high enough to dissolve any chance of taking the islands without American interference (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 365; Zhang, 1992, pp. 250-251).

The next day on September 5 Zhou Enlai stated China's limited aims and announced a resumption of China-US talks at ambassadorial level (Kissinger, 2011, p. 175). What followed was a stalemate between the US and China that ended on September 21 when it became clear that the Chinese blockade of Quemoy and Matsu had been broken by the US. On October 6 China announced a one-week ceasefire which, as tensions gradually declined, was extended when it ran out (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 383; Zhang, 1992, pp. 261-265).

## 5. Background to the Third Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996)

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Following a decade of pushing for recognition throughout the world, the 1970's and 1980's experienced a strengthening of the US-China relationship (Fung, 2008, p. 13). As a result of the Shanghai Communique in 1972 and the Normalization Communique in 1978 diplomatic relations between the US and China could be established on January 1, 1979 (Chen, 2012, p. 38). From 1972 the US would officially acknowledge the One-China principle, the recognition that there is only 'one China' and that 'Taiwan is part of that China' (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 163; Fung, 2008, p. 16).

However, it is important to emphasize that even with acknowledgement of the One-China principle and the official recognition of China by the US government the position of the US in the Taiwan issue changed little (Fung, 2008, p. 17). Though the 1954 mutual defence treaty was to be terminated and American military forces withdrawn, arms sales to Taiwan continued, even after a third Communique in 1982 failed to address this arms sales issue (Chen, 2012, pp. 39-41).

To address the question of American commitment an effective deterrence of both China and Taiwan by the US was established with the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 (Fung, 2008, pp. 17-18). Although it states that the US is appropriated any action to ensure peace in Taiwan it falls short of an outright commitment to Taiwanese defence as it doesn't stipulate the exact conditions that would warrant American intervention and doesn't specify the kind of American intervention (Pinsker, 2003, p. 356). Thus, through ambiguity a clearly defined American position in the Taiwan issue was circumvented and relations with both China and Taiwan could be maintained.

### *The attitude of the US toward the Taiwan issue in 1995*

The issue of Taiwan in the US was impacted primarily by rising support for the Taiwanese quest for sovereignty. Contrary to China's declining political reputation after 1989 Taiwan's prestige improved considerably in the US. This increase of standing wasn't just the result of economic development but predominantly due to political change, such as the implementation of universal suffrage and the first presidential elections (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 165; Fung, 2008, p. 18). Consequently, the US legislative grew far more supportive of Taiwan than it was of China (Fung, 2008, p. 34) and was inclined to continue and upgrade arms sales to Taiwan (Xin, 2002, pp. 26-27).

However, the arms sales had the unintended effect of both bolstering the impact of separatism and decreasing the assurance of the US to China of respecting the One-China principle as the arms sales were seen as American support for independence (Fung, 2008, pp. 35, 109-110). The US presidents had limited flexibility in this matter as, when confronted with the choice to veto arms sales or not, each was forced to choose between either his political position in the US and his Taiwan policy of ambiguity (Wedeman, 2001, p. 223).

American flexibility on the Taiwan issue decreased once more by rising Chinese nationalism which motivated the Chinese leadership to reject American mediation so as not to be seen as giving in on the Taiwan issue (Fung, 2008, p. 30).

Therefore, when in this period of decreasing American flexibility on the Taiwan issue and rising support for Taiwan in the US the Clinton administration undertook a review of its Taiwan policy in 1993-1994 it resulted in a deeper relationship between the US and Taiwan (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 165; Xin, 2002, p. 27).

#### *The attitude of China toward the Taiwan issue in 1995*

Taiwan's importance to China had only increased between 1958 and 1995. The realignment of the Chinese party's ideology from communism to capitalism while denouncing democracy caused it to lose support among the people. To offset this loss the party turned to nationalism and, as Chinese nationalism focussed on past humiliations by foreign powers and the reclamation of lost territories, was consequently given less space to manoeuvre on the Taiwan issue (Fung, 2008, pp. 21, 27-30).

Therefore, not only would the loss of Taiwan threaten the survival of the Chinese regime (Pinsker, 2003, p. 357), Taiwanese separatism hampered the stronger image of itself China wanted to send into the world (Tsang, 2006, p. 21). Meanwhile, in line with the suspicion that the US was using Taiwan to contain China, increasing American support of Taiwan was perceived as encouraging Taiwanese independence as actions prior to 1995 showed (Ross, 2000, p. 87).

Thus, the Chinese leadership assumed Taiwan was creeping towards independence and felt the need to demonstrate its resolve to prevent Taiwan from going too far, something they considered Lee Teng-Hui's trip to the US to be (Clark, 2004, p. 26; Lieberthal, 1995, p. 46). In 1995 China, so to speak, was already on the defensive as it perceived Taiwan to challenge the One-China principle with America support (Xin, 2002, p. 28).

*The situation in Taiwan in 1995*

Until martial law was lifted in 1987 severe restrictions and prohibitions prevented a political discussion in Taiwan about Taiwan's future. Until the 1970's there was no doubt whether Taiwan was part of China as Taiwan was recognized by most of the world as the sole legitimate government of China and unification was Taiwan's overarching goal (Fung, 2008, p. 13).

However, following the repeal of martial law and the opening of the media an explosive surge in political activity in Taiwan would ensure gradual democratic reform (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, pp. 23-24, 48). Eventually, in 1994 a constitutional amendment allowed the direct election of the Taiwanese president by universal suffrage (Kissinger, 2011, p. 471).

Democratization did not just permit the public expression of once repressed ideas or the rise of new political forces, it also encouraged the rise of a distinct Taiwanese identity and the need for politicians to appeal to the electorate (Tsang, 2006, p. 42). Consequently, support in Taiwan for eventual unification and the One-China principle decreased while the DPP, a rising force in Taiwanese politics, advocated a separatist stance on the issue (Clark, 2004, p. 31). Moreover, the growing desire for separatism affected the dialogue between Taiwan as Taiwanese political leaders had to comply with the growing demand for separatism, a notion China couldn't accept (Tsang, 2006, p. 13).

To conclude, at the onset of the 1995 crisis the flexibility of the political leadership in both the US, China and Taiwan was reduced as their space to manoeuvre was restricted by respectively American support of Taiwan, Chinese nationalism and Taiwanese separatism.

## 6. The Third Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996)

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The direct cause of the Third Taiwan Strait crisis was the visit of Taiwanese president Lee Teng-Hui to Cornell University in the US. His visa was approved by the White House on May 22, 1995, for the visit on June 9. This move was greatly disturbing for China as Clinton had guaranteed that the visit wouldn't be allowed and therefore embodied a striking reversal of US policy (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 8). However, when both Congress and the Senate voted in support of the visit, the former unanimously and the latter with only a single dissenting voice, the US administration yielded to the enormous pressure and altered its position (Ross, 2000, p. 91).

Furthermore, contrary to American assumptions and promises to China, Lee spoke in his speech unambiguously of Taiwanese independence and characterized Taiwan as a legitimate, lawful government (Bernkopf Tucker, 2005, p. 84).

Encouraged by the agitated Chinese military (Xin, 2002, p. 32), the Chinese leadership was convinced that a show of force was required to signal China's opposition to Taiwanese separatism to the US and to remind Taiwan to keep committed to the One-China principle (Pinsker, 2003, p. 364).

In a meeting between former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen on July 4 it clarified that Taiwanese sovereignty was absolutely non-negotiable for China (Kissinger, 2011, p. 474) and that the US would have to make 'concrete moves' to resolve the situation. On July 18 China announced it would conduct missile tests and naval and air exercises near Taiwan from July 21 to 28. It was followed by Taiwanese declarations that it would conduct its own exercises (Ross, 2000, pp. 94-96).

Shortly after the Chinese exercises concluded a meeting occurred on August 1 between US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Qian Qichen. Qian again criticised the lack of clear, formal American backing of the One-China principle and suggested a fourth Communique to settle the dispute. In a private letter Clinton assured Jiang of American opposition to Taiwanese independence (Ross, 2000, pp. 95-97).

China conducted a second round of missile and naval exercises near Taiwan from August 15 to August 25. This time it included a simulation of a naval blockade targeting Taiwan while defending against American intervention (Scobell, 2000, p. 232).

On September 18, the US State Department declared its opposition to a fourth Communique as it claimed that the US position on Taiwan was clear enough. A few days later



the US would state that the possibility of a summit depended on how China progressed in talks over human rights etc. (Ross, 2000, p. 98).

In a meeting between Christopher and Qian on September 27 China appeared to cease demanding American concessions regarding the Taiwan issue. Nearly a month later on October 24 Clinton and Jiang would meet during an unofficial summit, officially to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN (Ross, 2000, pp. 98-99). However, in the middle of November a third round of Chinese military exercises would take place which included amphibious landing exercises (Kissinger, 2011, p. 476).

On its way to the Indian Ocean the US aircraft carrier Nimitz on December 19 passed through the Taiwan Strait. The official reason was that the Strait was preferable on account of bad weather on the eastern route (Ross, 2000, p. 104), although it did signal China of American support of Taiwan (Pinsker, 2003, p. 364).

While January and February saw large increases in Chinese military forces across the Strait, March experienced three more rounds of Chinese military exercises, both timed just before the Taiwanese presidential election on March 23 and taking place near Taiwan's waters or borders. In response the US sent two aircraft carrier groups to the Taiwan Strait the day after the Chinese announcements are made (Fung, 2008, p. 120; Ross, 2000, pp. 107-111).

The crisis ended on March 23 as Lee Teng-Hui was elected as first directly elected president of Taiwan. With Lee elected president tensions receded as China ended its military exercises afterwards (Xin, 2002, p. 17; Fung, 2008, p. 113).

## **7. A comparative analysis of the Taiwan Strait crises**

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In order to properly research the differences or similarities between the Taiwan Strait crises the previously summarized individual developments of each crisis will be analysed and compared in this chapter. The comparative analysis will start with the origins of each crisis, followed by the developments during the crises and be concluded with any direct consequences of the crises.

### A comparative analysis of the origins of the crises

The First Taiwan Strait crisis originated from China's aim to break up the relationship between the US and Taiwan. By provoking a controlled crisis through low-level military actions such as shelling campaigns on Taiwanese controlled territory, China could apply pressure on the US decision-making, forcing it to recalculate the value of its support to Taiwan. It also might waken forces within the US that were less enthusiastic to enter a war with China over Taiwan and thus exert pressure on the US democratic system (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 278). Thus, short term aggression in order to apply pressure to the US became a preferable option for China (Zhang, 1992, pp. 193-194).

The Second Taiwan Strait crisis was in many ways a continuation of the 1954-1955 crisis. Although the tensions had subsided after 1955 the underlying causes of the conflict, the offshore islands, had not been resolved. Thus, Mao was free to reignite the conflict whenever he saw advantageous as he did in 1958 (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 266-267, 292).

The Third Taiwan Strait crisis can be depicted as partly the Chinese reaction against perceived Taiwanese violation of the One-China principle while being supported by the US and partly as a way to influence the Taiwanese presidential elections of 1996. The Third Taiwan Strait crisis therefore differs fundamentally from the other two as the Chinese short-term goals diverge. In broad terms, while the crises of the 1950's were initiated with the goal to probe US commitment to Taiwanese defence, the 1995-1996 crisis was started with challenging Taiwanese separatism in mind.

A second difference between the first two and the third crises is that at the onset of the 1995-1996 crisis the flexibility of the political leaders in all three states was reduced as they had less room to manoeuvre due to political developments in the preceding decades. Domestic political changes thus influenced the 1995-1996 crisis significantly.

Still, all crises are similar in the way China held onto its overall aims of strengthening the link between Taiwan and China while weakening the relationship between Taiwan and the US.

#### A comparative analysis of the developments during the crises

The First Taiwan Strait crisis started when China on September 3, 1954, began shelling the island groups of Quemoy and Matsu. At first the US tried to de-escalate the situation diplomatically on the international level by involving the UN.

However, on December 5 the signing of a mutual defence treaty led to new phase in this crisis as the US turned to signalling its position less ambiguously to China. Yet the treaty didn't clarify US commitment to offshore islands and thus failed to deter China from aggressive campaigns against these islands in January 1955. Pressured by the Chinese build-up of military forces and assaults on Taiwanese controlled islands the US passed the Formosa Resolution. Again, the Formosa Resolution failed to deter China. The usage of the nuclear threat by the US led to the final phase in this crisis as China reconsidered and ended the crisis.

Just as in 1954 the Second Taiwan Strait crisis was started by a Chinese shelling campaign of Quemoy and Matsu on August 23, 1958. The US initially reacted by gradually escalating its military responses (Zhang, 1992, p. 248). It wasn't until early September that the US administration realized the importance of the islands and publicly committed to defending Taiwan with nuclear weapons if necessary. As such, further escalation was prevented and another phase began as the situation turned into a stalemate, eventually broken by the failure of the Chinese blockade and the resumption of ambassadorial talks between the US and China.

The Third Taiwan Strait crisis began with the Chinese reaction against the visit by Lee Teng-Shui to Cornell University on June 9, 1995, and the speech he gave there. The initial Chinese reaction comprised two rounds of military exercises meant to coerce Taiwan into adhering to the One-China principle (Tsang, 2006, p. 63).

However, the meeting of September 27 marked a new phase in the crisis as China had altered its aims to influencing the Taiwanese elections and therefore gave up on any American concessions as China required a stable relationship with the US (Ross, 2000, p. 101). From November to March several rounds of Chinese missile test and exercises would take place in waters near Taiwan. These high-profile exercises were meant to pressure the Taiwanese

electorate to vote against Lee (Tsang, 2006, pp. 76-77). The elections concerned China as they would legitimize Taiwan's sovereignty and campaign politics might push candidates to exploit the independence issue to gain support. In the end Lee Teng-Hui won the presidential election after which China ceased the exercises, causing tensions to gradually decline and the crisis to end.

The most obvious difference between the crises that can be revealed from this analysis is how the balance of power had changed between the 1950's and the 1990's. In the 1950's American military superiority was indisputable and as a result a stalemate formed across the Taiwan Strait that neither China nor Taiwan could break (Fung, 2008, pp. 34-35).

However, by the 1990's economic growth had transformed China into a powerful actor that couldn't be as simply deterred by military means anymore. As Chinese growth accelerated the ideological Communist tenets of the Chinese Party were undermined, forcing the Chinese leadership to look to nationalism to increase their support. Consequently, as the Taiwan issue became more sensitive in Chinese politics (Lieberthal, 1995, p. 40) Chinese politicians were incited by nationalism to take a harder, less forgiving stance on the Taiwan issue (Tsang, 2006, pp. 22-23), thus impeding diplomatic progress.

On the other hand, due to democratization Taiwan had become an actor more independent of the US (Fung, 2008, p. 36) as demonstrated by the fact that Taiwan responded to Chinese military exercises in 1995 with its own.

It's interesting to note that all crises involved some kind of artillery or missile warfare by China though the purposes of it varied. During the first two crises China's aim was to probe the depth of US commitment and, if possible, to drive the US apart from Taiwan. For this goal shelling was a very controllable measure for China as bombardments can be stopped, resumed, increased or reduced depending on China's preferences and developments.

Moreover, during the 1958 crisis Chinese shelling managed to blockade Quemoy and thus gave China the added advantage that the choice and responsibility whether to escalate violence was given over to the US (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 373-375). However, during the 1995-1996 crisis missile launches were only a part of the exercises China carried out in order to influence the Taiwanese elections.

Another similarity can be revealed by the way the US utilized their military forces. As sufficient naval forces could prevent any Chinese amphibious attack across the Strait the US relied mostly on their navy and especially their aircraft carriers for the defence Taiwan (Tsang, 2006, pp. 136, 156-157).

Besides the US navy, the crises during the 1950's demonstrate the effectiveness of the inclusion of nuclear weapons in US deterrence around the Taiwan Strait crises. As described, American attempts to deter China during the first two phases of the 1954-1955 crisis were unsuccessful as the ambiguity of the US position weakened the credibility of its commitment. Hostilities ceased only after the US made clear to China its willingness to employ nuclear weapons to protect Taiwan, the first time the US had made a nuclear threat in an ongoing crisis (Kissinger, 2006, pp. 156-157).

While it took about half a year for the US to resort to the threat of nuclear weapons in the first crisis it took only a few weeks to do the same in the second. A reason for this could be that the importance of the island groups for the security of Taiwan had already been established during the First Taiwan Strait crisis (George & Smoke, 1974, p. 377).

It's important to note that the Eisenhower administration thought a public declaration to include nuclear weapons in US deterrence would be able to delay or deter a Chinese attack to such extent that an attack wouldn't take place. In the event that an attack would take place and Quemoy and Matsu were conquered the US would abandon the islands and blockade the Chinese coast (Zhang, 1992, pp. 214-216). China as well preferred to avoid provoking any American retaliation or escalation as is clear from Chinese efforts to avoid American casualties during all crises (Kissinger, 2011, p. 174; Pinsker, 2003, p. 365; Zhang, 1992, p. 218).

In all crises ambiguity was inherent to the US commitment to Taiwanese defence but in varying forms. Strategic ambiguity was present in the actions, statements and treaties of the US during the crises in the 1950's. After the 1970's however, strategic ambiguity became enshrined in US policy toward Taiwan with the conclusion of the Communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act (Fung, 2008, p. 60).

Ironically, as is illustrated by the Second Taiwan Strait crisis, the crisis resolved itself faster when the US stated its commitment to the defence of Quemoy and Matsu earlier and less ambiguously. This can be compared with the First Taiwan Strait crisis when it took several ambiguous commitments by the US in the form of the 1954 mutual defence treaty and

the 1955 Formosa Resolution and eventually the nuclear threat to halt the Chinese military build-up.

This difference is illustrated by the contrasting durations of the crises. While in the 1958 crisis the Chinese leadership stated the resumption of talks the very next day after the US stated its willingness to use nuclear weapons, such statement followed over a month later in the 1954-1955 crisis.

These arguments support the conclusion that strategic ambiguity offers great advantages to US deterrence during peacetime as it allows the US administration to deter both Taiwan and China but complicates US deterrence during a crisis as a clear, unambiguous commitment and a credible threat are required to deter an actor.

#### An analysis of the direct consequences of the crises

A direct consequence of the crises in the 1950's was that Mao became convinced of the usefulness of nuclear weapons and committed China to develop its own nuclear arsenal shortly afterwards (Chen, 2012, p. 49; Zhang, 1992, pp. 221-224). Although the Soviet Union initially supported China during the development of its arsenal it revoked this support after Mao's willingness to enter a nuclear war became clear during the Second Taiwan Strait crisis (Kissinger, 2011, pp. 158, 179-180). By the time the Third Taiwan Strait crisis occurred both the US and China were in possession of nuclear weapons.

A final point to remark upon would be that by drawing the US into a conflict with China during the first two crises over several insignificant islands the US strained its political relationships and resources while the Eisenhower administration lost much of its domestic political support (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 368-369). Consequently, after each crisis the Eisenhower administration tried and failed to convince Taiwan to reduce its forces on the island groups of Quemoy and Matsu in order to decrease their political significance in the event that the US couldn't afford to protect them (George & Smoke, 1974, pp. 385-386).

## Conclusion

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This research hopes to give an answer to the question what the differences or similarities were between the Taiwan Strait crises. The overarching conclusion of this research is that despite the overall similarities between the Taiwan Strait crises each crisis comprised individual developments and characteristics that define each as a unique event.

First of all, it appears that the crises of the 1950's contained many similarities in both their origins and development. The First Taiwan Strait crisis (1954-1955) was the consequence of the Chinese desire to break the relationship between Taiwan and the US by applying pressure to US commitment to Taiwanese defence. The Second Taiwan Strait crisis (1958) can be characterized as a delayed continuation of this desire as it followed near the same script as the first. Both crises featured extensive shelling and, eventually, a threat by the US of its willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend Taiwan.

However, the crises of the 1950's were quite distinct in the manner in which they developed. While the US in the First Taiwan Strait crisis initially tried to involve the UN and made several ambiguous statements regarding its commitment, in the Second Taiwan Strait crisis the US nearly immediately turned to threatening China with nuclear weapons. Perhaps as a result of this the Second Taiwan Strait crisis resolved itself much faster than the first.

Secondly, the Third Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996) appears to have been completely different in terms of both the origin and development from the crises of the 1950's. Rather than probing US commitment China aimed to preserve the One-China principle when it was perceived to be under threat by Lee Teng-Hui's actions. In the second phase of the crisis China hoped to influence the Taiwanese presidential election. Instead of shelling the islands China conducted military exercises near Taiwan's waters.

Thirdly, it can be concluded that the Taiwan Strait crises were significantly influenced by political changes on both the domestic and international level. The crises of the 1950's were largely the result of international relations as China aimed to break Taiwan and the US apart. The Third Taiwan Strait crisis culminated from domestic trends such as Taiwanese separatism, Chinese nationalism and American support for Taiwan.

Though this research aimed to cover each crisis' individual developments with adequate detail this coverage could be improved by adding more developments. This would establish a clearer and broader description of the way each crisis progressed. Furthermore, the

backgrounds to each crisis could be expanded by adding more variables as it would increase our understanding of each crisis' origin.

On the other hand, the strengths of this research lie in its methodology as the comparative analysis in part 7 can be deduced directly from the individual developments described in parts 2 to 6. Future research could aim to apply this methodology to a similar succession of crises somewhere else in the world. Besides, by doing so scientists could perhaps uncover structures similar to the ones that are present in the Taiwan Strait crises, such as strategic ambiguity.



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