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Strategic Theory and Xi Jinping's Taiwan Test

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Abstract

Whether or not Xi Jinping will pursue reunification with Taiwan presents a serious challenge for scholars and policy practitioners alike. But is reunification still an option, or is Xi's pursuit of this steadfast goal of the Communist Party too little, too late? This paper will utilise strategic theory—a set of purposive assumptions delineated in the work of Thomas Schelling—to examine how the concepts, resources, and objectives of Chinese strategy toward Taiwan align with the objective of reunification. Building on the notion of a “limited war” in the contemporary cross-Strait relationship, this paper acknowledges Beijing's ability for heavy-handed military punishment of a Taiwan that seeks independence, but focuses instead on how Beijing has utilised available strategic tools to increase the risk of all-out war. This paper will argue that it is Beijing's ability (or inability) to manipulate perceptions of risk that impact progress toward the objective of reunification. The paper begins with an overview of strategic theory, and its core assumptions and critiques, before elucidating four elements of strategic tradition in the cross-Strait relationship: legal, political, geoeconomic, and military. It then evaluates, both individually and collectively, the efficacy of each instrument within Chinese strategy toward Taiwan.

Keywords: *cross-Strait relations, Xi Jinping, Chinese strategy, strategic theory.*

In the Beijing-Taipei relationship, the more things change, the more they stay the same. After Xi Jinping met Ma Ying-jeou in Singapore in November 2015, there was hope for a new era in cross-Strait relations and cooperation. However, little progress has emerged since; and, particularly since the Democratic Progressive Party and Tsai Ing-wen took office in May 2016, there has been a marked cool in the relationship. Taking this context as but a starting point, there are many questions emerging from a close examination of the cross-Strait relationship: why progress is gradual, why the status quo (or its variants) persists, and why reunification has not materialised. From such questions

springs the puzzle at the core of this paper: how is Xi's strategy toward Taiwan striving to attain the objective of reunification, and why has it been unsuccessful?

To answer this question, this paper will put forth a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of what Chinese strategy toward Taiwan is. Different from countless existing assessments of Chinese *policy* toward Taiwan, a strategic focus involves digging into the interaction between ways, ends, and means developed and pursued by Beijing. To do so, as will be discussed below, this paper will rely on strategic theory as pioneered in the works of Thomas Schelling and his protégés to develop analytical and empirical rigour. As the only piece of research to utilise this method vis-à-vis cross-Strait relations, this framework serves as the basis for tracing elements of a Chinese strategic tradition while accounting for the role of interdependence, commitments and threats, mixed-motive bargaining processes, and the potential for conflict in the Taiwan Strait. The discussion herein examines China's Taiwan strategy in the context of a "limited war"—a situation in which Beijing, despite its ability to militarily punish Taiwan, has largely chosen to pursue its political objectives through other, less kinetic tools of statecraft. Through the use of strategic theory as an analytical lens, this paper offers utility to both scholars and practitioners in tracing and analysing the efficacy of Chinese strategy.

Strategic Theory: An Analytical Method for Strategic Problems

Nearly seventy years ago, Bernard Brodie called for a "genuine analytical method" to use in approaching strategic problems (1949: 484). One such method is that of strategic theory, an analytical tool for examining the interaction between ways, means, and ends which "opens the mind to all the possibilities and forces at play," thereby prompting scholars and practitioners alike "to consider the costs and risks of [their] decisions and weigh the consequences of those of [their] adversaries, allies, and others" (Yarger, 2006: 2). The application of strategic theory enables the researcher to gather and analyse empirical evidence of how strategy is developed and implemented, what effects emerge, and what policy outcomes and implications arise. It extends beyond the realm of pure military strategy to find middle ground between a historical approach of analysis and the rigidity of theoretical

frameworks. While neither a “checklist” nor a “cookbook solution”, what strategic theory ultimately offers is a way to understand how an actor defines, articulates, and employs strategy toward an opponent (Yarger, 2006: vii). To make such an understanding operational, strategic analysis herein relies upon process tracing, or the “systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator” (Collier, 2011: 823). Within this narrative, it is the examination and analysis of values shaping Beijing’s selection and ability to apply instruments from its strategic toolkit that will enable an analysis of Chinese strategy toward Taiwan.

One of the main assumptions in strategic theory is that war is used deliberately by political actors to achieve political objectives. In Clausewitzian logic, war as a political instrument is strategically (and intentionally) focused on the objective of dealing a single debilitating attack to destroy the enemy.¹ But the reason strategic theory tends to focus on conflict can be seen in the very essence of how the concept of strategy has evolved. British soldier and military theorist B.H. Liddell Hart defined strategy as “the art of distributing and employing military means to fulfil the ends of policy” (2008: 126), what Stone has further repackaged as the “instrumental link between military means and political ends” (2011: 4). Both definitions—among countless others—take a Clausewitzian approach by placing a clear emphasis upon the military responsibility to attain policy objectives (Elkus, 2014; Howard, 1983).

Strategy in today’s globalised, networked space is a far more complex creature, encompassing all available instruments of policy and statecraft in thinking beyond conflict to the subsequent peace (Freedman, 2013: 136). Building upon Clausewitzian thought but moving beyond pure military strategy, the work of strategic theory seeks to explain and investigate situations wherein actors are “endeavouring to secure their interests ... against the interests of other political actors” (Smith & Stone, 2011: 29-30). Such endeavours are increasingly characterised by the absence of kinetic war; instead, a “new species”

¹ This logic is captured in the oft-cited excerpt from *On War*: “... war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. ... The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose” (Howard & Paret, 1989: 87).

of war and “competition in risk-taking” has emerged (Schelling, 2008: 94). This contest of force—known better as a “limited war”—best captures the contemporary cross-Strait relationship given Beijing’s ability for heavy-handed military punishment rather than the actual application of force across the Strait (Schelling, 2008).² As will be discussed below, the objective from Beijing’s perspective is less to use kinetic force to achieve a political outcome than to utilise the increased risk of all-out war as a means of extracting greater concessions—or at minimum, decreasing recalcitrance—from Taipei regarding the task of reunification.

Core Premises Guiding Strategic Analysis

The premises of strategic theory, while remaining Clausewitzian in nature, have evolved to offer a coherent framework for investigating situations where actors are striving to secure their interests against those of other actors through a strategic increase in the *fear or risk* of war. Of these premises, there are three dominant themes of relevance to conducting strategic analysis of the cross-Strait relationship. First, as a theory of interdependent decision-making beset with the unknowns of a particular strategic environment, each actor exercises a degree of control over what the other wants (Smith & Stone, 2011: 29-30). The best course of action is dependent upon the other actor; the actors serve to benefit from compromise, exchange, and/or collaboration rather than inflexibility or dissociation. Strategic analysis thus becomes an endeavour of investigating the structure of incentives, information, communication, available choices, and employable tactics—the exogenous factors shaping a course of action—available to all parties in a specific situation. The focus of strategic analysis becomes the situations, rather than the actors who are assumed to be rational and capable of relating “means to ends as efficiently as possible” (Lopez-Alvez, 1989: 204).

² It is worth reminding ourselves of the difference between limited war, as in the Taiwan Strait, and actual war as can be seen in US-led coalitions across the Middle East in the post-9/11 era. The latter includes the use of overt military force, the actual firing of shots, and thus no longer involves the risk or potential of a “general war” between parties (Schelling, 1980: 191-192).

A second theme from the literature on strategic theory is the ongoing “game” of tacit and explicit bargaining inherent in international politics. Actors must be alert to *what* the other actor is expressing through chosen manoeuvres, and able to convey intentions and awareness of expectations—expectations which, in turn, set limits upon the risk of conflict (Schelling, 1980: 101). Throughout this game of bargaining, an actor’s choice to rely upon kinetic or non-kinetic tools contributes to a dynamic process of mutual accommodation which retains the safety net of the *status quo ante* at which the bargaining process began. Actions can alter the game through incurring costs, increasing risk, or even by reducing the range of subsequent choices.

Such actions are aided by the third theme, namely the skilled application of commitments, threats, and promises. Each must be calibrated to reflect expectations of interdependence, requiring an understanding of the beliefs, values, and interests maintained by the opponent, as well as knowledge “about [one’s] environment and the constraints on what [one] may choose” (Schelling, 1984: ix), which is necessary to match means with ends.³ The challenge for actors, however, is both maintaining sufficient resolve and the flexibility to decouple from threats or promises. Cheap words alone will prove insufficient in backing down—for if verbiage alone was adequate to undo an actor’s commitment, threat, or promise, then it was arguably a tactic of little value from the outset.

Taken in sum, the concept of limited war as emerging from the study of strategic theory involves interdependent decision-making, bargaining, and a mixture of threats, promises, and/or commitments. A limited war, such as can be seen in the Taiwan Strait, will be no less political in nature; yet, it will fall short of an absolute form of conflict given the constraints of tangible and intangible resources, colloquially known as the ways and means of strategy. Such a conceptualisation is, of course, not without its critics. Of greatest relevance is scholarship on strategic culture, which suggests different approaches to issues of war and peace due to unique cultural and/or historical backgrounds. Beginning first with work on Soviet strategic culture, this approach has since been re-applied time and again around the world (Snyder,

³ This entails an attention to cultural elements, existing behaviours and tactics, historical experience, ideological platforms, and/or an awareness to sources of motivation.

1977; Johnston, 1995; Booth & Trood, 1999; Echevarria, 2011). Chinese strategic culture is predominantly framed in terms of traditional military and defensive thought, often citing Confucius, Mencius, Mozi, Sun Tzu and other ancient scholars for their various contributions to contemporary Chinese strategy, be it interpersonal behaviours, the role of “non-offence”, or the importance of deception (Li, 1997; Sawyer, 2007; Kaufman & Mackenzie, 2009). Other framings of strategic culture tend to gravitate toward Han ethnocentrism, or a Chinese set of interests divergent from those of other rising powers (Pye, 1992; Johnson, 2009). Still others orient understandings of strategy within traditional theories of international relations—drawing upon the record of Chinese military texts and historical actions in mixing Confucian-Mencian paradigms with classical realism or *realpolitik* (Ford, 2016; Johnston, 1995; Scobell, 2009).

Unfortunately, all such approaches under the guise of “strategic culture” are highly problematic—and, at the cost of focusing on cultural variables thought to shape strategy, fail to constitute assertions of *what* strategy is. If these so-called Chinese-specific concepts are stripped of their affiliations to Chinese culture, it is hard to find anything remotely *just* Chinese about them. After all, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and Clausewitz in different eras and geographies each stress the value of knowledge and deception, of bloodless victory, and of non-military methods to victory (Porter, 2007). Put simply, strategic culture is a logically and empirically problematic perspective on strategy that avoids analytical precision (Gray, 2014: 93-95). Rather than focusing on the ambiguities of defining culture and contriving correlation between cultural by-products and strategic behaviour, strategic theory engages with elements of traditional international relations theory while analysing the linkage between ideas, resources, and objectives.

The Evolution of China’s Strategic Tradition toward Taiwan

What strategic theory is poised to offer is an exacting method laden with purposeful assumptions for examining the logic of Chinese leadership in its manipulation of strategy to wage a limited war vis-à-vis Taiwan. Despite such analytical rigours, no scholars have explicitly employed this lens to cross-Strait

relations, opting for traditional realist, liberal, or constructivist frameworks instead. Entirely absent is scholarship that comprehensively ties the core premises of strategic theory to the contemporary cross-Strait relationship, and a focus on *strategy* and the policy themes it has translated into under Xi, rather than the policy guidance upon which Chinese strategy toward Taiwan is built. The remaining text seeks to fill this gap, offering an illustration and analysis of the comprehensive elements of strategic power employed by Beijing with the intention of increasing the risks—both perceived and actual—to Taiwan should it continue to impede (or deny) Beijing the ultimate objective of reunification.

Beijing's leaders are predisposed to reunify, a task that Xi himself has said cannot be passed on from generation to generation (Blanchard, 2013). Chinese leadership continues to pursue the long-held and widely touted goal of peaceful reunification in the form of "one country, two systems", despite changes to the strategic environment since 1949 (Tsang, 2016). On the opposite side of the Strait, a status quo of neither independence nor unification is the baseline from which Kuomintang or Democratic Progressive Party politicians shape their agenda.

Despite these divergent strategic trajectories, it is China's long sought goal of reunification and interest in not "losing" Taiwan that perpetuates its strategy toward the island. Of the tools available, there are four instruments in the Chinese strategic tradition that have consistently been applied in ties between Beijing and Taipei. In particular, there are the principles that have guided Beijing's views about sovereignty over Taiwan (the legal instrument), the CCP's mandate as executed by political leadership (the political instrument), the military strategy that has determined Chinese decisions on how to enforce sovereignty claims (the military instrument), and the strategic economic linkages across the Strait (the geoeconomic instrument). By focusing on these four instruments in China's strategic tradition toward Taiwan, this research can schematically analyse the evolution of themes within Chinese strategy that bear upon its progress toward national reunification. These concepts—and the policy themes they have translated into—can be understood as the foundation for Xi's own strategy toward Taiwan.

While each will be evaluated separately to maximise analytical depth, each instrument operates in close conjunction with other elements of Beijing's strategy. Collectively, the instruments offer a way of looking at Beijing's management of the Taiwan issue as a type of limited—and ongoing—war. For Xi, and his predecessors, these four instruments are intentionally manipulated below a threshold of overt military conflict to support the political objective of unifying the Chinese state. This synergy of ways, means, and ends forms part of an organic whole, known as strategy, and demarcates both progress and efficacy in attaining China's goal of reunification.

Legal Instrument: One Sovereign China (Not Two)

In the contemporary period, Chinese strategy encompasses a long tradition of interpreting and advancing legal norms which serve Beijing's political objectives. This can be seen across time and strategic environments, ranging from China's ascension to the United Nations, the International Court of Justice's opinion on Kosovo's independence, and UN peacekeeping operations in Macedonia, to issues on the Chinese periphery such as the reversion of Hong Kong and Macau, territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, and—of concern herein—the Taiwan issue.⁴

The concept of sovereignty alone has merited tomes of rigorous scholarship (e.g., Krasner, 1999; deLisle, 2002; Chan, 2015). While beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that sovereignty as conceptualised in the Western, Westphalian sense was not native to China (Tok, 2013: 24). Instead, it entered China during the period of unequal treaties made between foreign powers and the Qing dynasty; it was subsequently adapted in conjunction with traditional

⁴ In each instance, Chinese government officials have argued on behalf of a vision of sovereignty that best suits Chinese interests. In discussions with US officials surrounding the PRC's ascension to the UN, for instance, "dual representation" was nixed for its invalidation of Chinese sovereignty (People's Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1971). At the ICJ, Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence was denounced by China on the premise that a part cannot retrospectively seek to be free from the whole (International Court of Justice, 2009). Sovereignty along the Chinese periphery has been largely based on history, be it legacies of the Hundred Years of Humiliation (i.e., Hong Kong/Macau) or historical access and use of the disputed territories (i.e., Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea features).

notions of suzerainty manifested in the Chinese governing concept of *tianxia* 天下 (“all under heaven”). At the intersection of Westphalian and “Eastphalian” norms, sovereignty in the Chinese sense of the term is less about the hard boundaries of a state, falling instead between the power of governance and the right of a core sovereign power to claim territorial integrity (Coleman & Maogoto, 2013; Brown, 2016; Zheng, 2016). It is this concept that Beijing employs, both domestically and internationally, to assert its “one China” policy or principle and to entice or punish others in their support or hindrance of Beijing’s political objective of reunification. More specifically, it is this perception of sovereignty that has enabled Beijing to weaken international legal norms on sovereignty—insofar as its claims to Taiwan go unchallenged—and exert greater strategic influence over Taiwan.

Beijing’s use of the instrument of sovereignty in strategy toward Taiwan manifests in several forms, each of which is underpinned by an insistence, based upon United Nations Resolution 2758 (October 1971), that the PRC is the sole representative of China. Perhaps of greatest prominence is the impact “one China” has upon Taiwan’s international space, be it relations with diplomatic partners or participation in international organisations and non-governmental activities. More recently, the squeeze play to pressure an acceptance of “one China” *sans* different interpretations has trickled down to the level of Taiwanese citizens.⁵ This section will focus specifically on Taiwan and the UN, diplomatic partnerships, and Taiwanese abroad with the intention of highlighting how such tactics are thought to support progress toward reunification through a prevention of Taiwanese secession.

From 1993-2008, Taiwanese government officials actively lobbied their partners and allies to support bids for a place in the UN.⁶ Realising such efforts had yet to bear fruit, Ma Ying-jeou shifted to pursuing meaningful inclusion in UN-affiliated institutions and other international bodies (UN General Assembly,

⁵ The author’s qualification of Chinese pressure is based upon data from the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs which examines how China undermines relations with Taiwan’s diplomatic partners, prevents the development of substantive relationships, blocks participation in international organisations, suppresses NGO activities, undermines overseas Chinese work, and/or impedes civil society (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2016).

⁶ E.g., UN General Assembly (1998).

2008). It was, in many ways, a strategy that won appeasement from Beijing. Where Taiwan was willing to take a different name—usually “Chinese Taipei”—Beijing did not feel it was losing recognition of its *de jure* sovereignty as “one China” at the international level. Instances where Taiwan could be construed as a separate entity (à la “one China, one Taiwan”) were, expectedly, met with resistance. In 2016 alone, Taiwanese delegations were forced to leave an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) meeting in Brussels, a UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Committee on Fisheries conference in Rome, and denied an invitation to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) due to Chinese advocacy for restricting participation to *government officials* or an insistence on upholding Resolution 2758 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2016).

Regarding Taiwan’s diplomatic ties, in the Chen Shui-bian era of 2000-2008, nine of Taiwan’s partners severed ties with Taipei to recognise Beijing.⁷ A divisive issue often accompanied by geoeconomic carrots to incentivise normalisation of relations with the PRC, in one instance a prime minister was ousted amid a brief establishment of diplomatic ties with Taiwan (*BBC News*, 2004). The era of “chequebook diplomacy” ended with Ma Ying-jeou’s unilateral declaration in 2008, giving way to a largely stable period in Taiwan’s foreign relations (*Focus Taiwan News*, 2015). Despite the guilty plea of former Guatemalan president Alfonso Portillo to charges of accepting bribes in exchange for diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, it was only Gambia that severed ties with Taiwan during the Ma era (Villegas, 2014). Since Tsai Ing-wen took office in May 2016, not only has Gambia re-established relations with Beijing, but Taiwan has also lost its diplomatic links with São Tomé and Príncipe, and Panama. Additional pressure from the Nigerian government to relocate the existing Taiwan Trade Mission suggests the Chinese government is insisting that other countries ensure relations remain well within the bounds of Beijing’s interpretation of sovereign control and “one China” (Bax et al., 2017).

Arguably most troubling of all, Beijing’s averment of sovereignty has trickled down to the level of Taiwanese citizens. Taiwanese tourists in New York, for instance, are barred from visiting the UN headquarters. Sometime after May 19,

⁷ The countries which switched recognition: Macedonia, Liberia, Dominica, Vanuatu, Grenada, Senegal, Chad, Malawi, and Costa Rica.

2016, the United Nations switched its requirements for accessing the UN buildings from possessing “government-issued photo identification” to “government-issued photo identification *issued by a Member state or an Observer State* [emphasis added]”.⁸ Elsewhere, “one China” has determined the fate of suspected Taiwanese telecommunications fraudsters arrested overseas and deported to mainland China (not Taiwan) despite the existence of a cross-strait crime fighting agreement. As of early 2017, with over 220 deported Taiwanese still in China, it is easy to succumb to a narrative that Beijing is using the deportations to punish the Tsai Ing-wen administration. But reality is likely far more nuanced; each of the countries that have sent the Taiwanese to mainland China have followed the accepted norm of deportation whereby criminals are sent back to their city of embarkation. In many of these countries—Kenya, Cambodia, and Malaysia in particular—the governments stand to benefit economically from the continuation of a stable relationship with Beijing, thus increasing the likelihood of an aversion to actions *against* the “one China” policy. Ultimately, however, the deportation of Taiwanese criminals may simply be about justice: Beijing seeks more stringent punishment for actions that have claimed the bank accounts of countless Chinese citizens. From both cases, while a smoking gun is likely to remain beyond reach, it remains no less plausible that China was the culprit in creating the necessary pressures to bring the suspects to the mainland irrespective of their passports (Chung, 2016; Glaser, 2016; Huang, 2016a).

Aside from Taiwanese protestations, Beijing’s proclamations of sovereignty have largely gone unchallenged. Those that have advocated for an interpretation of “one China” which differs from Beijing’s have been threatened—literally—by the silencing of microphones or the expulsion from meetings (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2016). While this tactic rarely operates alone, it has been effective insofar as countries continue to complicity accept and uphold China’s definition of “one China”, *sans* separate interpretations, and avoid strategic decisions that would suggest a

⁸ See internet archives of the United Nations Visitor Centre Tickets webpage (<http://visit.un.org/content/tickets>). It is worth noting that, as of July 2017, while Taiwanese tourists can proffer “valid identity documents” to visit the UN Geneva Palais des Nations, the author’s sources have suggested that Taiwanese traveling in a private capacity are still denied entry regardless of documentation.

recognition otherwise. Sovereignty, in short, is a central element of strategy which enables China to play both softball and hardball. Beijing can opt to accommodate Taiwan's requests at the international level—as, usually, “Chinese Taipei”—when no threat to Beijing's *de jure* sovereign power exists; but, when Taiwan is seen to be seeking greater independence or a “two Chinas” world, Beijing will continue to squeeze Taiwan's ability to act, *de facto*, as a state.

Political Instrument: The Party's Mandate and Taiwan

It has become fashionable to debate how and whether statesmen shape policy. On one hand are those that argue in favour of statesmen, positing that international relations cannot be understood if the role of the individual is overlooked (Byman & Pollack, 2001: 145). A statesman-centric analysis in China—and, indeed it would be a statesman not stateswoman—would examine his rise through the Party ranks, personal background, and personality as underpinning strategy and policy.⁹ On the other hand are those that believe statesmen do not inherently matter, and that the impact of political leadership is a result of weighing opportunities and risks, rather than skill and expertise (Breuning, 2007: 32-36; Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 16-21). This is not too dissimilar from a rational actor model in suggesting that Chinese leadership weighs pros and cons in decision-making but may exercise proclivities toward certain behaviours given how its leaders have been socialised to view the world.

Chinese strategy toward Taiwan—a core national interest—has traditionally been spearheaded by the highest echelons of political power. But while the statesman is of explicit interest, such a task is made more difficult by the black box and secretive operations of Zhongnanhai that characterise Chinese decision-making circles. Fortunately, the task is less to discern how a leader has risen to power, or how he manipulates collective versus centralised leadership, and instead to examine the interaction between the leader and the political system. Contemporary Chinese leaders are privileged in their ability to control and operationalise ideology and political objectives; for the Taiwan issue, this

⁹ No woman has ever risen beyond the Politburo to the highest echelons of political power.

entails a “popularised awareness” of how leaders think about management of the cross-Strait relationship (Brady, 2015: 804; Brown, 2012a: 53).

To be certain, the priority given to Taiwan by generations of Chinese leadership has depended much on perceptions of the Taiwan issue, namely whether Taiwanese politicians are seen to encourage greater Taiwanese independence or seek closer cooperation across the Strait. Consistent across both time and generations of Chinese political leadership, however, is a grounding in the Party’s political mandate. Readily seen in the government work reports issued at annual *lianghui* 两会 meetings as representative of political consensus within the Party, each leader is explicitly tasked with the long-term objective of sustaining the right of China’s one-party system to govern a unified Chinese nation (Heath, 2014: 129).

Taking this existential political mandate as a core mission—and building on political capital in the form of a leader’s loyalty to the Party—has ultimately restricted the options available to Chinese leaders in shaping strategy toward Taiwan. Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin adamantly advocated on behalf of the task of reunification in their respective issuance of “six items” (*liutiao* 六条) and “eight points” (*badian* 八点).¹⁰ For both, and arguably continuing to present-day Beijing, the Taiwan issue is fundamentally an ideological one. Accompanying the obvious divide in political systems is that of competing national identities and nationalisms (Cole, 2017). In seeking to address the ideological gap, Deng and Jiang focused their efforts upon the path toward reunification in a manner that was mindful of the respective lifestyles and political systems emerging on each side.

Hu Jintao, by contrast, was much softer on Taiwan. While vocalising an immovability from the one-China principle and the necessity of progressing toward peaceful reunification, Beijing’s strategic stance was far more subdued under Hu than in past eras (Li, 2016). Readily attributed by some experts to a lack of supportive political allies—as Hu himself was a protégé of Deng Xiaoping—Taiwan instead became a high priority for Hu’s deputy, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (Brown, 2012b). In a 2004 speech with the overseas

¹⁰ See *Xinhua* (2004) and *Renmin ribao* (1995).

Chinese community at the PRC Embassy in London, Wen expressed a need to “earnestly consider” (*renzhen kaolü* 认真考虑) enacting a unification law (*BBC Chinese*, 2004; Paal, 2016). Wen’s idea was ultimately inverted and formalised as the Anti-Secession Law of 2005, a notable development which suggests Beijing’s political objective at the time recognised the difficulties in reunifying, thus shifting to focus on preventing secession and separatism. In other words, it was a law that responded to perceived changes in Beijing’s strategic environment, but set a future precedent for the use of military force as a response to a Taiwanese declaration of independence (Huang, 2016b).

Xi Jinping has returned to a decisively hawkish posture on the Taiwan issue, emphasising that a final resolution cannot wait forever (Blanchard, 2013). While the gap in ideologies on both sides of the Taiwan Strait is no less prominent now than sixty years ago, of greater concern is the issue of sovereignty and the existence of one *de jure*, sovereign China. Working within the political mandate of the 18th Party Congress to “build a moderately prosperous society ... and achieve the renewal of the Chinese nation” (*Xinhua*, 2012), Xi’s Taiwan strategy will be successful if he can ensure a single-mindedness to uphold “one China” exists on both sides of the Strait.

The Party will continue to retain a preeminent place in Xi’s strategy toward Taiwan. Narratives or perspectives which run counter to the Party’s political objectives vis-à-vis Taipei will intentionally be restricted. What one will see in public messaging, particularly from the central government and Party apparatus, is a firm commitment to prevent Taiwanese independence with secondary calls to complete the “great task” (*daye* 大业) of reunification (Glaser, 2016; Huang, 2016b; Zheng, 2016). This is best seen in the non-negotiable one China principle—the notion that the “two sides belong to one China” (*liang’an tongshu yige Zhongguo* 两岸同属一个中国)—which serves as the foundation upon which cross-Strait relations are conducted.¹¹ Just as Xi cannot ignore the Party’s mandate and support China’s national rejuvenation, so too can he not back down or ease the political pressures Beijing has strategically—and

¹¹ The one China principle should not be confused with the one China policy, a widely-accepted recognition by other countries of Beijing’s stance that it is the sole legitimate representative of China, including Taiwan.

intentionally—imposed upon Taiwan as prerequisites for navigating the cross-Strait relationship.

Military Instrument: Waging War by Other Means

Mao Zedong famously pronounced that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun; and in China, it is the Communist Party that commands the gun. The role of the military instrument in Beijing's strategic tradition toward Taiwan is shaped by strategic concepts, doctrine, and capabilities and the reality that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a loyal servant of the Party and its General Secretary, not the Chinese state or the Chinese people. It is the interests and involvement of the PLA that have defined the oscillation between pacifism and realism in a deterrence strategy that has yet to yield a final resolution of the Taiwan issue.

The ability to deter through military might is complemented by the comparatively softer tactics of compellence manifested in the PLA's political work efforts toward Taiwan—a quasi-schizophrenic tradition that has emerged in Beijing's use of the military instrument. Deterrence (*weishe* 威慑) in the Chinese mind effectively combines Thomas Schelling's oft-referenced definitions of deterrence and compellence (Cheng, 2011: 92; Kissinger, 2012: 133). Taken in combination, the two tactics offer Beijing a means for deterring Taiwan from any steps that would alter its sovereign status as a part of China, and compelling the island slowly toward the goal of reunification. The same combination of tactics target the United States, which Beijing seeks to keep from supporting Taipei through the development of military capabilities or involvement in a future cross-Strait contingency (Chan, 2004).

The military component of Beijing's strategy toward Taiwan cannot be separated from domestic politics and the demands upon the PLA as the armed wing of the Communist Party. While the PLA's mission set has broadened amid modernisation, a responsibility for handling the Taiwan issue will always remain the PLA's "sacred responsibility"—a reality unlikely to change as long as reunification and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the CCP's dominant priority (Information Office of the State Council, 2004). Given the pace of PLA

modernisation, it is tempting to believe that the Chinese military has long since achieved preponderance over Taiwan. The emergence of advanced, disruptive technology—including short-range missiles, fifth-generation fighters, and nuclear-powered attack submarines—presents a persuasive security dilemma narrative across the Strait. As Beijing’s security and military capabilities continue to increase, many Taiwanese see their own increased vulnerability and inadequate defences (Chang, 2016).

But high tech platforms alone do not translate into an ability to fight and win wars. Underpinning the warfighting performance of today’s PLA are the doctrines and exercises that offer a sense of how leadership in Beijing envisions a future cross-Strait conflict. The PLA’s ability to prepare for such a conflict is determined primarily by guidance from the Central Military Commission (CMC). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the CMC has issued three iterations of strategic guidelines (*zhanlüe fangzhen* 战略方针) to shape the principles, development, and application of Chinese military power (Zheng, 2016). The guidelines have evolved from Mao-era People’s War to “active defence” and a prioritisation of “winning informationised [networked] local wars”, a reflection of the development of institutional and operational capacities to pursue and protect Beijing’s strategic objectives (Finkelstein, 2007: 71).

However, while the existence of strategic guidelines illuminates how the PLA *thinks* about military readiness and preparation, it offers little for understanding the actual capabilities of today’s PLA. Absent a “Grenada-like scenario” that offers analysts a sense of how adept the PLA is at joint operations and warfare, much will continue to remain unknown about the application of military force in the Taiwan Strait (Cheng, 2016). What is clear, however, is that the PLA’s procurement and training on disruptive platforms serves as an essential deterrent—a tactic that allows Beijing to manage the threshold at which conflict would break out in the Strait, and the limits in which such conflict could be constrained.

As mentioned above, the other element of Chinese deterrence is a far subtler form of compellence. In 2003, the Central Military Commission declared political work as an essential task of the PLA, including a responsibility to conduct campaigns of public opinion warfare (*yulun zhan* 舆论战), psychological

(*xinli zhan* 心理战), and legal warfare (*falü zhan* 法律战) (*CPC News*, 5 December 2013; Wu & Liu, 2014). Collectively known as the “Three Warfares” (*san zhan* 三战), these campaigns seek to degrade Beijing’s opponent—Taipei—in gradual efforts to create perceptions favourable to China’s strategic objectives (Zhang, 2006: 212). The military instrument is of particular utility toward Taiwan insofar as the PLA can use its people, platforms, and exercises to strengthen Taiwanese perception of China’s military strength and weaken its will to fight. This can be seen, for instance, in the increasingly hawkish rhetoric of retired PLA officers. While not representative of the entire military apparatus, commentary that likens Taiwan to “a fish swimming at the bottom of a pot” (*fudi youyu* 釜底游鱼) is widely disseminated across Chinese news outlets and social media, strengthening a sense of national confidence and resolve in pursuing Beijing’s reunification agenda (Dai, 2016). Periodic exchanges between retired PLA officers and their Taiwanese counterparts takes a slightly different tack to easing tensions, fostering common interests, and nurturing ties to bind the Strait closer together (e.g., *Taipei Times*, 12 November 2016b). The greatest threat, however, lies in the psychological impact of Chinese military might: the omnipresent threat of 1,000 missiles capable of raining down on Taiwan or the joint training exercises which showcase an ability to launch an amphibious attack and island invasion (*Nanfang ribao*, 17 September 2012; US Department of Defence, 2016: 109).

The military instrument in contemporary Chinese strategy toward Taiwan is far more than the application of overt military force. Aware of the accompanying costs, Beijing has shifted instead to rely upon the PLA as part of a calibrated political warfare campaign. It has succeeded in deterring Taiwan from further steps toward independence—and, in many ways, deterring the US from any actions that would strengthen its commitment to Taiwan beyond the Taiwan Relations Act.¹² Looking toward the future, the task for Beijing entails integrating modern weapons with a leaner, meaner professional fighting force that is capable and competent in manipulating risk without creating an all-out war.

¹² Under the Taiwan Relations Act (1979), the United States is committed to, for instance, providing Taiwan with arms of a defensive character. Involvement in a cross-Strait contingency is intentionally vague.

Geoeconomic Instrument: The Power of Beijing's Purse Strings

The breakneck economic growth of the last several decades has left China well positioned to turn to its wallet, rather than its weaponry, in pursuit of strategic objectives. Geoeconomic tools—the intentional use of economic instruments in pursuit of geopolitical ends—are more than just trade for trade's sake in Chinese strategy toward Taiwan, enabling Beijing to focus on consolidating its own economic strength as a means of projecting power and influencing (as opposed to coercing) Taiwan toward reunification (Norris, 2016).

Beijing's geoeconomic strategy toward Taiwan has, over the years, reflected several immediate and long-term priorities. First, and not too dissimilar from ensuring the PLA's own modernisation serves developmental goals, is the need to bolster China's domestic economic growth and modernisation. Nowhere are these interests clearer than in Xi's focus on reaching "two centennials": becoming a moderately well-off society (*xiaokang shehui* 小康社会) by 2020, around the Party's centennial, and a fully developed socialist nation (*shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia* 社会主义现代化国家) by 2050, to coincide with the centennial of the PRC's founding (Xi, 2014). The paramount importance of reunification is, notably, something for which leadership in Beijing may be willing to risk economic development (Li, 2016). A second priority of Beijing's geoeconomic strategy toward Taiwan can be seen in its ability to use economic levers to woo other countries away from supporting or recognising Taiwan through the "one China policy" discussed above. Third, geoeconomic tools are used by Beijing in a strategic carrot-and-stick combination, exploiting Taiwan's need to liberalise to stay competitive, avoid marginalisation, and maintain access to Chinese markets and the global supply chain (Chen, 2013: 406).

Under Xi, after Tsai failed to explicitly accept the 1992 Consensus in her inaugural address, Chinese leadership sought to increase pressure upon the Taiwanese tourism industry—a source of vulnerability for a sector that has fundamentally restructured itself around the demand of Chinese tourists (*Da*

jiyuan, 2015; Blanchard & Hung, 2016).¹³ Known colloquially as *yi tiao long* 一条龙 (or “one dragon”), the Taiwanese tourism sector began to receive mainland tourists *en masse* from 2002. Travel agencies attract Chinese group tours with at-cost or low-cost fees and attempt to turn a profit by taking the groups to hotels, restaurants, and shops to accrue commission (Taipei Times, 13 September 2016a). Money spent on the island does not go directly into Taiwanese pockets, however, as an increasing number of tourist services are owned by Hong Kong and Chinese investors.

Given the problematic structure of Taiwan’s China-oriented tourism sector, the island is particularly vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of tourist numbers. Those businesses designed to take advantage of the growth in Chinese tourist groups are first to suffer when numbers decline.¹⁴ Initially, it appeared that China’s tourism quotas were slow to take effect. Chinese tourist agencies were directed by the central government to decrease the availability of Taiwan travel permits; websites froze offerings of Taiwan packaged tours (Glaser, 2016). But the reality—as seen in data on “tourist categories 1-3” from Taiwan’s National Immigration Agency (NIA) in table 1 below—is that group tourism to Taiwan began to decline from 2013.¹⁵ This shift can be attributed to a series of factors, including less favourable exchange rates, slower Chinese economic growth, the ease of traveling to Taiwan independently, and/or the desire to travel elsewhere in the world.¹⁶ Somewhat more perplexingly, even as group tourists began to decline, individual travel began a steady increase through 2015—suggesting that more Chinese were finding their way to Taiwan via Hong Kong or other transit points. At the end of 2016, with Beijing’s travel quotas in place, total Chinese entries have declined 20 percent year-on-year, a not insignificant

¹³ In 2016, tourism directly and indirectly contributed five percent (US\$26.6 billion) of Taiwan’s total gross domestic product (GDP) and approximately 669,500 jobs, or roughly 5.9 percent of total employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017).

¹⁴ Given the focus on the mainland Chinese tourist market, the ability of travel agencies to attract tourists from elsewhere in the region has atrophied.

¹⁵ Author compilation of National Immigration Agency, Taiwan (ROC) December 2016 Statistics, available at: www.immigration.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=1325434&ctNode=29699&mp=1 (accessed 1.21.2017).

¹⁶ For example, the Renminbi-New Taiwan Dollar exchange rate has seen a gradual decline since mid-2015; Chinese tourist numbers to the US, Australia/New Zealand, and Great Britain have continued a steady climb since 2001.

number but one that suggests the bite to Chinese geoeconomic damage is not yet as bad as the bark.¹⁷

Table 1: Chinese Travel to Taiwan

Year	Tourist categories 1-3	Individual travel	Total Chinese entries
2001	-	-	26,669
2002	2,151	-	41,846
2003	12,768	-	39,427
2004	19,150	-	29,016
2005	54,162	-	102,737
2006	98,548	-	181,994
2007	81,903	-	182,777
2008	90,035	-	177,344
2009	601,754	-	858,698
2010	1,188,929	-	1,588,876
2011	1,286,574	30,281	1,748,940
2012	2,001,941	191,148	2,667,298
2013	2,263,476	522,443	3,266,113
2014	2,141,727	1,186,497	3,869,655
2015	2,001,105	1,334,818	3,925,464
2016	1,427,452	1,308,601	3,107,689

What emerges from the priorities delineated through Beijing’s use of the geoeconomic instrument toward Taiwan—as seen in the case of the tourism sector—is an interaction between power and interdependence that utilises Taiwan’s vulnerabilities to punish actions which are seen by Beijing as counter to its political agenda (Keohane & Nye, 2012: 7-10). Going forward, if the 1992 Consensus is explicitly accepted by Tsai, one could expect the “carrot” of full

¹⁷ According to November 2016 data from the Tourism Bureau (ROC), the total number of visitors to Taiwan declined year-on-year by 5.14 percent. While mainland Chinese tourists dipped in number, visitors from Japan, the United States, Southeast Asia, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, Korea and elsewhere increased (Tourism Bureau, November 2016).

tourist outflows to be resumed. Until such circumstances materialise, the structure of Taiwan's tourism industry and dependency upon mainland tourists will continue to expose the island to Beijing's geoeconomic manipulation.

Conclusion

Contemporary Chinese strategy toward Taiwan takes a nuanced, multi-faceted approach that has shifted from a primary focus on securing reunification to preventing independence. An examination of the four elements of Beijing's strategic tradition—legal, political, military, and geoeconomic—highlights the reality that the decisions Chinese leaders make on the Taiwan issue often have strong historical precedents. But this should, by no means, suggest that there is a one-size-fits-all approach for Xi to modify and apply to the cross-Strait political separation. Nor should such analysis suggest that, given the absence of reunification, Beijing should embark on a military invasion and occupation to solve the Taiwan problem once and for all. Rather, what is clear from the analysis of each instrument of the Chinese strategic tradition is just how much each instrument depends on the success of the others to shape strategy capable of attaining Beijing's political objectives.

Returning to the research question—how Xi's strategy is striving to attain the objective of reunification and why it has been unsuccessful—the task of this article has been an explicit examination of the interaction between ways, means, and ends. It has sought to assess how an actor—China—defines, articulates, and employs strategy toward Taiwan. Through the application and manipulation of four instruments of statecraft, Beijing has succeeded in maintaining a threshold in its relations with Taipei just below the level of overt conflict. The existence of a "limited war", as Schelling and strategic theorists would so deem, creates several disadvantages (and few advantages) in the overall thrust of China's strategy toward Taiwan.

While Beijing's preponderance of comprehensive national power appears to give it an upper hand in bargaining with Taipei, the legal and political tools are far too constrained to allow for much room to bargain. A conceptualisation of sovereignty confined to "one China" on Beijing's terms will preclude anything

short of Taiwan's eventual unification. In the political sphere, a Chinese leader will simply be unable to abandon the narrative of Taiwan's inseparable place in Chinese territory without shaking the entire foundation of the Party's political authority. Similarly, promises and threats to exact military or geoeconomic punishment upon Taiwan cannot be rescinded by Beijing without incurring political costs and a loss of legitimacy.

As one looks toward the future, where Chinese strategy has and will continue to fall short is in its ability to adapt to the interdependencies of cross-Strait relations. Xi and his predecessors have resolutely conveyed Beijing's intentions and expectations of their counterparts in Taiwan; but none have displayed adequate receptivity to Taiwanese strategic signalling. What appears to be strategy is but a one-way conversation with a stronger China setting the terms and conditions. Absent a flexible, sophisticated strategy, what will remain of China's approach to Taiwan is a series of policy initiatives—encapsulated in the four tools studied herein—that will continue to deter Taiwanese independence, deny Taiwan status as a *de facto* state, and incentivise closer cross-Strait cooperation as a path to reunification. Above all, China's strategic approach to Taiwan will continue to remain ambiguous, operating in a zone of limited war, shy of overt conflict but susceptible to Beijing's abilities to ratchet up or dial down pressures in a manner that best suits its political objectives.

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