



No. 74

February 5, 2003

The China-Taiwan Military Balance Implications for the United States

by Ivan Eland

Executive Summary

China's economy is four times the size of Taiwan's and apparently growing at a faster rate; that economic disparity between China and Taiwan could eventually lead to a military disparity as well. Nonetheless, even an informal U.S. security guarantee for Taiwan against nuclear-armed China is ill-advised. Taiwan is not strategically essential to America's national security. Moreover, China has significant incentives to avoid attacking Taiwan. Perhaps the most crucial is that hostile behavior toward Taiwan would jeopardize China's increasing economic linkage with the United States and other key countries.

Taiwan has several military advantages that it could exploit. First, Taiwan could use a "porcupine" strategy to deter China—Taiwan does not need to be able to win a conflict with a more powerful China; it needs only to inflict unacceptable damage on Chinese forces. Second, Taiwan would have the advantage of defending an island against an amphibious attack—an attack

that is extremely hard to execute successfully. Prospects for a successful defense are enhanced because China would be unlikely to have strategic surprise; air or naval supremacy; or sufficient landing forces, fleet air defense, or naval gunfire support. Third, because of current Taiwanese naval superiority (including anti-submarine warfare capabilities) and deficiencies in Chinese fleet air defense and command and control, even a partial Chinese naval blockade would be difficult to carry out. Fourth, Chinese missile strikes on Taiwan could be countered with enhanced passive defenses and retaliatory strikes on the Chinese homeland by the superior Taiwanese air force.

Rather than provide an informal security guarantee to Taiwan, the United States should sell that nation more arms to defend itself. President Bush has authorized the sale of more weapons, but Taiwan needs to spend more on its own defenses and actually buy the needed weapons.

Ivan Eland is director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute and author of Putting "Defense" Back into U.S. Defense Policy: Rethinking U.S. Security in the Post-Cold War World.

The security of Taiwan has never been strategically essential to the United States, and dueling with a nuclear-armed power in any crisis over the island would be ill-advised.

Introduction

China's economy is now four times the size of Taiwan's (\$1.2 trillion versus about \$300 billion)¹ and is growing faster (if you believe the official Chinese government data, which some analysts find suspect). That economic disparity could, at least theoretically, be turned into a military disparity. But according to the Pentagon, Taiwan's strategy is to enhance key aspects of its military capabilities—counterblockade operations, air superiority over the Taiwan Strait, and defense against amphibious and aerial assault on the island—and buy time for positive political changes to occur in China that will ease tensions with Taiwan.²

The Taiwanese certainly could do more than they currently do to ensure their own security. Defense expenditures actually have been declining as a percentage of Taiwanese government spending. The Taiwanese fail to do more to enhance their own defenses because they believe that the United States will come to their aid if a crisis occurs with China. Although U.S. policy is ambiguous on that point, President Clinton sent two U.S. aircraft carriers into the Taiwan Strait in 1996 after the Chinese splashed missiles there to intimidate Taiwan. President Bush made the policy less ambiguous in April 2001 by saying the United States would do "whatever it took" to defend Taiwan.

Even an ambiguous U.S. security guarantee for Taiwan is dubious. The security of Taiwan has never been strategically essential to the United States, and dueling with a nuclear-armed power in any crisis over the island would be ill-advised. In any conflict between the China and the United States over the island, escalation to nuclear war is an ever-present danger. Although the United States possesses thousands of nuclear warheads that could hit China, and the Chinese have only about 20 warheads that can reach the United States, China cares much more about Taiwan than does the United States and could even be irrational about the issue.

Although coming to the defense of a fellow democracy against an authoritarian Chinese regime has emotional appeal, U.S. policymakers have to ask themselves whether they are willing to trade Los Angeles to save Taipei. The answer should be a resounding no. The United States should sell Taiwan the arms it needs for self-defense but should not guarantee its security. Besides, despite what some analysts suggest, Taiwan is more than capable of deterring a Chinese attack and defending against Chinese aggression if deterrence fails.

The Taiwanese Military Can Most Likely Dissuade China from Attacking

Determining the intentions of countries is difficult, but China has some important incentives to avoid attacking or intimidating Taiwan by military means. Such hostile actions could have counterproductive political and economic effects. In 1996 China tried to intimidate voters in the Taiwanese presidential election by firing missiles into the Taiwan Strait during a "training exercise." Although China sought to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate, its action had the opposite effect—the Taiwanese elected, by a wider margin than expected, a president who took a more independent stance vis-à-vis China. Although China avoided similarly provocative military actions prior to the Taiwanese elections of 2000 (having learned at least a little), belligerent Chinese rhetoric prior to the polling was still counterproductive. Chen Shui-bian, a candidate favoring Taiwan's independence from China, was elected president of Taiwan. Now China, worried about Taiwan's moving further down the path toward independence, threatens Taiwan merely to defend the status quo.

But hostile behavior toward Taiwan could disturb China's increasing economic linkage with the rest of the world—especially its growing commercial links with Taiwan.

Because China's highest priority is economic growth, the disruption of such economic relationships is a disincentive for China to take aggressive actions vis-à-vis Taiwan. Any attack short of invasion (splashing more missiles or instituting a naval blockade) would likely harm the Taiwanese economy and disrupt Chinese trade and financial contacts with Taiwan and other developed nations without getting China what it most wants—control of Taiwan. An amphibious invasion, in the unlikely event that it succeeded, would provide such control but would cause even greater disruption in China's commercial links to developed nations—probably resulting in economic sanctions against China and a reduction of vital foreign investment there. Even the Pentagon notes: "China apparently . . . is sensitive to the potential political and economic costs that it could incur from war with Taiwan. . . . To that end, Beijing has avoided activities that might threaten its economic growth and access to foreign markets, investments, and technology."³

In addition, an examination of the most likely conflict scenarios indicates that China's ability to succeed in intimidating or overrunning Taiwan has been overstated.

Amphibious Assault

An amphibious assault on Taiwan is the least likely Chinese military option because of its low probability of success. Even without U.S. assistance, the Taiwanese have the advantage of defending an island. An amphibious assault—that is, attacking over water and landing against defended positions—is one of the hardest and most risky military operations to execute. In the Normandy invasion of 1944, the Allies had strategic surprise, air and naval supremacy, crushing naval gunfire support, and a ground force coming ashore that was vastly superior in numbers to that of the Germans. Yet even with all those advantages, the Allies had some difficulty establishing beachheads.

In any amphibious assault on Taiwan, China would be unlikely to have strategic surprise, air or naval supremacy (Taiwan's air

and naval forces are currently superior to those of the Chinese),⁴ or sufficient naval gunfire support, and its landing force would be dwarfed by the Taiwanese army and reserves. Furthermore, the inhospitable Taiwan Strait and the limited number of Taiwanese beaches are likely to make such an attack difficult.

The Chinese army, navy, and air force are much bigger than those of Taiwan. But, according to James Holt of the World Policy Institute, Taiwan is modernizing its forces—through domestic production of arms and imports of weapons—faster than China.⁵ The Chinese services are antiquated, have lackluster personnel (because of the more lucrative civilian opportunities in an expanding economy) who are poorly trained in joint and combined arms operations and are limited in the forces they could project to attack Taiwan. Ground and air forces often exercise simultaneously, ships and naval aircraft occasionally train together, but ground and naval forces—needed for an amphibious assault—rarely exercise in tandem.⁶ In addition, China's military forces lack the command, control, and communications and the centralized logistics system needed to project the forces needed to carry out a large-scale, high-tempo amphibious assault.

The Chinese air force has only a limited number of air bases close to the Taiwan Strait, must operate in constricted airspace, and has little experience in controlling large numbers of aircraft at once. Thus, China could use only a small portion of its large, obsolete air force to attack Taiwan. In addition, the Chinese air force would be hampered by inadequate electronic warfare and air-to-air refueling capabilities and pilot training (compared with that of Taiwan). Only in 2010 will China finally have all the elements—operational concepts and training—of an integrated, modern air force.⁷

Taiwan now has an air defense that could probably effectively deter a Chinese aerial attack, according to the Pentagon.⁸ In another 10 years, the Taiwanese will probably have a sizable and advanced air defense that

China's ability to succeed in intimidating or overrunning Taiwan has been overstated.

An amphibious assault on Taiwan is the least likely Chinese military option because of its low probability of success.

includes airborne early warning aircraft, an automated command and control system, new surface-to-air missiles, and a large, modern air force.⁹ A Taiwanese air force (including French-designed Mirage 2000 fighters, F-16 American-designed aircraft, and an indigenously produced fighter) that is qualitatively superior to the Chinese air force (China's modern aircraft consist of small quantities of Russian-designed Su-27 and Su-30 aircraft) would most likely have air superiority over the strait. Under those conditions, an amphibious assault would likely fail because the flotilla of Chinese troop-carrying ships and their naval warship escorts would be subjected to murderous attack from the air. Chinese warships would probably be unable to protect the flotilla because they have poor air defenses. Also, the Chinese navy would probably be unable to adequately support an amphibious landing because of insufficient naval gunfire.

Although smaller than the Chinese navy, Taiwan's navy is qualitatively superior to China's (especially in surveillance; air defense; and command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence), is well run and maintained, and is the third most powerful in the region. Taiwan's naval modernization program includes licensed production of eight U.S.-designed Perry-class frigates, purchase of six French-designed Lafayette-class frigates, lease of eight U.S.-designed Knox-class frigates, and possible purchase of four U.S.-designed Kidd-class destroyers (with sophisticated air defenses). The Taiwanese navy, when combined with Taiwan's strong, layered shore-based coastal defenses, presents a major roadblock to an invasion force.¹⁰

Finally, China could probably muster a maximum of two divisions of troops experienced in amphibious warfare (the vast majority of China's ground forces do not have the sealift, airlift, or logistics capabilities to project power and are used mainly for domestic security). Moreover, China has enough amphibious ships to lift only one of those divisions to Taiwan's beaches. The Chinese

have not been in a rush to augment significantly the training of additional amphibious forces or the amphibious lift needed to transport them to Taiwanese shores. According to Michael Swaine and James Mulvenon of RAND, by 2010 or 2015 China, at best, could project one or two divisions—about 15,000 to 30,000 troops—by air, land, and sea over the 100 miles to the Taiwanese coast. By 2025 they predict that China could project three or four divisions—about 45,000 to 60,000 troops—slightly farther using the same methods.¹¹ Those meager forces would then have to fight a large Taiwanese army of about 200,000 active-duty forces, plus the one and a half million Taiwanese reserves. By 2005 those Taiwanese ground forces will have been enhanced by the addition of tanks and other armored vehicles, mobile artillery, and attack helicopters.

According to Swaine and Mulvenon, "Mainland China will likely remain unable to undertake such massive attack over the medium-term, and perhaps, over the long-term as well."¹² Even absent any improvements in the Taiwanese air, sea, and land forces, it would probably take the Chinese years to eliminate the deficiencies in airpower, naval power, naval air defense, airborne and air assault, special operations, amphibious lift, and ground forces trained in amphibious assault that would be needed to overcome Taiwanese defenses in any assault. China would have to coordinate and synchronize all of those elements into a coherent attack. In addition, China's lack of an integrated air defense system (the Chinese will need more than the few SA-10 and SA-15 surface-to-air missiles purchased from Russia to remedy this problem) for the foreseeable future—probably the next two decades—could leave its homeland open to retaliatory attacks by the Taiwanese air force. The mere threat of such retaliatory attacks might be enough to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan in the first place.

In the long term, even if China overcomes its numerous deficiencies and Taiwan lags behind China in military improvements, the

Taiwanese could use a “porcupine strategy” against a superior foe. That is, the Taiwanese armed forces would not have to be strong enough to win a war with the Chinese military; they would only have to be able to inflict enough damage to raise the cost of a Chinese invasion to unacceptable levels. In that regard, Taiwan may be helped by modern technology. Sea mines, precision-guided munitions (including anti-ship cruise missiles), and satellite reconnaissance (making surprise difficult) may make any amphibious assault a bloody and problematic affair. (In fact, such technology has probably rendered large-scale amphibious assaults a thing of the past. The last large U.S. amphibious assault was the landing at Inchon during the Korean War.)¹³ When coupled with the potential loss of international commercial ties that China would suffer after any invasion of Taiwan, the likelihood of high casualties would probably be enough to dissuade China from undertaking such an aggressive action.

Naval Blockade

Although more likely than an amphibious invasion of Taiwan, a Chinese military quarantine of Taiwan would also be costly for China and would not necessarily give China control of Taiwan. Threatening to close the busy Taiwan Strait by military means, or actually doing so, would adversely affect the commerce of many nations.¹⁴ Also, Chinese relations and commerce with Taiwan and the rest of the world (as a reaction to what is an act of war) would probably be significantly impaired. Such relations are vital to China’s number one priority: domestic economic development.

A naval blockade using Chinese submarines and surface ships would face some of the same problems as an amphibious invasion. The poor air defenses on Chinese surface ships would render them vulnerable to attack from superior Taiwanese air power. In addition, Chinese naval command and control is probably inadequate to manage a naval quarantine. Although China has more submarines and surface warships in its navy than

does Taiwan, the Taiwanese navy has superior surveillance and anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare capabilities. Currently, the Chinese might very well be able to disrupt Taiwan’s commerce to a limited extent with their modest mine-laying capability and submarine attacks (which are less susceptible to attack from the air), but even establishing a partial blockade of certain ports would be difficult. At the very least, the Taiwanese could most likely keep some of the ports and sea-lanes on the eastern side of the island open to commerce.

According to Swaine and Mulvenon, by 2010 or 2015, at best, China would be able to deny the use of the sea and air within 250 miles of China’s coast in specific areas over short periods of time and would probably be able to enforce a partial blockade. They predict that by 2025 China could deny the use of the sea and air out to 500 nautical miles from China’s coastline and attempt a naval blockade within 200 nautical miles of that coastline.¹⁵ But even in 2025 China might not be able to enforce a complete naval quarantine around Taiwan.

Intimidation with Missile Launches or Actual Attacks

In 1996 China tried to intimidate Taiwan with missile tests in the Taiwan Strait during Chinese military “exercises” at the time of the Taiwanese presidential elections. As noted earlier, however, those actions had the opposite effect of that intended. Actual missile attacks on Taiwan for the purpose of terrorizing the Taiwanese population would probably cause an even greater backlash against China in Taiwan and the international community and could trigger retaliatory raids on the mainland by the superior Taiwanese air force. An attack by 300 Chinese short-range missiles on Taiwanese cities would do less damage than one sortie of the Taiwanese air force against China.¹⁶ The Chinese are vulnerable to attacks from the air because they have no integrated air defense system.

China does not now have enough missiles or sufficiently accurate missiles to have a sig-

The Taiwanese could use a “porcupine strategy” against a superior foe.

Taiwan does not now spend enough on its defense and will not do so as long as the United States offers the protection of an informal security umbrella.

nificant effect when used against Taiwanese military targets. Swaine and Mulvenon estimate that China will not have that capability until 2010 or 2015.¹⁷ Even the hawkish, congressionally mandated China Security Review Commission admitted, “A barrage even of hundreds of Chinese ballistic and cruise missiles fired against Taiwan . . . would actually do limited (or at least not permanently devastating) damage, unless China resorted to chemical, biological or nuclear warheads or the missile strike is coordinated with other concurrent operations such as air and maritime engagements.”¹⁸ The problems with air and maritime operations have been discussed above. It is also unlikely that China would use weapons of mass destruction against Taiwan because massive casualties would sour economic and political connections with the rest of the world.

As Chinese missiles become more numerous and accurate, missile attacks, even with conventional warheads, would become more militarily consequential. They would probably be used to attempt to knock out or damage Taiwanese airfields, air defenses, and command centers prior to any amphibious invasion of the island—the risks of which for China were discussed earlier. If missiles were used by China to strike such military targets, though, the Taiwanese air force could retaliate with punitive strikes on the mainland. In addition, as noted below, passive defense measures could reduce significantly the effectiveness of Chinese missile attacks on military targets.

What the United States Could Do to Help Taiwan

Certainly, Taiwan should be commended for making significant reforms to its political and economic systems, especially compared with authoritarian China. But that does not mean that the United States should put its homeland at risk in a clash with a nuclear-armed power to come to the aid of a nation that is not vital to U.S. security.

Instead, the United States should sell

Taiwan the arms to defend itself. For Taiwan, self-defense is a better solution than relying on a superpower ally that might become fickle if nuclear weapons are brandished by China. To his credit, Chen Shui-bian has emphasized acquiring weapons and support systems that actually give Taiwan war-fighting capability, instead of following the past Taiwanese practice of buying armaments that were merely political symbols and relying on the informal U.S. security guarantee. But Chen also has a propensity to buy offensive systems, aimed not just at defending against but also at deterring a Chinese attack (for example, some analysts suggest that Taiwan is developing an offensive tactical ballistic missile and a land attack version of a Taiwanese cruise missile).¹⁹ Because the United States needs to maintain a good working relationship with China, the U.S. government should sell Taiwan weapons that are primarily defensive.

President Bush has authorized the sale of a greater number of weapon systems to Taiwan than President Clinton approved. But Taiwan has been slow to come up with the money to buy many of them. Some types of weapons—for example, diesel submarines—had never before been approved. Much has been made in the U.S. press of the authorization of the sale of submarines (and the reluctance of European nations to anger China by providing diesel submarine designs for production in U.S. shipyards) and the lack of approval of the export of missile defenses. Yet, whether their sale is approved or not, the military value to Taiwan of those two weapon systems is overrated.

Diesel submarines, because of their slow speed and the limited range of their weapons, are most useful for attacking commercial vessels of the adversary. Diesel submarines are usually too slow to keep up with and kill the enemy’s surface warships. In addition, the waters north, south, and west of Taiwan are not conducive to submarine-on-submarine operations.²⁰ In short, at least in the waters near Taiwan, diesel submarines are more useful in offensive operations (raiding enemy

commerce) than in defensive operations (countering enemy submarines and surface warships). Furthermore, although some Chinese diesel subs are quiet, they are vulnerable to detection and attack when they must come near the water's surface to recharge their batteries by taking in air through a snorkel. So Taiwanese air and surface naval forces, with a good anti-submarine warfare capability, can essentially "suffocate" Chinese diesel subs by outwaiting them. Thus, although Taiwanese diesel submarines might play a limited role in countering China's diesel submarines, Taiwan has an even greater need for anti-submarine warfare systems housed in aircraft (both helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft) and surface warships and the training to effectively operate them. Taiwan is already acquiring advanced anti-submarine warfare technology. On the long list of weapon systems that President Bush is willing to sell Taiwan, the lumbering P-3 anti-submarine warfare aircraft, packed with gear, may be less sexy but more useful than diesel subs.

Although Taiwan will gain some limited (area) defense against Chinese missiles in the next 10 to 20 years by acquiring the Patriot PAC-3 system (a lower-tier theater missile defense system), President Bush did not, at least for now, approve the sale of the sea-based missile defense used on sophisticated Aegis destroyers (an upper-tier theater missile defense system). That expensive system, still in development, could eventually provide Taiwan with more capable missile defense, but at a great opportunity cost. China could ultimately defeat the missile defense by launching a saturating attack with short-range missiles that are more cheaply built than the defenses. So Taiwan would ultimately lose any arms race between Chinese offensive missiles and Taiwanese missile defenses. Moreover, the large amounts of money spent on those active defenses could better be spent on passive defenses, such as hardening airfields and military command centers and improving missile early warning systems. Taiwanese aircraft could disperse if intelligence provided a suf-

ficient warning of attack. In addition, the United States should not sell upper-tier missile defense to the Taiwanese because then Taiwan would need to be integrated into U.S. intelligence and early warning systems. Such integration would enhance the informal alliance between Taiwan and the United States at a time when the United States should be decoupling Taiwan's defenses from a U.S. security guarantee.

Instead of buying diesel submarines and expensive upper-tier missile defense, Taiwan could better spend money on advanced anti-ship missiles (such as Harpoon missiles that could help sink any amphibious flotilla or blockading naval force), more sophisticated command and control capabilities (the Taiwanese have a big deficiency here), and the creation of a professional cadre of senior enlisted personnel (the backbone of any military).

The Taiwanese military, like other militaries around the world, likes to buy glamorous high-technology weapons platforms (such as missile defense), but it should invest in the mundane "glue" that integrates interservice fighting forces—for example, increased training; greater maintenance capabilities; more capable precision-guided munitions; and enhanced command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C⁴I).

In addition, like China, Taiwan needs to emphasize air and naval forces instead of land forces. The army is the most politically powerful of Taiwan's military services. That power is left over from the period of dictatorship, when the army provided internal security for the regime. A democratic Taiwan needs a restructured military. If the Taiwanese have to fight Chinese ground forces on Taiwan's soil, the war would be in danger of being lost. Taiwan's military needs to stop the Chinese amphibious flotilla with air and sea power before it reaches the Taiwanese coast.

Conclusion

Conservatives (and some liberals) have called for a tighter security relationship

**The United States
should sell
Taiwan the arms
to defend itself.**

The Taiwanese military likes to buy glamorous high-technology weapons platforms, but it should invest in the mundane “glue” that integrates interservice fighting forces.

between the United States and Taiwan.²¹ They note that Taiwan is now a democracy that is dwarfed by an authoritarian China—both in population and in economic power. Yet their arguments are made through Cold War lenses rather than from a dispassionate assessment of U.S. security interests in a post-Cold War world. The political and economic reforms initiated by Taiwan are laudable, but that does not mean the United States should put its own homeland at risk by dueling with a nuclear-armed great power over a small, nonstrategic island.

Besides, China will probably remain deterred from attacking Taiwan, regardless of whether or not the United States guarantees Taiwanese security. Economic development is China's top priority, and attacking Taiwan would adversely affect the international economic linkages vital to that goal. In addition, to deter China, Taiwan's armed forces do not need to be able to defeat China in any conflict; they must merely be able to execute a “porcupine” strategy—that is, inflict unacceptable damage on Chinese forces.

In the absence of a U.S. security guarantee, Taiwan should be able to carry out that strategy by increasing its purchases of weapons from the United States. Taiwan does not now spend enough on its defense and will not do so as long as the United States offers the protection of an informal security umbrella. Thus, the United States should wean Taiwan from such protection and further increase arms sales to that nation. The independence and long-term security of both nations would be improved.

Notes

1. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: 2002–2003* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 298, 301.
2. U.S. Department of Defense, *The Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait: Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY 99 Appropriations Bill*, 1999, p. 3. Hereafter cited as DoD, *Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait*.
3. U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report on*

the Military Power of the People's Republic of China: Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act, 2002, p. 49. Although Congress required the report in a fiscal year 2000 law, DoD submitted it in 2002. Hereafter cited as DoD, *Military Power of the PRC*.

4. Michael Swaine and James Mulvenon, *Taiwan's Foreign and Defense Policies: Features and Determinants* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001), p. 115.
5. James W. Holt, “Twenty Theses on the Chinese Military and the China-Taiwan Military Balance,” World Policy Institute, April 18, 2001, p. 1. www.comw.org/cmp.
6. DoD, *Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait*, p. 14.
7. DoD, *Military Power of the PRC*, p. 18.
8. DoD, *Security Situation in the Taiwan Strait*, p. 7.
9. Swaine and Mulvenon, p. 118.
10. China Security Review Commission, *Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Review Commission—The National Security Implications of the Economic Relationship between the United States and China*, July 2002, chap. 8, p. 5.
11. Swaine and Mulvenon, pp. 113–14.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
13. For more on this topic, see Ivan Eland, *Putting “Defense” Back into U.S. Defense Policy: Rethinking U.S. Security in the Post-Cold War World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), p. 212.
14. China Security Review Commission, chap. 8, p. 4.
15. Swaine and Mulvenon, pp. 113–14, 116.
16. Holt, p. 2.
17. Swaine and Mulvenon, p. 113.
18. China Security Review Commission, chap. 8, p. 4.
19. Swaine and Mulvenon, pp. xiv, xvii.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
21. For example, Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro note that “without an American commitment to intervene in a Taiwan-China conflict, there would be very little standing in the way of Chinese domination of all East Asia.” Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict*

with China (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 165. There is currently no commitment on the part of the United States to intervene if China attacks Taiwan, but President Bush has recently made the traditional ambiguity about a U.S. response a little less ambiguous. Bernstein and Munro's assertion that if Taiwan fell all of East Asia would be open to Chinese domination is

wildly exaggerated. As this paper indicates, the Chinese military probably cannot successfully invade Taiwan, let alone dominate the rest of East Asia. Furthermore, Japan, alone or in combination with other prosperous states in East Asia (such as Australia and South Korea), could act as a counterweight to a China that increased its military power over time.

Published by the Cato Institute, Cato Foreign Policy Briefing is a regular series evaluating government policies and offering proposals for reform. Nothing in Cato Foreign Policy Briefing should be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of the Cato Institute or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress. Contact the Cato Institute for reprint permission. Additional copies of Cato Foreign Policy Briefing are \$2.00 each (\$1.00 in bulk). To order, or for a complete listing of available studies, write the Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001, call toll free 1-800-767-1241 (noon - 9 p.m. eastern time), fax (202) 842-3490, or visit our website at www.cato.org.