

## The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996)

Naomi Eisenbeiss—Sciences Po Paris à Nancy & Freie Universität\*

Hannah Elten—Sciences Po Paris à Nancy & Sydney University\*\*

### Introduction

On May 22, 1995, tensions quickly arose between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC), also known as Taiwan, when President Lee Teng-hui, then president of the ROC was granted a visa by the White House to visit the United States of America in June in order to attend his graduate school reunion at Cornell University.\* Allowing the Taiwanese leader to enter the United States contradicted both public and private statements made by the Clinton administration and, from the Chinese point of view, seemed to indicate a revision of U.S. policy towards an increased encouragement of Taiwan's authorities to envision a declaration of sovereignty from Mainland China. This impression had already evolved during the three years preceding 1995, due to the U.S. sale of one hundred and fifty F-16 warplanes to the ROC in 1992 and the revision of protocol rules regarding U.S. « unofficial » treatment of Taiwan diplomats in 1994. (Ross 2000 : 87). In the following months, from August 1995 until March 1996, the PRC retaliated by letting the People's Liberation Army (PLA) conduct a series of missile tests and live fire exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan. This demonstration of force was intended to not only deter Taiwan from pursuing independence, and Washington from promoting it, but also to intimidate the people of the ROC before their presidential elections, from which President Lee nevertheless emerged as re-elected president. As a response, the U.S. deployed two carrier battle groups in the region. Although the security crisis was ultimately resolved without any direct military confrontation, it marked the most serious confrontation between the United States and China since the early 1960's, and it was to

---

\* Naomi Eisenbeiss is studying Political Science in a double-bachelor degree program with Sciences Po Paris à Nancy in France, and the Otto-Suhr-Institut of the Freie Universität in Berlin.

\*\* Hannah Elten is studying Political Economy and Asian Studies in a double-bachelor degree program with Sciences Po Paris à Nancy in France and the University of Sydney in Australia.

become a crucial turning point for Sino-U.S. relations in the development of the post-Cold War order in the Asian region. (Scobell 2000 : 232)

This article will examine why the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis did not end in armed conflict like so many other crises before it and which factors contributed to the peaceful resolution. It will take into account the international politics of recognition between nations and national administrations based on the principles of Thomas Lindemann's *Causes of War : The Struggle for Recognition*. Recognition politics focus on the fact that states do not only aim for security and satisfaction, but also strive to be recognized and respected. This coincides neatly with Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein's statement that one-dimensional strategies to appease states and avoid conflict are often unsuccessful because they, « [...] disregard a host of other values—emotional, intangible, unquantifiable things—that history reveals to be at least as important for most peoples. » (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 10) These « intangible, unquantifiable things » are at the centre of Lindemann's recognition theory. Lindemann highlights the importance of the self-image and self-esteem of a nation and its leader, for the likelihood of armed conflict depends on more than just whether the gains of war are inferior to those of peace. (Lindemann 2010 : 133) According to Lindemann, recognition, or the lack thereof, can come through different channels. Lindemann claims that leaders with hubris are more sensitive to recognition or non-recognition from other countries and will be thus inclined to take greater risks in order to reinforce their image as a powerful leader. Secondly, a shared identity between two states creates a balanced relationship, whereas states lacking this mutual respect are more prone to armed conflict. Thirdly, non-recognition can stem from violations against a state actor's honour, dignity, and autonomy. This paper aims to support Lindemann's theory of recognition by applying it to the instance of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.

The first part of this paper will illustrate how the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis unfolded, including the relationship between the PRC and ROC before the crisis, the crisis itself, and the pacific outcome. The second part will take a closer look at the initiator of the crisis, the PRC. Specifically, this part will examine what level of democracy existed within the government, which form of leadership was in place, and what perception China had about Taiwan. The final part of this paper will analyse what type of politics were implemented by both Beijing and Taipei. We will apply politics of deterrence, politics of reassurance, politics of incentive and material sanctions, and symbolic politics to this specific crisis in order to gauge what elements were involved.

In order to maintain an easily comprehensible overview of the various factors, scores ranging from 0 to 3 have been given to each aspect of the crisis. Since each section analyses a different aspect of the

crisis and the involved nations, the score of 0 indicates the most neutral or most positive possibility in the section, while a score of 3 indicates the strongest or most negative outcome for that section. For example, when discussing regimes and their level of democracy, an authoritarian regime would receive the score of 3, a somewhat authoritarian regime a 2, a somewhat democratic government a 1, and a democratic government a 0. This scoring system will be tailored to each section and will be reiterated in certain sections for clarification.

## Evolution of the Crisis

### *Background History*

In 1949, the ruling Kuomintang party (KMT) of China lost control to Mao Zedong's revolutionary Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As a result, 1.3 million supporters of the KMT fled to the neighbouring island of Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa. (Bush 2012 : 10) This division gave way to great animosity between the neighbouring nations and has since led to numerous instances of crisis. Due to the fear of McCarthyism that spread throughout the United States in the early 1950s, the U.S. government chose to ally itself with the KMT and to protect the small island against its giant Communist neighbour. The U.S. became Taiwan's principal patron and the two countries shared a mutual defence treaty for the next thirty years. (Shlapak, Orletsky & Wilson 2000 : 2) In the three crises to follow the rise of Communism, the United States was instrumental in preventing a major armed conflict between the two nations. (Lee 1991 : 2) In early 1955, in what is now referred to as the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC seized the Yijiangshan Islands from the ROC's control. The United States led the evacuation and relocation of Taiwanese forces from the Tachen Islands, which were taken only a few days later by the PRC. (Matsumoto 2012 : 90) Having signed the Mutual Defence Treaty earlier in December 1954, the U.S. government showed its support to protect Taiwan.\* The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis took place only a few years later in 1958, when the PRC began shelling the islands of Matsu and Quemoy. Once again, the United States broadened its commitment to Taiwan and encouraged the cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait. (Lee 1991 : 2)

After the decline of Mao's rule in the late 1970s, relations between the U.S. and China began to normalize and with it, the close cooperation between Taiwan and the U.S. gradually came to an end. From this point onward, the U.S. government maintained an equivocal stance toward ROC-PRC relations. Although the U.S. officially recognizes Beijing as China (PRC) and has forsworn

---

\* Full text available at ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/chin001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp)).

diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the U.S. has also signed the Taiwan Relations Act, which urges Washington to « enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability ».\* (U.S. Congress, Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8, section 3(a), 1979) In addition, every presidential administration has stated that it would object to any endeavour by the PRC to unite the two by force, but would encourage peaceful resolutions agreed upon by both parties. (Hu 2010 : 55)

### *China's Military Coercion*

For more than fifteen years, this policy was more than sufficient ; the tense relationship between the PRC and the ROC remained in the background of U.S. foreign policy. (Shlapak, Orletsky & Wilson 2000 : 3) Yet, in 1995, this situation erupted into military action in what is currently known as the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. The conflict was triggered by a number of Taiwanese pro-independence events. The first affront occurred when then-Taiwanese president, Lee Teng-hui, made a public appearance in the U.S. while visiting his alma mater, Cornell University. Shortly before President Lee was granted a visa, then-US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, promised then-Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, that President Lee would be refused a visa for the U.S. because it would be inconsistent with U.S. policy. (Huang 2003 : 32) When only a few days later the United States granted President Lee the necessary visa to visit his alma mater, the Chinese government was left feeling shocked and infuriated. This incident, seemingly unexpected, had deeper roots than the Chinese realized. President Lee had experienced prior difficulties in 1994 when he landed in Honolulu, Hawaii to refuel, but was unable to leave the plane due to the refusal of his entry visa. President Lee ended up sleeping on the plane in what was later considered a public humiliation. This event resulted in a significant backlash in which several prominent pro-Taiwan figures in the U.S. demanded Congress to act in favour of President Lee. (Wertz 2014 : 1) In May 1995, the United States Congress and the Senate passed a resolution that asked the State Department to grant President Lee a visit to the U.S., which it ultimately did on May 22, 1995. Feeling betrayed, the PRC perceived the event as confirmation that Taiwan was obtaining international support to become a separate nation. Around the same time, Taiwan began to intensify its bid for U.N. membership, which enraged China even further. (Cabestan 2010 : 16)

Owing to these events, China chose to retaliate using military pressure. Beginning in July 1995, China initiated missile tests 60 km off the coast of Taiwan's Pengjia Islet and simultaneously

---

\* Full text available at (<http://ait.org.tw/ait/tra.html>).

mobilized forces in Fujian. Shortly after this incident, the U.S. government sold 150 F-16 fighters to Taiwan in the event that it would need to defend itself. The following year, in the lead-up to the Taiwanese presidential elections, China shot four DF-15 ballistic missiles into the surrounding areas of Taiwan's two largest ports, Keelung and Kaohsiung. (Shlapak, Orletsky & Wilson 2000 : 3) This clear act of aggression was seen as a move to discourage voters from re-electing President Lee. More importantly, these actions demonstrated China's readiness to « safeguard the sovereignty of the motherland » at any price and to discourage the United States from supporting Taiwanese independence. (Huang 2003 : 31)

### *End and Aftermath of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis*

In response, the United States displayed their largest presence since the previous two Strait crises by sending the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz into the waters around the strait. (Shlapak, Orletsky & Wilson 2000 : 3) This move marked the first time the US had patrolled those waters since the Vietnam War. Carrier battle groups were sent to the region once again in March 1996, during Lee Teng-hui's election period. As for the UN membership application, the UN soon rejected the application and gave no mediation efforts during the crisis. (Sutter 1995) The conflict soon cooled, but relations between Taiwan and China have remained a complicated affair. Due to the history between the two nations, China has made it clear that it is of utmost importance to maintain a «one-China» policy.

## **Characteristics of the People's Republic of China (PRC)**

### *Political Regime in China*

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong, China has remained a socialist state run by the Communist Party since 1949. Mao would later lead the Chinese population into the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward. After Mao's death and due to economic reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China transformed itself into one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Yet, its growing global influence as an economic powerhouse and its authoritarianism have bled into regional conflicts as well as civil rights violations and censorship issues. (Meisner 1999 : 580) The Chinese electoral system is hierarchical ; the population directly elects local People's Congresses, whereas all higher levels are indirectly elected by lower levels of People's Congress. The political system of China is decentralized, giving provincial leaders a certain

amount of autonomy. Most power is gathered in the Paramount Leader who heads the most important political offices. The Paramount Leader during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Jiang Zemin, held the positions of General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and President of the PRC. The three main organs of power in China are the National People's Congress, the President, and the State Council. (Wong 2005 : 220)

According to the 1998 Freedom House Index<sup>\*</sup>, China was considered a « not free » nation. With a freedom rating of 6.5, a civil liberties rating of 6, and a political rights rating of 7, China was considered an undemocratic country.<sup>†</sup> These rankings reveal that China did not allow its citizens any sort of political or civil rights and was considered an oppressive regime. According to Polity IV<sup>‡</sup>, China has maintained a score of -7 since 1977, which indicates an autocratic regime.<sup>§</sup> Although China is often viewed globally as one of the major powers, data clearly shows that it was (and remains) an autocratic regime, which disregards essential rights of its citizens. Following the rankings retrieved from both the Freedom House Index as well as Polity IV, China merits a score of 3, indicating an authoritarian regime.

**Score : 3**

### *Political Regime in Taiwan*

Taiwan had its parliamentary elections scheduled for the year 1996. Lee Teng-hui had gained popular support among the Taiwanese population, and the Chinese government grew increasingly suspicious of his policy towards the reunification with Mainland China. In early 1991, President Lee had made remarks that seemed to mask the hidden desire of an independent Taiwan, which was perceived as a threat against Mainland Chinese authority. This sense of loss of support (not only from Taiwan but also from its allies), progressed towards a feeling of distrust when President Lee, in 1995, referred to the ROC as « Republic of China on Taiwan » in his address at Cornell University and heavily criticized Chinese political behaviour during the Thousand Lake incident.<sup>\*\*</sup> Furthermore, during an interview with a Japanese journalist in the same year, President Lee seemed to identify

---

<sup>\*</sup>The Freedom House Index consists of an overall rating system of a country being free, partly free, or not free. The Index ranks countries with aggregate scores from 1 to 7, 1 being the highest and 7 being the lowest.

<sup>†</sup>« China 1998 », *Freedom House Index*, 1998 : (<http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1998/china>).

<sup>‡</sup>According to the Polity IV scheme, scores from -10 to -6 are autocracies, scores from -5 to 0 are closed anocracies, scores from 1 to 5 are open anocracies, scores from 6 to 9 are democracies, and the highest score, 10, indicates a full democracy.

<sup>§</sup>« Authority Trends, 1946-2013 », *Polity IV Project*, 2014 : (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/chn2.htm>).

<sup>\*\*</sup>The Thousand Lake Incident (also known as the Qiandao Lake Incident) was the kidnap and murder of Taiwanese tourists around the Qiandao Lake in Zhejiang, China in 1994. The Chinese government was heavily criticized for insensitive treatment and unprofessional criminal investigation procedures. This created a public backlash in Taiwan and led to many beginning to support Taiwanese independence movements.

himself with Japan more than with the PRC, which further irritated the Communist leaders in Beijing (Ding 2003 : 380).

Taiwan's government ratings at the time reveal a different political atmosphere than that of China's. According to the Freedom House Index, Taiwan's Freedom in the World status in 1999 was that of a free nation. Its Freedom Rating score was a 2, its civil liberties score was a 2, and its political rights score was also a 2.\* According to Polity IV, Taiwan maintained a score of 7 from 1995 until 1996, indicating a democracy. In 2004, Taiwan managed to reach Polity IV's top score of 10, which officially classified it a full democracy.† In contrast to China's score of 3, the political regime in Taiwan is scored with a 0 signifying a democratic regime.

**Score : 0**

### *Legitimacy Sources*

According to Lindemann's recognition theories, the leader of a nation and his sense of identification play a large role in the lead-up to armed conflict. If a leader feels threatened or humiliated by his adversary, in other words, if there is no honourable exit strategy, the chances of war become greater. (Lindemann 2010 : 134). If the symbolic costs of war are higher than those of peace, however, peace is more likely to be maintained. (Lindemann 2010 : 134) It is, therefore, important to analyse the leader and the institutions of the initiator country in order to identify the recognition politics surrounding him at the time.

Jiang Zemin, the leader of China during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, was declared « core leader » of the third generation of Chinese leadership. (Eds. Mackerras, McMillen & Watson 2001 : 120) Despite the various positions Jiang has held over the years (General Secretary of the CCP, President of the PRC, etc.), being labelled « core leader » meant that Jiang possessed a significant amount of power at the time. When Jiang first became General Secretary he was often seen as merely a transitional leader, as many were unsure whether he would be charismatic enough domestically or internationally. (Shambaugh 1996 : 270) Yet, with time he gained respect from his fellow politicians and would become recognized as a decisive and fair leader. The best example to illustrate his image within China would be the case of Mayor Chen Xitong of Beijing. Despite Chen's senior position, Jiang had him dismissed in 1995 for abuse of power and for leading an exceedingly decadent lifestyle. Internationally, Jiang was recognized as a diplomatic leader by maintaining relations with

\* « Taiwan 1999 », *Freedom House Index*, 1999 : (<http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/1999/taiwan>).

† « Polity IV Regime Trends : Taiwan, 1949-2013 », *Polity IV Regime Trends*, 2014 : (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/taw2.htm>).

other countries. For example, during the 1990s when Sino-American relations were fragile, Jiang held meetings with President Bill Clinton, in an attempt to mitigate issues. Jiang was committed to economic reform, less political than a leader like Mao, and was fully devoted to retaining the CCP. (Eds. Mackerras, McMillen & Watson 2001 : 121) He was a charismatic leader in the sense that he wanted what was best for his country and also wanted it to prosper. Jiang was a strong leader and made sure he had international as well as national recognition, yet, his demeanour and leadership style were not bogged down in ideology.

In mid-June 1995, after President Lee Teng-hui had returned to Taiwan from his visit to the U.S., Beijing's top-policy making body called an emergency session of the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group (TALSG)—the six-member organization in charge of policies for Taiwan—in order to determine how Beijing should react to the events. The Chinese government clearly felt that its legitimacy as the « only true Chinese administration » was violated. TALSG consisted of Chairman Jiang, Quian Qichen, China's foreign minister at the time, Wang Daohan, Jiang's most trusted policy adviser, and three military representatives. The presence of these three members of the military corps, who all emphasized the need for harsher action, influenced the change of policy that was then undertaken by Beijing. At the time of the meeting, military action against Taiwan was only justified if Taiwan made a formal declaration of independence and/or as the direct intervention or support by a foreign country. The military representatives of the TALSG knew that neither of these criteria would be met under the Lee administration and thus proposed loosening their stance on these. (Scobell 1999 : 9).

Moreover, Beijing felt its legitimacy being undermined due to the hostile relationship with the United States. Throughout the 1990s, the U.S criticized various angles of China. Among other incidents, religious groups criticized the absence of religious freedom in the PRC, labour organizations accused the country of involving slave labour in the production of their goods, and the Chinese « one-child-policy » which involved forced abortion was denounced by many human rights groups. Furthermore, China had been repeatedly slighted by the United States on the international stage : the U.S. Olympic committee had opposed Beijing's bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games and also voted against it receiving the world game sponsorship (Ding 2003 : 382). The legitimacy sources in China receive a 2 due to Jiang's strong personality and leadership style.

**Score : 2**



### *The Image of the Enemy*

The beginning of the deep rifts between China and Taiwan originate from the birth of Taiwan as a separate nation. Ever since the KMT fled to the neighbouring island, the relationship has been a complex balancing act. With time, the rivalry between the ideologies of Communism and Nationalism has subsided, but conflicts between the PRC and ROC remain a problem for the prospects of peace in the future. Due to its international status and change in national politics, the PRC has proven its relative flexibility, but has also shown it is determined to reunify with Taiwan. (Huang 2003 : 25) Toward the end of the 1990's the achievement of this goal seemed to be closer than ever when Beijing resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macao. The last piece of the puzzle seemed to be Taiwan. This remained an important factor in the eyes of the Chinese administration, and especially among the PLA, as the military believed it had a special responsibility to reunite Mainland China and Taiwan (Scobell 1999 : 13). The Chinese resolve to reunite is met with ambivalence in Taiwan, creating a tense relationship and distrust on both sides. The potential use of weapons or military aggression lingers in the air ; both sides are aware that it could reach that point. In fact, Beijing has shown its readiness to act in the past if Taiwan crosses the line. (Shlapak, Orletsky & Wilson 2000 : 2) On the whole, tensions remain high between the two nations and China has strong associations in relation to Taiwan. Beijing has made its intentions of reunification very clear and, thus, there exist important perceptions of the enemy, leading to a score of 2.

**Score : 2**

### **Politics of Deterrence**

Politics of deterrence are defined by Patrick Morgan as « the threat to use force in response as a way of preventing the first use of force by someone else ». (Morgan 2012 : 86) This military strategy can therefore be seen as a way to prevent or end a crisis via a threat of reprisal against the adversary power. In essence, by convincing the initiator that armed conflict or any other undesired action will cost more than any gain that action will bring, the initiator will be persuaded to back down. (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 5) Lebow and Stein describe deterrence as a strategy that, « [...] assumes that utility can be equated with narrow calculations of cost and gain, that is, in terms of the political, material, and physical well-being of leaders and their states. » (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 10) Clearly, deterrence strategies function on a very strategic level and remain an important mechanism for countries to

prevent war. The following section will analyse the military framework in each country, whether politics of deterrence existed before the crisis, and whether they existed during the crisis.

### *Military Balance*

The balance of any military is based on how well armed any given nation is and in this era, the possession of nuclear weapons signifies power over others. In the case of Taiwan, it possesses no nuclear weapons, although it has pursued nuclear weapons in the past. If Taiwan were to develop a nuclear weapons system in the near future, it would create an imbalance between China and Taiwan and would present the risk of armed conflict. For this reason, the United States, which acts as a protective power and wishes to avoid tensions in the Taiwan Strait, has always opposed the arming of Taiwan. The ROC can be seen as a threshold nuclear state due to its previous nuclear research, but has also ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970, which establishes a vow towards nuclear disarmament. President Lee wanted to reactivate a nuclear research program during the 1995-96 crises, but after large criticism was forced to back down. (Albright, Gay 1998 : 4)

Prior crises in the Taiwan Strait in 1954–1955 and 1958 count as failures from a Chinese perspective, because they were not successful in modifying Taiwanese or American behaviour. While China is vastly superior to Taiwan in terms of manpower, aircraft, and naval vessels on paper, these statistics are misleading. For China it would be extremely difficult to bring into play the hundreds of thousands of soldiers needed for an invasion, because China does not have the appropriate ships or landing craft in anywhere near the numbers required. Moreover, Taiwan's more modern air wings and fleets surpass the PLA's outdated air and naval craft. And many of the air and sea craft formally part of the PLA's inventory are probably inoperable, while many that do function are in poor condition and likely capable of only limited service (Scobell 1999 : 10). The one military advantage China had over Taiwan was their missile technology, which was clearly demonstrated in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.

### *Deterrence Strategies Before the Crisis*

The two crises that took place in 1954 and 1958 were both diffused with the help of the United States. In the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC seized control of the Yijiangshan Islands and forced Taiwanese forces to flee. The United States stepped in at this point and helped evacuate all Taiwanese soldiers from the islands. In addition to this, the United States seriously considered using

nuclear weapons against Mainland China. However, for the first crisis, it sufficed to threaten the PRC with nuclear weapons. In the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, which lasted for four weeks in 1958, the PRC once again tried to take control by shelling Quemoy and the nearby Matsu Islands in order to force the ROC army out. Once again, the United States intervened and used the threat of nuclear weapons against the PRC, who had yet to gain nuclear power at that point. In this case, Eisenhower had used the tactic of brinkmanship in order to avoid an armed conflict or war between the two nations. (You 1999 : 213)

It is thus clear that in previous matters between the two opposing nations, China has always been quieted by deterrence policies like the threat of nuclear weapons. However, shortly before the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, China and Taiwan were, surprisingly, at peace with one another. In fact, on October 12, 1992, President Jiang, noted, « Under the 'one China' prerequisite, [the two sides] can discuss everything, including the method for a formal negotiation, to find a way both sides deem appropriate ». (Ribao 1999) This was a groundbreaking notion at the time, and discussions began soon thereafter. In April 1993, a meeting between Taipei's Koo Cheng-fu and Beijing's Wang Daohan, later to be known as the Wang-Koo meeting, took place in Singapore to discuss the needs and desires of both China and Taiwan. In these meetings, numerous agreements were signed including the *Agreement of the System for Connection and Talks between the Two Sides*. (Lijun 2001 : 20) The two sides then conducted a number of negotiations to discuss issues arising from their exchanges. Although a second Wang-Koo meeting was scheduled for July 20, 1995, it never took place due to President Lee's visit to the United States and the events of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis that followed shortly after. It retracted cross-strait relations to their nadir.

Deterrence strategies were used on a large scale for the two prior crises involving the PRC and the ROC. Yet, leading up to the crisis, deterrence strategies were not needed from either side, due to the peaceful efforts like the Wang-Koo meetings. On the whole, deterrence policies were moderate before the crisis, meriting a score of 2 ; although there were elements of deterrence in its past, there was no need for deterrence strategies in the lead-up to the crisis.

**Score : 2**

### *Deterrence Strategies During the Crisis*

For China the missile tests undertaken in the 1995/96 crisis were a clear demonstration that their threats were credible, that they had the will to use force, and the capability to strike Taiwan – but at the same time the missile tests offered little danger of a true escalation of the crisis. It can be seen as

a show of force, as there was no intention of China to initiate actual hostilities against Taiwan. The Chinese behaviour in this crisis is a clear example of coercive diplomacy. In coercive diplomacy, « force is used in an exemplary, demonstrative manner, in discrete and controlled increments to induce the opponent to revise his calculations and agree to a mutually acceptable termination of the conflict ». (Scobell 1999 : 8) The objective was clearly to intimidate Taiwan and to warn the United States not to meddle in China's domestic affairs—no actual invasion or attack on Taiwan was planned. (Scobell 1999 : 10) Beijing also wanted to deter the United States from the perceived modification of its established One-China policy. Through the forceful posture of the military exercises, China also wanted to show the United States that it would pay a heavy cost if it altered its China policy. (Ding 2003 : 382)

During the crisis of 1995/96, the United States sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the coast of Taiwan to monitor Chinese military movements. This was America's largest naval movement in the Asia-Pacific region since the Vietnam War, which indicates a serious commitment from the U.S. government. (Qimao 1996 : 1055) By demonstrating a naval presence in the China Sea, the U.S., acting as Taiwan's protector, sent a strong message to Beijing and showed that the issues surrounding Taiwan needed to be dealt with delicately—otherwise there would be more dire consequences. (Ding 2003) According to John W. Garver's research, Beijing was taken aback by the U.S. decision to intervene due to the little engagement adopted earlier by the United States. (Garver, 1997 : 118-126) An important lesson that Beijing learned during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis was the importance of the U.S.'s credibility. Despite the normalization of relations between Beijing and Washington, the U.S. did not renounce its commitment to Taiwan due to the integrity at stake. (Ding 2003 : 396)

The crisis was pacified due to the deterrence strategy implemented by the United States. By moving into the harbour, the U.S. not only made its intentions clear, but the significance of it being the largest U.S. naval movement since the Vietnam War also reiterated the commitment it felt towards Taiwan. The PRC was thoroughly surprised by this move and was intimidated enough to back down—fulfilling the main aspects of deterrence politics. For this, the authors of this paper attribute the score of 3 to the crisis, indicating a strong policy of deterrence.

**Score : 3**

## Politics of Reassurance

### *Reassurance Policies Before the Crisis*

Reassurance strategies begin from a completely different perspective than do deterrence strategies. They presume that the root of the hostility lies not in an opponent's search for opportunity, rather in the vulnerabilities and misunderstandings. (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 40) Reassurance strategies entail communication between adversaries in order to reduce fear, misinterpretation, and insecurity—all of which may lead to war. (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 40) Robert Jervis writes that even misunderstandings about military capability can in itself lead to aggression. Since most states have different perceptions of what level of defence is appropriate for a certain situation, it is often the case that confrontation ensues. For example, if one state builds up arms far more than another, the country with fewer arms may see this manoeuvre as an offensive action against them. (Jervis 1978 : 170) This may have been the case during the crisis, as China prepared much more heavily for war than Taiwan did, but not before the crisis. Before the crisis began there was only political hostility between the two nations. This can be observed in the two preceding crises in the Strait. There was a clear absence of reassurance policies between the two countries, as China did not attempt in any way to communicate benign intentions, rather it sought to block it off from any international recognition or awareness. Reassurance strategies can take numerous forms, some of which include bargaining strategies, reciprocal strategies (*tit for tat*), creating « norms of competition », and building informal or formal regimes to diminish the likelihood of miscalculated war. (Lebow & Stein 1987 : 41) Despite the Wang-Koo effort, as soon as the Chinese government heard about President Lee's Cornell visit, all talks of peace immediately ceased and no form of the aforementioned reassurance strategies were implemented.

According to Jervis, other elements and circumstances can affect the intensity of the dilemma as well. One of the most important variables is the offense-defence balance, which presents how easy it is to defend or attack a certain nation. When a country is easier to defend than to attack, security is typically guaranteed and states are less likely to feel threatened, which leads to a less intense security dilemma. Conversely, when a country is more prepared to attack than to defend, the intensity rises quickly and the safety of either nation is no longer secure. Interestingly, Taiwan's defence spending had been declining for a number of years before the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. The defence spending as percentage of GDP before the crisis had been declining since 1992 when it peaked at

around 5.2%.\* Spending continued to decrease in 1994 to around 4.2% (equating 9.8 billion U.S. dollars), while remaining at a solid 4% (\$9.5 billion) throughout the crisis in 1995-1996. (Murray 2013 : 2) China, on the other hand, had also decreased in defence spending as of 1992, when it was at around 3.6% and continued to decrease up until 1996 when it picked up momentum again. Curiously, Taiwan did not increase their military spending during the crisis, despite the fact that the risk of attack from China was so large. The reason for this was that the purchase of new arms from the United States had become a very political debate at the time.† Many had claimed that the weapons were too expensive, others said it would take too long to integrate them into the military, and some claimed that it would simply create an arms race with Mainland China.

Reassurance policies before the crisis were relatively weak, as neither side attempted to set up a mutually trusting relationship. Even though there were efforts from both sides in 1993 through the Wang-Koo meetings, all sense of trust vanished when China clearly felt betrayed by President Lee's visit to the United States. Since the reassurance policies implemented before the crisis were weak, it merits a score of 1.

**Score : 1**

### *Reassurance Policies During the Crisis*

Another important theory by Jervis is the offense-defence differentiation, which indicates how clear it is to distinguish defensive from offensive weapons and policies. He believes that if the differentiation were high, the security dilemma would be completely eliminated (Jervis 1978 : 187). Charles L. Glaser adds to this arguing that the unit-level-knowledge is an equally important agent. When countries are informed of other domestic systems (political and economic) they are more able to perceive the other's intentions and thus avoid the dilemma at hand. (Glaser 1997 : 192) The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis presents an important example of Glaser's unit-level-knowledge theory between the United States and Taiwan itself. For example, Kurt Campbell, the Pentagon's senior official who was responsible for the region at the time, described the biggest difficulty as the complicated nature of communication between the Washington and Taipei and the struggle to understand Taiwanese capabilities and objectives.‡ This was clearly problematic, especially when a conflict between China was to be avoided through joint action. In order to do so, the Clinton administration decided to

---

\* « The Dragon Next Door », *The Economist*, 13 janvier 2005 : (<http://www.economist.com/node/3535185>).

† Ibid.

‡ « The Dragon Next Door », *The Economist*, 13 janvier 2005 : (<http://www.economist.com/node/3535185>).

increase their level of communication with armed forces, training officers as well as making mutual visits. Overall, if uncertainty can be diminished, nations can make informed decisions about whether to pursue policies of reassurance or deterrence.

China did not pursue any reassurance policies during the crisis. It did not attempt to make any security guarantees and it was not open to discussions. In fact, China's main purpose was to prove its readiness to punish Taiwan for stepping out of line and to demonstrate to the U.S. that it did not approve of its policies toward Taiwan, as they were not in accordance with China's. Overall, none of the involved countries implemented any reassurance policies to avoid conflict. The U.S. tried to alleviate communication issues with its ally, Taiwan, but relations between China and Taiwan remained tense, without any attempt at mediation or clarification through reassurance. The score for reassurance policies during the crisis, is thus, 0.

**Score : 0**

### **Politics of Incentives or Material Sanctions**

Despite the fact that economic issues or sanctions are often a motivating force to turn to armed conflict, this was not the case for the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. Neither China nor Taiwan suffered economically nor did any countries sanction either of them. China did want to politically isolate Taiwan from international politics and did want to force Taiwan to adhere to its One-China policy, but neither country acted due to economic issues or sanctions. In fact, the opposite was true, both China and Taiwan were economically strong and successful. At the time preceding the crisis, Taiwan was rising to exponential success as one of the Asian Tigers. (Cai 2011 : 3) China, in the meantime, was also economically successful and growing healthily during the early '90s. (Sutter 2012 : 50) The politics of incentives or material sanctions does not apply to this particular case due to the economic stability of both nations and, therefore, merits a score of 0.

**Score : 0**

### **Recognition Politics**

#### *Existing symbolic difficulties before the crisis*

A very important factor that influenced Chinese self-perception before the outbreak of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis were the foreign relations between Beijing and the United States as well as those

between Taipei and the United States—members of the Chinese politburo estimated that this would impact Taiwanese diplomatic relations with other countries. Unfortunately, the Chinese government faced a growing number of friendly actions between Taipei and Washington and increased support and encouragement coming from the White House concerning Taiwan's measures to reach independence. Moreover, Beijing perceived President Lee's leadership as gradually more daring and provocative over time. The launch of several aggressive diplomatic initiatives in order to obtain a higher profile on the international stage was considered especially controversial. (Anlin in Cai 2011 : 28) Furthermore, the Taiwanese public seemed to back the idea of independence, a development that was reflected by the increased support for the pro-independence party (DPP) in 1995 and 1996. The Communist leaders in Beijing regarded Washington's behaviour towards Taiwan as unwelcomed interference with Chinese internal affairs. The PRC feared that if Taiwan gained independence with the support of the United States, hopes for the reunification of Greater China would have to be buried forever and a threat to Mainland China would be imminent.

When President Lee's visa for his Cornell University visit was accepted, it revealed, at least in the eyes of the PRC, a significant and unwelcome change in Washington's foreign policy. The communist leaders feared the potential consequences of President Lee's visit to the U.S. The public event provided recognition for President Lee and it might encourage other countries to support the Lee administration. Beijing was particularly worried about Japan and the possibility of an invitation for President Lee to visit his alma mater at Kyoto University (Scobell 1999 : 6-12). This could eventually lead to a successful entrance into the international community for Taiwan, thus making it more complicated for the PRC to further isolate Taiwan and pursue the task of reunification.

In this case, China felt as though its rule was not being respected by the U.S. nor by Taiwan. According to Lindemann, this type of non-recognition would fall under the case of recognition of sovereign dignity, « sovereign dignity implies abstaining from issuing ultimatums, explicit threats, and activities that devalue the others' hierarchical or moral status [...] ». (Lindemann 2010 : 133) Before the crisis, China faced significant issues due to non-recognition by the U.S. and was afraid that it would spread on a global level. For this reason, China receives the highest score of 3.

**Score : 3**

### *Politics of Recognition Implemented During the Crisis by the Political Unit*

Confronted with the recent events of 1994 and 1995, the Chinese administration considered its policy of peaceful unification with Taiwan (which had been implemented at this point for 15 years)



as no longer serving the cause of Chinese reunification. However, the sanctions put in place by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the summer of 1995 as a reaction to President Lee's visit to the U.S. did not achieve the desired effects : Washington did not respond in any way to the recall of the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. or the cancellation of ministry-level visits between both countries (Scobell 1999 : 9). Furthermore, President Lee's speech held at Cornell University in June 1995 did not mention Chinese reunification at all ; instead it propagated a very inflammatory, nationalist image of Taiwan and its people. (Lee 1995 : Cornell University). In September 1995, General Liu Huaqing, one of China's most influential soldiers, stated in an interview with a Hong Kong newspaper : « In June, Lee-Teng-hui went to the United States flaunting his connections with foreigners, openly forsook national interests, brazenly advocated a split, and resisted reunifications. This inevitably has increased tension across the Taiwan Strait. We resolutely oppose any moves by foreign forces to interfere in China's internal affairs and to undermine China's reunification, and resolutely oppose the conspiracy of the Taiwan authorities of going against the overall interest of the nation, resisting the great cause of peaceful unification of the motherland». (Ta Kung Pao, 1995, cited in FBIS September 7, 1995 : 32).

This statement stresses the highly aggressive potential and tension, which had been built up within the Chinese administration concerning the Taiwanese issue over the course of the past months. Moreover, it shows the Chinese desire to propagate and justify its cause for reunification on a global level, wanting this urge to be recognized and respected internationally. Nevertheless, the military exercises put in place by Beijing were announced in advance, clearly defined, carefully planned, and circumscribed in scope, duration, and location. This included an explicit communication with both Taipei and Washington some days before each exercise.

However, we can note an increased awareness for the need for communication within Chinese leadership. The exercises in July 1995 were arranged and implemented rapidly, so that the U.S. and Taiwan could not be notified far in advance. In contrast to this, the exercises held during March 1996 were prepared and planned many months beforehand, so that advanced notice could be given to Washington. For instance, Beijing even sent Liu Huaqiu, the Vice Foreign Minister to the American capital in order to ensure that the administration under President Clinton knew that China did not want to directly attack Taiwan, but only to implement some missile-tests and exercises. This measure was unprecedented in the history of the PRC and showed the high level of importance allocated by Beijing to the task of clarifying Chinese intentions concerning Taiwan towards the U.S. Moreover, this move also indicates Beijing's awareness of the risk that the U.S. might react

aggressively to the military exercises by sending a naval battle group in the direction of the Taiwan Strait. However, the Communist government seemed surprised when Washington did not only send one but two naval battle groups to the vicinity of Taiwan (Wertz 2014 : 1).

Concerning Chinese behaviour towards Taipei during the crisis, Beijing was strict in its no-contact policy with the enemy, because it wanted to ensure that no actual hostilities would break out. Although the live-fire exercises were implemented in the area of the Taiwan Strait, none of them actually reached Taiwanese territory. Moreover, by using missiles as a demonstration of power, the Chinese administration hoped to avoid a direct confrontation between its own military and the Taiwanese one. The communist leaders therefore acknowledged that the situation should not escalate (Ding 2003 : 384).

Due to the very weak recognition that China received from the U.S. and Taiwan, China received a score of 1 in this section, indicating that the PRC was somewhat recognized, but not fully.

**Score : 1**

## **Conclusion**

The naval presence of the United States in the China Sea can be seen as a clear deterrence strategy and as a sign to China that the preservation of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait is a priority. The United States valued the Taiwan issue as it influenced their credibility as a leader in the region. Furthermore, today the United States welcome exchanges that enhance channels of communication between leaders in Beijing and Taipei, and urges Beijing and Taipei to further cross-strait relations, including direct discussions between the authorities in Beijing and elected leaders in Taipei. According to the security dilemma theorists Robert Jervis and Charles L. Glaser, circumstances have a large impact upon the future of a crisis. These specific variables can determine the intensity of a conflict as well as explain why some conflicts end in armed conflict and others simply fizzle out. The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis was an important example in presenting their theories, as reassurance policies played no role in the interrelationship between the two nations.

Similarly, crises do not end in armed conflict by chance. Although each crisis has a complex set of factors that affect the decisions leaders make, according to Lindemann, the decision to arm a country is not only based on the gains or losses of war. Surely, these aspects play a role as well, but more importantly the politics of recognition determine whether countries will end in war or not. China attempted to isolate Taiwan and punish it for its strive towards independence.

Misunderstandings between the two countries led to an extremely turbulent and tense period, which supports Glaser's argument of unit-level-knowledge. If lack of certainty can be eliminated from the interpersonal relationship between two countries, they can make more informed decisions and create a less-hostile atmosphere. Certainly the policy changes undertaken by the United States in the years and months preceding the crisis have influenced the political leaders in Beijing in their decision to start the military exercises in summer 1995. They felt compromised in their image of being the true Chinese authority and wanted to demonstrate both to Taipei and Washington that they were willing to use military force if necessary. And indeed, after this crisis, both the U.S. and Taiwan became more careful in their decision-making concerning the relations between the PRC and the ROC. With President Lee's re-election of an overwhelming majority in 1996, China became aware that the actions of their government had an effect contrary to what had been intended.

## Bibliography

- ALBRIGHT, David et GAY, Corey, « Taiwan : Nuclear Nightmare Averted », *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, janvier/fevrier 1998.
- ANLIN, Yan, « Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations and Beijing's Taiwan Policy Adjustment Since 1979 », in CAI, Kevin G., (ed.), *Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations since 1979 : Policy Adjustment and Institutional Change Across the Straits*, Singapore : World Scientific Series on Contemporary China – Vol. 28, 2011, pp. 21-50.
- BUSH, Richard C., *Uncharted Strait : The Future of China-Taiwan Relations*, Washington, DC : The Brookings Institution Press, 2012.
- CABESTAN, Jean-Pierre, « Taiwan's Political Development and U.S.- China Relations », in LIN, Cheng-yi et ROY, Denny (eds.), *The Future of United States, China, and Taiwan Relations*, New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 13-28.
- CAI, Kevin G., « Introduction : Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations Since 1979 », in CAI, Kevin G., (ed.), *Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations since 1979 : Policy Adjustment and Institutional Change Across the Straits*, Singapore : World Scientific, Series on Contemporary China – Vol. 28, 2011, pp. 1-18.
- DING, Arthur S., « The Lessons of the 1995-1996 Military Taiwan Strait Crisis », *The Lessons of History*, juillet 2003, pp. 379-402.
- GLASER, Charles L., « The Security Dilemma Revisited », *World Politics*, vol. L, n° 1, 1997, pp. 171-201.
- GARVER, John W., *Face Off : China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization*, Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1997.
- HERZ, John H., « Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma », *World Politics*, vol. II, n° 2, 1950, pp. 157-180.
- HU, Richard W., « The TRA, Cross-Strait Relations, and Sino-U.S. Relations : Searching for Cross-Strait Stability », in LIN, Cheng-yi et ROY, Denny (eds.), *The Future of United States, China, and Taiwan Relations*, New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 53-70.
- HUANG, Jing, « China's Taiwan Policy : Past and Present », in HEO, Uk, et HOROWITZ, Shale A. (eds.), *Conflict in Asia : Korea, China-Taiwan, and India-Pakistan*, Westport, CT : Praeger Publishers, 2003, pp. 25-40.
- JERVIS, Robert, « Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma », *World Politics*, vol. XXX, n° 2, janvier 1978, pp. 326-359.
- KUNG, Pao Ta, *Interview in the FBIS*, 7 septembre 1995.
- LEBOW, Richard Ned, et STEIN, Janice Gross, « Beyond Deterrence », *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. XXXIII, n° 4, 1987, pp. 5-71.
- LEE, Lai To, *The Reunification of China : PRC-Taiwan Relations in Flux*, New York : Praeger Publishers, 1991.
- LEE, Teng-hui, *Cornell Address*, Ithaca, New York, 6 juin 1995, URL: <http://taiwanauj.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=13324&CtNode=103>
- LIJUN, Sheng, *China's Dilemma : The Taiwan Issue*, Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001.
- LINDEMANN, Thomas, *Causes of War : The Struggle for Recognition*, University of Essex, UK : ECPR, 2010.

- MACKERRAS, Colin, MCMILLEN, Donald H., et WATSON, Andrew (eds.), *Dictionary of the Politics of the People's Republic of China* London : Routledge, 2001.
- MATSUMOTO, Haruka, « The First Taiwan Strait Crisis and China's 'Border' Dispute Around Taiwan », *Slavic-Eurasian Research Center*, Eurasia Border Review Special Issue, 2012, pp. 77-91.
- MEISNER, Maurice, *Mao's China and After : A History of the People's Republic*, New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- MORGAN, Patrick M., « The State of Deterrence in International Politics Today », *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. XXXIII, n° 1, avril 2012, pp.85–107.
- MURRAY, Craig, « Taiwan's Declining Defense Spending Could Jeopardize Military Preparedness », USCC, 2013 : ([http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Taiwan's%20Declining%20Defense%20Spending%20Could%20Jeopardize%20Military%20Preparedness\\_Staff%20Research%20Background.pdf](http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Taiwan's%20Declining%20Defense%20Spending%20Could%20Jeopardize%20Military%20Preparedness_Staff%20Research%20Background.pdf)).
- QIMAO, Chen, « The Taiwan Strait Crisis : Its Crux and Solutions », *Asian Survey*, vol. XXXVI, n° 11, novembre 1996, pp. 1055-1066.
- RIBAO, Renmin, « *Yige Zhongguo Shi Wuke Zhengbian De Shishi* [One China is an Indisputable Fact] », 12 août 1999.
- ROSS, Robert S., « The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation : Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force », *International Security*, vol. XXV, n° 2, 2000, pp. 87-123.
- SCHMAH, Laura, « Can the Security Dilemma Ever be Escaped? » *E-International Relations*, novembre 2012 : (<http://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/23/can-the-security-dilemma-ever-be-escaped/>).
- SCOBELL, Andrew, « Show of Force : The PLA and the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis », *Asia Pacific Research Center*, 1999 : (<http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/10091/Scobell.pdf>).
- SCOBELL, Andrew, « Show of Force : Chinese Soldiers, Statesmen, and the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis », *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. CXV, n° 2, 2000, pp. 227-246.
- SHAMBAUGH, David, « China's Military in Transition : Politics, Professionalism, Procurement and Power Projection », *The China Quarterly*, n° 146, juin 1996, pp. 265-298.
- SHLAPAK, David A., ORLETSKY, David T., et WILSON, Barry A. *Dire Strait? : Military Aspects of the China-Taiwan Confrontation and Options for U.S. Policy*, Santa Monica, CA : Rand, 2000.
- STEIN, Janice Gross, « Reassurance in International Conflict Management », *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. CXI, n° 3, 1991, pp. 431-451.
- SUTTER, Robert G., « China Policy : Crisis Over Taiwan, 1995—A Post-Mortem », *CRS Issue Brief Congressional Research Service*, décembre 1995 : (<http://fas.org/spp/starwars/crs/95-1173f.htm>).
- SUTTER, Robert G., *Chinese Foreign Relations : Power and Policy Since the Cold War*, Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012.
- TUCKER, Nancy Bernkopf (ed.), *Dangerous Strait : The U.S.--Taiwan--China Crisis*, New York : Columbia University Press, 2005.
- U.S. Congress, 96th Congress, 1st Session, Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8, section 3(a).
- WERTZ, Richard R., « Conflict and War : Taiwan », *Exploring Chinese History*, 2014 : (<http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/03pol/c04s06.html>).
- WONG, Yiu-chung, *From Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin : Two Decades of Political Reform in the People's Republic of China*, Lanham, MD : University Press of America, 2005.
- YOU, E. Ji, *The Armed Forces of China*, St. Leonards, N.S.W. : Allen & Unwin, 1999.