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Breakwaters of the “1st Island-chain” – Structural similarities in Japan and Taiwan’s limited deterrence strategies¹

[DOI 10.17047/HADTUD.2020.30.4.31](https://doi.org/10.17047/HADTUD.2020.30.4.31)

A changing balance of power between Washington and Beijing has dominated discourse on regional and global trends in both academic and policy circles. While ample body of literature deals with the question of deterrence vis-a-vis the US and China, less attention is given to medium powers in the Asia Pacific regarding their policy decisions to adapt to a dynamic balance of power. This paper looks at how two key regional players, Taiwan and Japan, have shifted their strategic perceptions from territorial defense to a more active deterrence regarding the PRC. It gives an overview of the state of the theory of deterrence in IR and Security Studies literature, followed by an assessment of changing Chinese military capabilities. It then shows the strategic perceptions and expressed intentions of Japanese and Taiwanese defense reforms that highlight deterrence as a core concept. The two regional actors’ deterrence strategies share core similarities and represent special cases of deterrence thinking that can contribute to theoretical analysis of deterrence strategy in the 21st century. KEYWORDS: Deterrence, China, Japan, Taiwan

Az „Első szigetlánc” hullámtörői – rendszer szintű hasonlóságok Japán és Tajvan korlátozott elrettentés stratégiáiban

A regionális és globális trendekről folytatott diskurzust mind tudományos, mind politikai körökben meghatározza a Washington és Peking közötti változó erőviszonyok kérdése. Míg a szakirodalom bőségesen foglalkozik az USA-val és Kínával szembeni elrettentés kérdésével, addig az ázsiai-csendes-óceáni térség közép-hatalmainak kevesebb figyelmet szentel, holott szakpolitikájuk természetesen alkalmazkodni kényszerül a dinamikusan változó erőviszonyokhoz. A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogy két kulcsfontosságú regionális szereplő, Tajvan

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1 Supported by the ÚNKP-19-3-III-NKE-91 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry For Innovation And Technology.



és Japán hogyan helyezte át stratégiai figyelmét a klasszikus területvédelemről a Kínát érintő aktívabb elrettentésre. Áttekintést ad az elrettentés elméletének irányairól a vonatkozó szakirodalomban, majd áttekinti a kínai katonai képességek változását. Végül láthatjuk, a japán és tajvani stratégiákban hogyan alakul ki az elrettentés, mint megoldási lehetőség. A két regionális szereplő elrettentési stratégiája alapvető hasonlóságokat mutat és az elrettentés speciális változatát képviselik. Japán és Tajvan elrettentési törekvéseinek vizsgálata hozzájárulhat a 21. század elrettentési stratégiáinak behatóbb megértéséhez.
 KULCSSZAVAK: Elrettentés, Kína, Japán, Tajvan

Introduction

The rapid increase of China's economic potential and the long overdue modernization of its military, launched in the 1990s, has reconfigured global power politics in a way that most experts – for more than a decade – have been contemplating a great power rivalry between the US and the PRC.¹ The most commonly used concept to illustrate what the rise of China might mean for the global order is the “Thucydides trap”,² arguing for the determined inevitability of clash between status quo and revisionist centers of power. Proponents of this argument point to the structural similarities between the Peloponnesian clash of interests and the current possible collision course on which the rise of Chinese power puts both Washington and Beijing.³ While one can argue against the inevitability of clashing interests, from a strategic theoretical standpoint, the most logical way to deal with a revisionist actor is *deterrence*. Accordingly, deterrence-based conceptualization dominates strategic thinking on US-China power dynamics. However, much less attention is given to the agency in deterrence to regional powers other than the US, whose strategic concerns are also mainly focused on the rise of Chinese military and other capabilities. This paper looks at two non-nuclear East Asian powers, Japan and Taiwan and gives a comprehensive overview on their respective deterrence strategies towards the PRC. Structural similarities in the patterns of deterrence strategy, point towards a trend developing among the examined international actors. Deterrence strategies in these two cases are aimed at denying favorable military operational, strategic, and political conditions for Chinese unilateral adventurism regarding the status quo of bilateral flashpoints. Such trends are the emphasis on conventional military capability enhancement, pro-active diplomatic initiatives, and diversification of relevant economic segments in order to lessen Beijing's military, diplomatic and economic leverages.

¹ Mearsheimer, John J., *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company, 2001. pp. 401-402.

² Based on the analogy of how the status quo power Sparta had a clash of interests with the rising “revisionist” power, Athens.

³ Allison, Graham, “The Thucydides Trap: are the US and China headed for war?” *The Atlantic*, 24 (2015).

Deterrence and Theoretical Frameworks

Deterrence has been the key strategic theory for conceptualizing power rivalry between China and the US. Deterring China from unilaterally annexing Taiwan has long dominated Washington's Asia-Pacific strategy. On the other side of the Strait, the Chinese military's A2/AD capabilities are mostly regarded as deterrents against a US intervention in China's Pacific coastlines.⁴ However, the strategic theoretical framework of deterrence has faced some conceptual challenges after the end of the Cold War.

Deterrence, as a strategy applied by relevant powers in international relations, is a factor that can contribute to the construction of analytic frameworks when theorizing about the structure of global politics. But the problem with theoretical approaches that incorporate deterrence, is that the strategy itself is inherently complex and involves abstract calculations. That is because it is not a strategy involving any singular operational concept (such as a preemptive strike, or certain disposition capabilities), but a comprehensive strategic complex aimed at the political will of an opponent or target audience. Because deterrence is such a composite idea, theoretical approaches in Security Studies literature cover wide ranges of topics and capabilities, from nuclear, to conventional, and non-conventional, such as cyber warfare.⁵

The most common within theoretical literature on the strategy of deterrence is nuclear strategy and nuclear weapons-based deterrence. In some cases, the word „*deterrence*” is synonymous for nuclear deterrence.⁶

However, the bipolar tradition of Cold War approaches is still tangible in theoretical works on deterrence. Conceptualization of deterrence in the case of East Asia for example mainly focuses on US agency against Beijing – and as a secondary issue, the WMD program of North Korea – and merely regards the Alliance structure members (such as Japan or Taiwan) as parts of the structure, but not as agents within a system of deterrence. Some arguments explain this heavily US focused approach on East Asian deterrence with the assumption, that deterrence without nuclear weapons capability is sufficiently credible. Conventional deterrence requires multiple layered weapons-systems complexes more composite than a nuclear triad and complex systems of military capabilities are more likely to fail, thus less credible in terms of deterring an adversary.⁸

Strategic theory conceptualizes deterrence in two ways: deterrence by *denial*, or by *punishment*. As some describe deterrence by denial dates back to centuries of military history and is aimed at either stopping or defeating an attack. It can also be done by a military buildup that guarantees the would-be aggressor such a number of casualties that

⁴ Bonds, Timothy M., Joel B. Predd, Timothy R. Heath, Michael S. Chase, Michael Johnson, Michael J. Lostumbo, James Bonomo, Muharrem Mane, and Paul S. Steinberg, *What Role Can Land-Based, Multi-Domain Anti-Access/Area Denial Forces Play in Deterring or Defeating Aggression?* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017. pp. 97-981.

⁵ Jabbour, Kamaal T., and E. Paul Ratazzi, “Does the United States Need a New Model for Cyber Deterrence?” in Lowther, Adam, ed., *Deterrence*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012. pp. 33-45.

⁶ Booth, Ken, *Theory of world security*. Vol. 105. Cambridge University Press, 2007. pp. 109., 155., 267. 8
Morgan, Patrick M., *Deterrence now*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. pp. 276-278.

the political will behind aggression is dissuaded by the prior calculations of possible casualties. The advent of air power, ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons have created a second approach to deterrence: deterrence by punishment. This element allows one to inflict unacceptable casualties on an attacker without having to engage its military capabilities.⁷ Most great- and superpower deterrence approaches – states that are *de facto* nuclear powers as well as have substantial militaries – rely heavily on strategic deterrence by punishment while also incorporating elements of deterrence by denial. However, neither Taiwan nor Japan are nuclear powers, nor can their individual military capabilities justify the threat of inflicting strategic level casualties on a much larger country such as China. As such, the only element of deterrence they are individually capable of implementing is *denial*, although the US nuclear umbrella supplements this with a strategic level of *punishment*. As the paper strives to demonstrate, Taipei and Tokyo are consciously and actively pursuing deterrence in their military strategies regarding China but since it is restricted to the *denial* aspect of deterrence, this can only be regarded as a form of *limited deterrence*. This does not mean, however, that limited deterrence cannot have the effect of influencing the prior calculations and political will of a theoretical aggressor. Even deterrence by denial can hamper possible political gains of military aggression by severely lowering operational confidence and increasing prospected casualties. As such, understanding limited deterrence pursued by Taiwan and Japan as well as the agency of individual actors in the US alliance structure in East Asia contributes to the strategic understanding of power balance in Asia Pacific.

Rise of Chinese Military Capabilities, the Us Alliance System and Regional Perceptions on a Changing Balance of Power

Rising Chinese Military Capabilities

The People's Republic of China has been able to gradually increase its military budget in significant proportions for more than two decades now, becoming the country with the second largest defense spending.⁸ Subsequently, the budgetary increases have brought with them a comprehensive modernization within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) services, starting with the acquisition of high-end weapons systems in the 1990s, to domestic developments of such equipment in the 2010s, such as China's homegrown 4th and 5th generation fighter aircraft.¹¹

One of the major foci in China's military modernization and capacity building was the operational concept of anti-access / area denial (A2/AD), which is a complex set of weapons systems aimed at targeting kinetic and non-kinetic attacks at an opponent's naval capabilities, heavily relying on either shore based anti-ship weapons, or smaller naval and air assets armed with anti-ship missiles. By the early 2010s, the PLA had developed

⁷ Mazarr, Michael J. *Understanding Deterrence*. RAND 2018.

⁸ International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS). *The Military Balance 2019*. Routledge, 2019. pp. 21-22. 11 IISS. *The Military Balance 2012*. Routledge, 2011. p. 197.

substantial elements of A2/AD that, according to some analysis, had the potential to deter US intervention close to Chinese shores in a cost-effective way by possessing large quantities of anti-ship missiles capable of striking at US Navy strike forces.⁹ The assessment of „cost-effectiveness” refers to the fact that while becoming a peer competitor in naval power would require vast national resources, a substantial arsenal of land based anti-ship missiles is a much lighter investment, while still changes the balance of power in a favorable way for China. In most analyses on Chinese A2/AD capabilities, the concept is regarded as an asymmetric – in a sense that instead of rivaling US Naval power, shore-based and other anti-ship missile strike capabilities are developed – deterrence strategy against US naval presence around contingencies sensitive to Beijing’s interests.¹⁰

Another, somewhat more recent endeavor of Chinese military modernization and force buildup are weapon systems and supporting equipment that enhance China’s power projection capabilities. The most symbolic of these was the launch of the PLA Navy’s first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning* in 2012, followed by a second carrier in 2019.¹¹ Aircraft carriers, however, are not the only assets for maritime power projection. China also fields four large amphibious assault ships (in naval terminology: Landing Platform Dock – LPDs) of the *Yuzhao* class, and in 2019 it launched its first „helicopter carrier”, the Type 075, classified as a Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD). Besides from central and visible principal surface vessels of power projection, the PLA Navy (PLAN) fields 10 nuclear and 55 diesel electric submarines, 4 nuclear-powered and armed with ballistic missiles, a surface fleet of 1 cruiser, 28 destroyers, with a large additional fleet of smaller ships, 52 frigates and 43 corvettes.¹² While the PLA ground forces are one of the largest armies in the world, they might factor less in other missions than mainland territorial defense, however, the PLAN marines, organized into four brigades and numbering around 25,000 personnel, also constitute crucial elements of Chinese power projection assets.¹⁶

China is also a nuclear power, with an estimated arsenal of 70 or more warheads actively deployed on ballistic missiles. This is a much smaller force than that of Russian or American nuclear capabilities and China has a declared nuclear strategy of „no-first-use”, meaning it theoretically only employs nuclear forces for retaliatory strikes in order to deter other nuclear powers from using their strategic weapons against China. Also, China’s nuclear doctrine expresses Beijing’s commitment not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear power adversaries. While IR and Security Studies literature ponders on the realities and possibilities of Chinese no-first-use policy, it is not within the scope of this paper, nor the intention of the author to question the credibility of official PLA nuclear doctrine. It is also important to emphasize, that Beijing is highly keen on representing its military capabilities as primarily defensive in nature. All official published strategic documents highlight a

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ IISS. *The Military Balance 2012*. Routledge, 2011. p. 197.

¹¹ IISS. *The Military Balance 2019*. Routledge, 2019. p. 225.

¹² IISS. *The Military Balance 2020*. Routledge, 2020. pp. 261-262. 16

Ibid. pp. 256-265.

doctrinal commitment to using Chinese military capability defensively, as this non-offensive representation is a deeply rooted element of Chinese strategic culture.

While ample volumes of intellectual works in IR literature are devoted to doubting the strategic reality of this defense-natured Chinese representation, it is also beyond the limits of this paper to realistically question Beijing's strategic disposition regarding the use of military force.

US Strategy and Alliances in East Asia - Changing perceptions of regional security

The United States is involved in the Asia Pacific regional security complex through its bilateral security alliance framework, sometimes referred to as the "Hub-and-Spokes" or "San Francisco System".¹³ Regarding Northeast Asia, this encompasses the US-Japan and US-South Korea alliances and before the Nixon administration's China policy shift,¹⁴ it used to include the alliance between Washington and the nationalist Chinese government in Taipei. Due to this, the strategic deterrent factor of the US "nuclear umbrella" in Northeast Asia currently includes only South Korea and Japan. The position of Taiwan is much more complicated.

After formal recognition as the representative government of China shifted to Beijing, and the "One China" principle has become international norm, the US-Taiwan alliance relations could no longer function the way they were established early in the Cold War. The US has adopted the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which in terms of security cooperation, outlines US commitment towards Taipei's security in the form of arms sales. The American security guarantee regarding Taiwan is usually described with "Strategic Ambiguity", which means that the US does not give explicit guarantee for Taipei but does not rule out the possibility of supporting Taiwan in case of an attack.

Concerning the rise of Chinese military capabilities, the US geostrategic tradition is confronted with a two-faceted challenge, one direct and one indirect threat perception. The former is US access to global sea lines of communication without any potential challengers, the latter is the threat looming over the member of the "Hub-and-Spokes System". As previously mentioned, Chinese military modernization had a two-stage focus on reducing the vulnerability of Chinese maritime interests, first a "denial" strategy of A2/AD and subsequently, the buildup of naval power projection capabilities. The US geopolitical tradition is deeply rooted in the concept of "Sea Power" which regards unchallenged access to global sea lines of communications as vital for American interests. China's A2/AD – although defensive in nature – threatens this undisturbed access to a large portion of the Asia Pacific littoral and as such, has sparked major reactions in US strategic and operational doctrinal thinking regarding naval capabilities. One example of this is the operational

¹³ "Hub-and-Spokes" refers to the strictly bilateral nature of US East Asian alliances, which is quite different from the multilateral institutional tradition of NATO; "San Francisco System" comes from the fact that most of the security cooperation agreements were signed after the 1951 San Francisco peace conference, that resolved the Asia Pacific theatres of World War II.

¹⁴ Through which the US enacted a rapprochement towards communist China, making it a significant partner in American Cold War strategy against the USSR. Through this process, the US changed its policy and shifted recognition of a legitimate Chinese government from Taiwan to mainland China.

concept and relevant capability development of the concept of *AirSea Battle*,¹⁵ the US answer to the perceived challenge of Chinese A2/AD.

Chinese military buildup paired with a highly assertive behavior regarding disputed territorial claims and a more confrontative rhetoric regarding issues such as Taiwan, increases the structural stress on the “Hub-and-Spokes” alliance system, since many of its formal and informal members are involved in these flashpoints. As such, the US has to balance between confirming its commitments to allies while trying not to draw China into an escalating process. Such balancing was the case in the early 2010s, when Sino-Japanese tensions rose regarding the Senkaku islands and it took the Obama administration 4 years to publicly reaffirm its security guarantee to Japan regarding the disputed island group.¹⁶

The rise of China as a revisionist power raised some questions on the durability of the “Hub-and-Spokes” system, as it opened up the question whether the US allies would rather realign their security policies to accommodate with the regional hegemon. Samuel Huntington’s iconic monograph, “The Clash of Civilizations” envisions a global conflict in the 2010s as a thought experiment and predicts that some US allies in the Pacific – Japan in particular – would likely switch sides and join China against their current American ally.¹⁷ Nevertheless, we do not see US allies in territorial disputes with China realign their geopolitical configuration to accommodate Beijing as a regional hegemon. This would pose the question, why do not members of the “Hub-and-Spokes” system “bandwagon” towards a rising regional power. A satisfying answer could be drawn from “balance of threat” theory, conceptualized by Stephen M. Walt in his 1985 article, *Alliance formation and the balance of world power*. Walt argues that while neo-realist theory would suggest that states most likely choose “bandwagoning” towards a rising regional power, in reality, calculation on alliance alignment are much more complex. States form their alliance strategy based on perceived threats along several factors regarding regional balance of power. Some of these factors outlined by Walt can shed light on why the “Hub-and-Spokes” system does not gravitate towards a rising China. One such factor is the proximity of a rising power, which suggests that states regard others that are close as greater of a threat because the ability to project power declines over distance. Another factor is that Walt calls “offensive intentions”. If the perceived intentions of a rising power point toward confrontation, states will be more likely to form alliances to oppose such a state as they fear of becoming a target of belligerent behavior for it in the future.¹⁸ If we look at the threat perceptions in Taiwan and Japan’s strategic documents, we will see precisely this factor highlighted as Taipei and Tokyo both formulate substantial perceptions of threat by China.

As previously mentioned, China frames its increasing might as defensive in nature both towards its domestic and international audiences. It is not the purpose of this paper to

¹⁵ Krepinevich, Andrew, *Why AirSea Battle?*. Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) 2010.

¹⁶ *Obama Asia tour: US-Japan treaty 'covers disputed islands'* BBC. 24 April 2014.

¹⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, 1996. pp. 312-318.

¹⁸ Walt, Stephen M., “Alliance formation and the balance of world power.” *International security* 9.4 (1985).

question the sincerity of this defensive disposition in Chinese strategic culture. However, there is one important factor in China’s security doctrine that is highly relevant to an analysis of Japanese and Taiwanese strategic reactions to Beijing’s growing military capabilities. As Beijing’s latest National Defense White Paper proclaims, China’s strategic commitments for its national defense aims at the safeguarding of China’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. This includes the *Diaoyu* (*Senkaku* in Japanese) islands in the East China Sea, an archipelago of small, uninhabited islands currently under Japanese administration but also claimed by Beijing. Another problematic aspect of strategic objective in the 2019 Chinese White Paper from an outside-Beijing perspective is the question of Taiwan, according to which China „make[s] no promise to renounce the use of force...” as according to the Chinese leadership “China must and will be reunited”.¹⁹



Figure 1.

Map of the Taiwan Strait

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Taiwan_Strait.png)

Consequently, however genuinely defensive China’s strategic culture might or might not be, declared strategic commitments create clashes of interest and overlapping claims of sovereignty with neighboring actors such as Japan and Taiwan. Without disputing either

¹⁹ Republic of China (Taiwan), Ministry of Defense. 2017 National Defense Report, Republic of China 2017. National Defense Report Editorial Committee. 2018. p. 17.

sides' standpoints on these issues, we can accept that such Chinese strategic proclamations, coupled with the increasing military capabilities of the PLA, create a perception of threat in regional powers that have conflicts of interests with Beijing. Such perceptions are visible in both Japanese and Taiwanese official strategic documents. Taiwan's 2017 *National Defense Report* white paper for example identifies China's acquisition of military power projection capability as a factor that challenges regional security, increases the ability of Beijing to attack Taiwan, and raises the difficulty of the international community to intervene, "presenting a serious threat to [Taiwan's] national defense and security".²⁰

Japan's National Security Strategy also mentions the rise of Chinese military capabilities as well as Chinese intrusions into Japan's territorial waters – the main concern being the areas around the Senkaku islands –, calling such trends as issues of concern for Japan. Regarding these trends, both Japan and Taiwan's published strategic documents mention deterrence as a core strategy for dealing with security threats and challenges.

Japan's Limited deterrence Strategy

Japan's expressed concerns regarding China's rising military capabilities and perceived threats to the sovereignty of Japanese territory are centered around the country's southernmost small island groups, the *Senkakus*. But this new kind of threat perception is quite different from the preparation for a Soviet invasion from the north – as was the paradigm in the bipolar global power struggle – so the adaptation to this new threat perception required deep structural changes in the Japanese defense policy.

Post-World War II Japan's defense and security were centered around the *Yoshida doctrine* – named after the first post-war prime minister – of keeping a low profile in security policy, developing only minimal defense capabilities, and concentrating on economic development. Japan relied on the US Alliance as a deterrent against external threats, especially its inclusion under Washington's nuclear umbrella. Some structural and force buildup changes have developed in the later years of the Cold War, on conventional military capabilities for national defense, but the *Yoshida doctrine* initially seemed more than enough for the post-Cold War era.

Yet, even with the pacifist overtones at the end of the Cold War, the *Jieitai*, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), were one of the leading militaries in terms of technological advancement and capabilities – regardless of restrictions on some offensive capabilities – and even with the defense budget capped at 1% of the country's annual GDP, it was still amongst the top 10 countries. The JSDF was

²⁰ State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. China's National Defense in the New Era. 2019. July, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm



Figure 2.

Map of the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_Senkaku_Islands#/media/File:Senkaku_Diaoyu_Tiaoyu_Islands.png)

equipped by the domestic military industry as well as cutting edge technology acquired from Japan's ally, the United States.

Some specific projects in the recent enhancement of Japan's defense capabilities point towards slightly different operational concerns than during the Cold War however, when the doctrine focused on halting a Soviet invasion of the northern island of Hokkaido. The emphasis has shifted from northern territorial defense towards more complex defense concepts. One of these new trends is restructuring the *Jieitai* towards a more rapidly deployable force capable of retaking distant islands in case of an attack.

In 2013, amongst some changes in Japanese defense policy making, the Abe cabinet approved a new *National Defense Program Guideline* (NDPG), which called for a structural and operational capability enhancement of the *Jieitai*, aiming for a "Dynamic Joint Defense Force" (DJDF). The key aspect of a DJDF was to be capable of "Response to an attack on remote islands".²¹ As the 2013 NDPG states, this would require *Jieitai* to:

"...intercept and defeat any invasion, by securing maritime supremacy and air superiority, with the necessary SDF units swiftly deployed to interdict, in addition to the units

²¹ Ministry of Defense, Japan: NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM GUIDELINES for FY 2014 and beyond. https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e2.pdf

deployed in advance in accordance with the security environment. Moreover, should any remote islands be invaded, Japan will recapture them. In doing so, any ballistic missile or cruise missile attacks will be dealt with appropriately."

This retaking of distant islands requires naval power projection abilities, which are based on the capabilities hosted by both the Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the Ground Self-Defense Forces. The former operates three amphibious assault ships of the *Osumi* class, with similar functions as the Chinese *Yuzhao* class, developed in the late 1990s and entered into service at the turn of the millennium. The JGSDF has contributed to the amphibious aspect of new defense doctrines by establishing the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade in 2018, practically a small corps of marines, a practice absent in the Japanese military after the Second World War.²⁶

The disposition of JSDF forces has also been reconfigured. At the end of the Cold War, Japan's heavy forces were stationed near Hokkaido, as the main objective was to halt any possible Soviet invasion. During the last decade, Tokyo has reconfigured the location of its forces in a way that more heavy armor units and rapid deployment brigades are also located closer to the southern part of the country, closer to vulnerable remote islands and more strategically tailored towards *deterring attacks against remote islands and retaking them if necessary*.²⁷ Regarding a more powerful military, Japan's main concern is an attack on its distant archipelagos, most probably the Senkaku islands, so its deterrence strategy is focused on repelling Chinese offensive actions in distant operational environments and retaking lost islets, both of which required for Japan to enhance its power projection capabilities.

Taiwan's limited deterrence Strategy

In the case of Taiwan, changing Chinese capabilities have similarly necessitated changes in the island's defense strategy, but unlike in the case of Japan, where political/historical pacifism and deep-rooted doctrinal paradigms meant a more structural change, Taiwan's traditional defense policy has always configured itself *to resist an offensive* by Mainland China. Also, unlike Japan, Taiwan's main security concern is not necessarily a limited contingency regarding some distant islets – although the issues of Quemoy and Matsu do present such possible scenarios – but the unilateral unification by Beijing, using military power.

Consequently, the strategy to deter such a Chinese invasion is not a new concept within Taiwanese defense strategy but changing Chinese capabilities have meant a necessary reconfiguration and enhancement of Taiwan's own defense capacities.

26 Ministry of Defense, Japan: 水陸機動団, official website of the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force: Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, <https://www.mod.go.jp/gsdf/gcc/ardb/index.html>

27 Ministry of Defense, Japan: Defense of Japan – White Paper 2014
http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2014/html/n2514000.html



Figure 3.

Quemoy and Matsu islands

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/Taiwan_Strait.png highlights added by author)

However, the rapid enhancement of Taiwan's defense capabilities has met its limitations in the past decades. On the one hand, the size and proportion to China's parameters of Taiwan's economy mean that while exponential GDP growth meant exponential increase in defense spending for Beijing, Taipei could not consequently increase its defense related expenditures to keep up with the pace experienced by the PLA.

Instead, it opted for a reconfiguration of its armed forces and capabilities, one that placed much less emphasis on ground forces and much more attention to naval, air and more precisely air and missile defense capabilities. In 1989, Taiwan fielded a ground force army of 270,000 personnel, which has gradually been decreased to its current 88,000 pers. strength, while both number of personnel and high-end equipment acquisitions were more focused on the Air Force and the Navy.²²

In the early 2000s, Taipei's primary focus was the threat of Chinese ballistic missile, so main developments were focused on deterrence, in the form of cruise missiles and ballistic missile defense related acquisitions.²³ But while the necessity of force reconfiguration and modernization was tangible, political circumstances slowed the process of weapons system developments and acquisitions. In the late 2000s however, starting in 2007, Taipei was able to secure key deals in missile, missile defense, and fighter aircraft acquisitions from the

²² IISS. *The Military Balance 1989*. Routledge, 1989. pp. 175-176.; IISS. *The Military Balance 2019*. Routledge, 2019. pp. 307-310.

²³ IISS. *The Military Balance 2005*. Routledge, 2005. pp. 259-260.

United States and started the process of significantly upgrading its deterrence capabilities regarding and invasion of the island.²⁴

Currently, Taiwan has substantial military capabilities to highly reduce the operational confidence of mainland China in a cross-strait amphibious assault contingency. The Republic of China (RoC, Taiwan) Air Defense and Missile Command deploys a high number of surface-to-air missiles and missile defense systems, such as the domestically developed *Hsiung Feng II* cruise missiles or the US made Patriot PAC-3 SAM systems.²⁵ The RoC Air Force has a small, but modern fleet of fighter aircraft, mostly consisting of F-16s responsible primarily for air superiority, with some additional domestic *Ching-Kuo* and other multirole fighters. The RoC Navy is very small compared to the PLA, with much less surface combatant warships equipped with anti-ship missiles and also only four tactical submarines. However, because Taiwan's main concern is to repel a landing on its shores, this small fleet should be considered mostly in the role of coastal defense, where the land-based radar installations and other force multiplier factors can greatly enhance its capacity. Taiwan's drive towards force modernization and reform, coupled with the strategy of deterrence is expressed in the latest Quadrennial Defense Review (2017) by its Ministry of Defense. The document also acknowledges the dire asymmetry of force enhancements vis-a-vis China and calls for a deterrence oriented defense strategy based on the use of what limited assets Taipei has at its disposal, mainly by reforms of modernization and creating a joint operational practice within the RoC services.²⁶

Overall, the quantitative imbalance of forces means that Taiwan cannot realistically hope to repel a full-scale invasion from China. However, it can increase the losses of the PLA as well as create such a contested operational environment that the political will behind an attack from the mainland has to factor in severe military losses, a slow pace of offensive and a dragged out contingency, which makes it difficult to quickly present the Taiwanese public and the international community with a *fait accompli* unification with mainland China.

Conclusion – Japanese and Taiwanese limited Deterrence

Within the field of IR and Security Studies, intellectual approaches and the theory of deterrence have been dominated by a tradition of Cold War bipolar nuclear strategies and thus the framework of deterrence is usually applied to super-powers' nuclear strategies. However, the changing distribution of power on a global scale coupled with increasing interconnectedness due to globalization have meant that the geopolitical context in which thinking about deterrence occurs and the application of deterrence strategies have become more complex. As such, theoretical approaches to

²⁴ IISS *The Military Balance 2008*. Routledge, 2008. pp. 361-362.

²⁵ IISS. *The Military Balance 2019*. Routledge, 2019. pp. 307-310.

²⁶ Republic of China (Taiwan), Ministry of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review 2017*. Quadrennial Defense Review Editing Committee, Taipei, 2017. pp. 4., 11.



Figure 4.

Picture of the Taiwan strait waters, at one of its narrowest points between China and Taiwan, from the Northern outskirts of Hsinchu city, Taiwan

(Photo taken by the author on 18th December 2019)

deterrence and the use of its framework IR analysis needs to adapt to the changing global dynamics. The study of deterrence by actors other than nuclear powers contributes to understanding the concept and strategy of deterrence and its representation in the strategic perceptions of international actors.

Japan and Taiwan are relevant examples for the study of deterrence as they are both located in a region that is central to narratives of global power competition between the United States and China. Tokyo and Taipei both have key conflicts of geopolitical interest with Beijing and both are in a severe quantitative disadvantage regarding Chinese military capabilities. Both have traditionally relied on security guarantees from the United States. Nevertheless, in recent decades both have expressed strategic concerns regarding the increase of Chinese military capabilities, and both have formulated national defense strategies that express and emphasize deterrence as their central concepts. While neither has questioned the credibility of US security guarantee, both have expressed the need for self-reliance in deterring unilateral action to change the status quo of relevant geopolitical flashpoints. Japan and Taiwan have opted for deterrence strategies that aim to create a contested operational environment to deny the opportunity for China of swiftly winning a contingency and presenting the international community with a *fait-accompli* situation. Japanese and Taiwanese deterrence strategies are tailored for a limited contingency – in the case of Taiwan an amphibious landing by China not an all-out ballistic missile or bombing campaign against the general population – and have two main target audiences, the political leadership in Beijing and the international community. The former is to be discouraged from a unilateral action by the credible threat of a contested operational environment and the denial of a quick victory without consequences. The international community and the United States as a target audience are to be signaled of the commitment of self-reliant defense strategy by Tokyo and Taipei. This is so as not to lose international support prior to any contingency by the perception that Japan and Taiwan have no strategic agency in deterring a Chinese military action regarding their respective clash of interests with Beijing.

Whether or not this will prove to be a successful strategic choice will depend on the abilities of Tokyo and Taipei to keep *limited deterrence options* based on a qualitative edge even with a quantitative disadvantage, as well as the perception in the international community regarding the changing balance of power in East Asia.

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