

## **“The Brookings Institution and Taiwan-China Relations”<sup>1</sup>**

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A couple of years ago, I chanced upon an aging copy of the January 1945 issue of *National Geographic* magazine. To my surprise, there was an article about Taiwan (called “Formosa” in the article). As was common with *National Geographic* at that time, there were many pictures of the island’s aboriginal peoples (in this case, they were all fully clothed). But there were also pictures of U.S. bomb damage during World War II, and a not-bad description of Taiwan’s history, society, and 20<sup>th</sup> century circumstances. The author was Joseph Ballantine, who had served in the American Consulate in Taihoku from 1912 to 1914. I had never heard of Ballantine, so I resorted to my default source of information – Wikipedia. Imagine my even greater surprise when I discovered that he had actually been a scholar at Brookings, and that through the Institution’s Press, he had published a book about Taiwan in 1952: *Formosa: A Problem for United States Foreign Policy*.<sup>2</sup> I had no idea that my own organization’s coverage of the Taiwan Strait issue had such a long history. So I was pleased when Arthur Ding invited me to write about how Brookings had treated the subject over the last six decades. I do so in a basically chronological way and draw on the books that a series of Brookings scholars have written that addressed cross-Strait relations to one degree or another.

### About Brookings

Brookings was a product of the Progressive Movement, a multi-faceted citizen campaign to reform government and ameliorate the consequences of unrestricted capitalism. The first of the organizations that later became Brookings was the Institute for Government Research, founded in 1916 to analyze public policy issues at the national level and to advocate for effective and efficient public service. Two sister organizations followed: the Institute of Economics in 1922 and a graduate school in 1924. In 1927, the institutes and the school merged to form the present-day Brookings Institution. Its mission was to promote, conduct, and foster research “in the broad fields of economics, government administration and the political and social sciences.” Among the initiatives to which it provided support were the Bureau of the Budget (in 1921), the United Nations and the Marshall Plan (in the 1940s), reform of the federal budget and tax system (in the 1970s and 1980s), and urban policy (in the 1990s).

Today, Brookings has five research programs: foreign policy, domestic economics, global economics and development, governance, and metropolitan issues. There are about one hundred full-time scholars on staff, and the topics they address depend on their areas of expertise. The Institution’s core values are “quality, independence, and impact.” Its scholars aim to produce in-depth research that speaks to the public policy challenges faced by governments both in the United States (federal, state, and local) and overseas. They do not do “proprietary”

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my deep appreciation to Robert Faherty, director of the Brookings Institution Press, and Sarah Chilton of the Brookings Library for their invaluable assistance in preparing this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph W. Ballantine, *Formosa: A Problem for United States Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 1952).

research, that is, analysis for the benefit of the funder only (whether it is a government agency or corporation). Moreover, the Institution shies away from projects where there might be the appearance that the substantive outcomes were tailored to suit the interests of the donor. The conclusions and recommendations conveyed through research by Brookings scholars reflect their views alone, undistorted by any outside interest. In fact, Brookings as an organization takes no position on substantive policy issues, and has no problem with its scholars disagreeing amongst themselves. This is one of the ways that Brookings's institutional character and culture is like that of a university. Another is its emphasis on books as the primary means of disseminating ideas (hence the existence of the Brookings Press), even as it has sought to enhance impact through producing more in the way of shorter treatments.

Brookings scholars seek to affect policy through direct contact with government officials, including legislators; contributing to the public debate on policy issues through the mass media; and by becoming government officials themselves.

### The Ballantine Era

Born in India in 1888 of missionary parents, Joseph Ballantine spent most of his career as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer—from 1909 to 1947. As noted, he did a tour on Taiwan and also served in Canton, Shenyang, and Tokyo. In 1944-45, he was director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State (the predecessor to the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs). He was a special assistant to the Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, from 1945 to early 1947, when George Marshall became Secretary. It was in March 1947 that Ballantine retired from the government to take the position at Brookings. While in the Foreign Service, he was associated with a group of officials, led by Joseph Grew, who tilted towards Japan and away from China. After retiring from the Foreign Service, therefore, he was active in the American Council on Japan, formed in 1948 to lobby for rectifying some of the worst features of the Occupation, and in the mid-1950s he was part of a group that probed the writings of Owen Lattimore to determine whether he had communist tendencies. One source describes him as “displaced and embittered” after leaving the State Department.<sup>3</sup> In any event, Ballantine was affiliated with Brookings until 1955, and he died in 1973.<sup>4</sup>

*Formosa: A Problem for United States Foreign Policy* (hereafter *Formosa*) was produced as part of a larger project on major problems in U.S. foreign policy that Brookings conducted at this time. It is probably no accident that the book was written during an election year, and came out after Dwight D. Eisenhower had defeated Adlai Stevenson for the presidency and the Republican Party gained control of the Congress.

By and large, *Formosa* is a straight-forward account of Taiwan, and of the tangle of issues that emerged after the end of the war in East Asia. There are chapters on the land and the people, the period of Qing rule, the period of Japanese rule, U.S. postwar planning as it affected Taiwan, events on the island immediately after 1945, the ROC government's 1945-49 conflict with the CCP, the situation on Taiwan in the early 1950s, U.S. policy regarding Taiwan after 1949, the ROC's position in the UN and role in the writing of peace treaties with Japan, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Howard B. Schonberger, *Aftermath of War: Americans and the Remaking of Japan, 1945-1952* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), pp. 143-144, 150-151; Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the "Loss" of China* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 466-71, 599.

<sup>4</sup> “Joseph W. Ballantine, 83, Dies; Was a Foreign Service Officer,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1973.

policy dilemmas facing the United States and the incoming Eisenhower Administration. The treatment is mostly factual, the writing clear and well structured, and the evaluations judicious.

Throughout, Ballantine had interesting insights concerning Taiwan's past history and American policy. His view of Japanese colonial rule is balanced, but his sympathies are with the ruled and not the rulers. He described the U.S. Navy's wartime desire up until the spring of 1944 to take Taiwan and turn it into as a platform for prosecuting the remainder of the war against Japan. His account of 2-28 reflects the information in the White Paper, which, it happens, was originally written by George Kerr, but he ignored the post-1949 political situation. He captured the dilemmas faced by U.S. policy-makers in 1949 as they sought to reconcile a pessimistic assessment of the KMT's prospects, a recognition that a CCP takeover of Taiwan would be a setback for U.S. interests, the scarcity of U.S. military resources to save Taiwan, and the pressures of American public opinion. (He mentioned in a footnote how in early 1950 the Truman Administration toyed with replacing the KMT regime with an independent government, as a way of blocking a communist take-over.<sup>5</sup>) He described the process by which public opinion and the beginning of the Korean War led the Truman Administration to abandon a hands-off and temporizing policy towards Taiwan and intervene on its behalf.

Writing in 1952, Ballantine placed Taiwan policy within the framework of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War contest and saw the island as a link in the Western Pacific island chain. He concluded that as of 1952 the Taiwan Strait status quo was stable, and only a "comprehensive Far Eastern settlement" would change it. That, in turn, would require a "marked change in the present balance of power" or a decision by one side or both that accommodation would better serve their interests.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, the general objectives of U.S. policy were to "prevent Formosa from falling into Communist hands" and to "support . . . the National Government of China."<sup>7</sup>

Ballantine regarded the first of these as achievable given the current balance of military power unless Beijing mounted an attack (a condition that anticipated the crises of 1954-55 and 1958). Supporting the ROC, however, was "fraught with ambiguities and uncertainties."<sup>8</sup> Was Taipei's economic policy sustainable? Might it act on its stated policy goal of retaking the Mainland and seek U.S. aid? Might it, on the other hand, "develop enlightened political institutions" and so become a "symbol to all non-Communist Chinese"?<sup>9</sup> How might the United States balance support for Taiwan with other interests in East Asia? Could it endure the disagreements with its European allies and Asian partners over Taiwan's legal status and the ROC's UN membership? What would be the implications of a "friendly and non-Communist regime on the Chinese mainland" and the "prospective value to the United States of having in China an ally instead of an enemy"?<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in this first Brookings focus on Taiwan, Joseph Ballantine presaged, if only vaguely, a number of the issues and challenges that would face Washington over the next several decades. The focus of his short-term analysis was very much on the security and international law dimensions of cross-Strait relations, but that was the nature of the times. (And, it is worth noting, he offered no recommendations on how Washington should address its policy dilemmas.)

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<sup>5</sup> For the full story, see David M. Finkelstein, *Washington's Taiwan Dilemma, 1949-1950: From Abandonment to Salvation* (Fairfax, Va.: George Mason University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Ballantine, *Formosa*, p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Ballantine did not anticipate, perhaps, the pro-ROC shift of the Eisenhower Administration, but he correctly anticipated the burdens that becoming the ROC's protector would entail. Understandably, he could not imagine that decades later direct interaction between Taipei and Beijing and democracy on Taiwan might become the dynamic elements of the cross-Strait equation.

### The Barnett-Clough Years (1969-1982)

There were times when Brookings had no resident China specialist. Thus, during the eighteen years after the publication of *Formosa*, there was no Brookings book that even touched on Taiwan. Indeed, it appears that foreign policy studies at the Institution were dormant for much of the 1950s and 1960s, and the only book published on Asia during that time was about Vietnam. That would change with the arrival of A. Doak Barnett and Ralph N. Clough, both in 1969.

Born in 1921 in China, Barnett was the son of missionaries who worked in China for the YMCA. He went to Yale before and after World War II, and from 1947 to 1956, he was a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*. Between 1947 and 1949, he wrote a series of longer journalistic essays from various parts of China (repackaged as *China on the Eve of the Communist Takeover*<sup>11</sup>). From 1961 to 1969, he was a member of the faculty of Columbia University. At the time he joined Brookings, he had already written several influential books on the PRC's internal situation, activities in Asia, and relations with the United States. In the intensely ideological atmosphere in the 1950s and 1960s, Barnett was on the more open-minded end of the policy spectrum and he hoped that a way could be found to improve U.S.-PRC relations. He challenged the demonization of China that was common at the time and worked tirelessly to improve the American public's understanding of China. On the other hand, he was not naïve: it was he who proposed a policy toward China of "containment but not isolation" during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's 1966 hearings (that is, containment should continue). The problem for him and anyone else who sought an American opening to Beijing, of course, was how to reconcile the long-standing U.S. support for the ROC with Beijing's demands that those ties end.

Ralph Clough had a different career track. Born in Seattle in 1916, he did his B.A. at the University of Washington and received a Master's degree from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. His first exposure to Asia came as an undergraduate, when he spent a year at Lingnan University in Guangzhou. After Fletcher, he joined the U.S. Foreign Service and many of his assignments concerned China in one way or another. Most notably, he was the deputy chief of mission and consul general at the U.S. embassy to the ROC from 1961 to 1965. Clough retired from the foreign service in 1969, when he became a senior fellow at Brookings. He remained in that capacity until 1975, after which he was a guest scholar for another two years. While at Brookings, he wrote more on U.S. policy towards East Asia than he did about China *per se*, but he apparently wrote the manuscript of *Island China* while he still had a Brookings affiliation.<sup>12</sup>

Doak Barnett published major books on China and Taiwan in 1971 and 1977 (that is, before two presidential elections). The first volume, *A New U.S. Policy Toward China*, was

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<sup>11</sup> Published by Frederick A. Praeger (New York) in 1963.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph N. Clough, *Island China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund. I wish to thank Alice Lyman Miller for reminding me that, even though Brookings did not publish *Island China*, Clough wrote it while he still had a connection with the Institution.

behind the pace of events at the time of publication,<sup>13</sup> because of the secrecy with which Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger conducted diplomacy. As the work was being prepared for publication, Beijing invited the U.S. ping-pong team to come to China. Barnett was able to take account of that surprising development in his preface, but the text remained as before.

The starting point of Barnett's analysis was the change in regional power relations. The United States and the Soviet Union were still the world's superpowers, but China and Japan were becoming more prominent in East Asia. A new, quadrilateral balance of power system seemed to be developing, but one in which the United States would be at a disadvantage because "of all the bilateral relationships between major powers in Asia, that between the United States and China is the least developed,"<sup>14</sup> and it was to their reciprocal advantage to create the possibility of strategic cooperation.

Yet Barnett recognized that the legacy of the last two decades had erected serious obstacles to a Sino-American rapprochement. The key ones were the U.S. ties to the Republic of China with respect to its role in the international community, particularly the United Nations, and cross-Straits military relations. Those commitments, which had strong support within the United States, and the PRC's demands that Washington end its "occupation" of Taiwan were mutually exclusive. Moreover, time was not on the U.S.'s side, as international support for Beijing was growing while Taipei's was in decline.<sup>15</sup>

To remedy this situation, Barnett sought to chart a "Goldilocks" policy course: one that would be satisfactory enough to Beijing but not represent too great a blow to Taipei's security or dignity and its supporters in America. On the security side, he proposed continuing the U.S. *defensive* commitment to Taiwan's security but also suggested a series of steps to demonstrate a non-hostile policy towards China: remove U.S. military forces from the island; persuade Taipei to withdraw from the offshore islands, where a conflict through miscalculation might occur; and end the ambiguous U.S. commitment to defend the offshore islands. Politically, Washington should dissociate itself from Taipei's illusory claims, including that it was the government of all of China; should deal with it only as the "existing authority on the island";<sup>16</sup> and should declare itself open to any change in Taiwan's status, "neither actively oppos[ing] nor actively promot[ing] either reunification with the mainland or independent status."<sup>17</sup> Concerning the United Nations, Barnett proposed a dual-representation scheme.<sup>18</sup> Regarding a final outcome, the only condition was that it "develops by peaceful means and is acceptable to the people on Taiwan."<sup>19</sup> Although Barnett acknowledged that the island had an authoritarian political system, he offered no clues to how the Taiwan people would register their preferences.

Barnett's focus was clearly on U.S. policy regarding the military dimension of cross-Straits relations and the ROC-PRC competition in the international arena, and little on cross-Straits relations per se. He hoped that the shifts in the U.S. position that he proposed would "help to induce Peking to be more flexible in its tactical approach to the problem, . . . and to put the Taiwan issue to one side for the present in order to deal with the United States on a range of other problems."<sup>20</sup> In essence, he proposed a Fabian strategy for adjusting relations with China

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<sup>13</sup> A. Doak Barnett, *A New U.S. Policy Toward China* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

and Taiwan incrementally, through steps that he hoped would be minimally acceptable to the various parties concerned. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, on the other hand, were pursuing a blitzkrieg strategy: undertaking an abrupt change in U.S. policy that accommodated to Beijing concerning American relations with Taipei and the future of the island.<sup>21</sup>

Barnett's second offering on U.S. policy concerning Taiwan and cross-strait relations came in April 1977, in *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges*.<sup>22</sup> He timed the book to have an impact on the thinking of the administration that emerged from the 1976 elections. He dwelt mostly on the array of new issues that would have to be addressed in the normalization of U.S.-China relations. Taiwan was clearly an "old problem."

In this book, Barnett's goal was the same as it had been in his 1971 work: to find a way to facilitate the normalization of U.S.-China relations without harming other interests. His strategic rationale was the same as six years before: a positive relationship between Washington and Beijing would foster stability among the four major powers of East Asia.<sup>23</sup> And he had a new sense of urgency: U.S.-China ties were fragile, and they would deteriorate if they did not advance.<sup>24</sup> He was not naïve about the benefits of improved ties, and he asserted that it was necessary to take the views and concerns of Chinese leaders into account.<sup>25</sup> But he still thought the effort was worthwhile.

Barnett's strategic rationale made a certain amount of sense. In an era in which the Soviet Union was expanding its influence in East Asia, a coalition among China, Japan, and the United States was the obvious counter. But like other American specialists, Barnett did not anticipate that Beijing, having reduced its global isolation, would also act to avoid excessive dependence on Washington and Tokyo. Within three years, Deng Xiaoping would engineer a semi-détente with Moscow.

The question for those favoring normalization (Barnett and the Carter Administration included) was what price America would have to pay concerning relations with Taiwan. Barnett saw no choice but to accept Deng Xiaoping's three conditions: the U.S. must terminate diplomatic relations with the ROC, terminate the mutual defense treaty of 1955, and withdraw all American military personnel and installations from the island. For Barnett, the third condition imposed no costs for U.S. interests. After all, he had advocated that step in 1971 (and by 1977 it was almost done anyway). The questions lay with the first two conditions.

Regarding U.S. relations with Taiwan, Barnett proposed changing their form but not the substance. He pointed for guidance to the so-called Japan formula: downgrading ties to an "unofficial" basis through creation of an ostensibly non-governmental diplomatic mission and assigning to it government officials who resigned their posts during the time that they served on Taiwan.<sup>26</sup>

Ensuring Taiwan's security was tougher. Barnett was realistic enough to know that the PRC was unlikely to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, but he said that Washington should insist that Beijing at least reaffirm an intention to rely on peaceful means. In addition he

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the account of Kissinger's meetings with Zhou En-lai in July 1971 in Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy Toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), pp. 29-34.

<sup>22</sup> A. Doak Barnett, *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24, 30.

recommended that the United States compensate for the end of the treaty. At the level of declaratory policy, he suggested that the United States should “make a strong, unilateral, public statement of the premises of its own future policy . . . to create a substitute of sorts for its past defense commitment,” and that “it should obtain at least tacit acquiescence from Peking to such a statement.” He proposed that the United States signal Beijing at least implicitly that it would consider using force to defend Taiwan in the event of a conflict. These actions would, in his view, be sufficient to deter China for some time to come and to reassure both Taiwan and other U.S. friends in Asia about its commitment.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Barnett understood that declaratory policy was not enough, and he proposed that the transfer of arms to Taiwan continue, particularly commercial sales instead of government ones. Yet Washington should “strictly limit the amounts and types of military equipment . . . to materiel essential for the defense of the island.” He understood that China would likely object strenuously to such a U.S. intention, but he thought it was necessary as long as it did not renounce the use of force. At best, he hoped that the matter could be finessed.<sup>28</sup>

On the political future of Taiwan, Barnett’s position in 1977 was similar to the one he took in 1971. “Washington should emphasize that the United States will not oppose future changes in Taiwan’s status, either toward reunification with China or ultimate autonomy, if such changes can be worked out peacefully by the Chinese themselves, including those both on Taiwan and in China.” Moreover, Washington should welcome cross-Straits contacts that might lead to exploring “an eventual political modus vivendi,” but it should not itself seek to mediate the dispute. And it should neither challenge Beijing’s position that Taiwan is a part of China (consistent with its statement in the Shanghai communiqué) nor associate itself with the PRC view. It should emphasize that it “does not support” *de jure* independence for Taiwan.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the United States should be willing to reduce its “political ties” with the island as long as China’s threat remained low, as U.S.-China relations improved, and if a cross-Straits dialogue was established.<sup>30</sup>

Barnett’s proposals were reasonably consistent with the starting point of the Carter Administration’s diplomacy on normalization (perhaps it was no coincidence that his former student, Michel Oksenberg was Carter’s key adviser on China policy). The Policy Review Memorandum of June 1977 (issued two months after *China Policy* was published) recommended to Carter that he accept Deng’s three conditions, and Carter decided to insist on three points: continuation of arms sales; conduct of “cultural, economic, and other relations” with Taiwan on an “unofficial” basis; and a “unilateral, uncontested” U.S. statement of its expectation that the Taiwan issue would be settled peacefully.<sup>31</sup> And Barnett was probably in the mainstream of specialist thinking on how to approach normalization.

Yet there were gaps in his approach. First of all, although the American Institute in Taiwan embodied the Japan formula for unofficial relations, Barnett did not anticipate the need within the American system to create the proper authority for such a mechanism through Congressional legislation. Second, when it came to declaratory policy on Taiwan’s security, Carter did issue a statement that was not contested (more or less), but its content was probably weaker than Barnett would have preferred. Third, he underestimated Beijing’s resistance to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-7; cited passage on p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Oksenberg, “A Decade of Sino-American Relations,” *Foreign Affairs* 61 (Fall 1982): 181-82.

continued arms sales; in the event, Deng chose to defer the issue but reserved the right to reopen it, which he did in 1981. Fourth, on Taiwan's political future, Barnett's emphasis on peaceful resolution "by the Chinese themselves" ignored the issue of how the wishes of Taiwan people were to be determined within the island's authoritarian system. He rather glossed over the political problems that normalization would create within Taiwan, saying only that the United States should try to "minimize" them.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Barnett totally misjudged the reaction of Congress and the public to normalization when it came. Writing just after the end of the Vietnam War, he thought the idea of continuing to support Taiwan economically and militarily would be a hard sell. (Actually, the dominant narrative was how Carter had sold out an ally.) And the need to get legislative authority for the American Institute in Taiwan opened the door to Congress asserting itself on security issues, which in turn upset China.

Ralph Clough's *Island China* appeared in 1978, the year after Barnett's *China Policy*, and it too spoke to the context of the imminent normalization of U.S.-PRC relations. Even as Clough placed Taiwan in that context, he addressed more exclusively the implications of normalization for the island. Moreover, he brought together in one place most of the available and relevant information about Taiwan and added the perspective of one who understood it from the inside out. The book's structure was conventional (political, economic, military, U.S. role, Japan's role, etc.) and its approach was factual and descriptive rather than analytical. Clough conveyed a positive evaluation for what the Kuomintang had achieved since taking over Taiwan, but he did not shy away from discussing its abuses either.

Take, for example, Clough's description of Taiwan's political situation.<sup>33</sup> He inventoried the positive developments that occurred under the KMT regime: effective leadership, particularly on economic policy; the fostering of economic prosperity and political stability; the gradual steps for political development at the sub-national level; and how Chiang Ching-kuo was an improvement over his father. But Clough also reviewed the KMT's rocky takeover of the island; Chiang Kai-shek's rigid, ideological approach to state-society relations; the significant role of the security services; the persistence of Mainlander-Taiwanese tensions; the overseas movement for Taiwan Independence; and so on. In sum, the political system was marked by "serious strains."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Clough argued that the "effectiveness and stability of the political system in Taiwan must be evaluated from the viewpoint of the people of Taiwan, whose attitudes toward authority, civil rights, and democratic processes differ from those of the average Americans."<sup>35</sup> As it happened, the Kaohsiung Incident, which occurred less than two years after the publication of *Island China*, demonstrated that there was substantial diversity of views among Taiwan people and that the regime would go to some lengths to block the expression of dissent.

For Clough, as with Ballantine and Barnett, Taiwan was not an active force in shaping cross-Strait relations. When it came to developments of U.S.-PRC relations, it was acted upon and not an actor in its own right. He did not anticipate how soon democracy would come to Taiwan and how that would turn Taiwan into the lead actor in the Beijing-Washington-Taipei triangle. But then, no-one else did either. To his credit, Clough recognized that the United States still had important interests concerning Taiwan, particularly concerning the economic and social system. Moreover, "after so long a period of close cooperation and the establishment of

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<sup>32</sup> Barnett, *China Policy*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Clough, *Island China*, pp. 33-68.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.



innumerable personal relations between Americans and the Chinese on Taiwan, many Americans would find it repugnant to abandon the people of Taiwan in the face of pressures from Peking.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, for Clough, the ROC was more than just an impediment to the achievement of U.S.-PRC normalization. But Clough also ignored the possibility that perhaps the United States, having made decisions that constrained the future of the people of Taiwan before they were permitted to have a say in those decisions, might wish to ensure that they should have a say in decisions yet to come.<sup>37</sup>

Doak Barnett produced two other works that concerned Taiwan: two short monographs on the subject of arms sales. The first, released in October 1981, was on a proposed, significant improvement in Taiwan’s air power capabilities that had been under consideration for transfer since the Carter Administration. Naturally, China was strongly opposed to any new transfer, and Barnett also opposed it. He argued that the United States should be prudent in its arms sales policy, formulate a grand strategy to enhancing peace and stability in the Taiwan region (of which arms sales would be a part), and remain cognizant of Chinese “sensitivities.” In the end, the Reagan Administration decided in January 1982 against any upgrade.<sup>38</sup>

The second monograph, which was published in 1982, was spawned by China’s campaign that began in the fall of 1981 to get the United States to set a date for ending Taiwan arms sales. It began with Ye Jianying’s “nine points” statement on September 30<sup>th</sup> and continued with the Chinese demand for a terminal date in meetings between Premier Zhao Ziyang and President Reagan and between Foreign Minister Huang Hua and Secretary of State Alexander Haig in Cancun, Mexico, in October. These were two sides of the same policy: convey new flexibility on peacefully resolving the dispute with Taipei while convincing Washington that the instruments of war were no longer necessary.

Barnett addressed both sides in his monograph.<sup>39</sup> He felt that Ye’s statement was important (even though it actually left a number of issues unclear). He wrote: “One might argue that it went about as far as any Chinese government conceivably could go in attempting to demonstrate flexibility and make verbal assurances to leaders in Taipei.”<sup>40</sup> He suggested that the emergence of some sort of cross-Straits dialogue, leading to political talks, was the best guarantee of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait “and therefore be in the U.S. national interest.”<sup>41</sup> Washington should convey support for “some kind of dialogue and mutual accommodation” and help to create a “political climate” conducive to such a process, but neither force Taipei to begin a dialogue nor get in the middle of any Beijing-Taipei interaction.<sup>42</sup> It should stick to its insistence on peaceful resolution and only alter Washington’s non-position on Taiwan’s sovereignty if it would foster a “new basis of compromise” with Beijing and “enhance the prospect for a gradual, peaceful, evolutionary change” and reduce the chance of future crises. Barnett felt that setting a cutoff date was a bad idea, because it would destroy morale on Taiwan. But at least implicitly it should link reductions in arms sales to “the expectation that tension in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> See Richard C. Bush, *At Cross Purposes: U.S.-Taiwan Relations Since 1942* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. 9-39, 124-178.

<sup>38</sup> A. Doak Barnett, “The FX Decision: ‘Another Crucial Moment’ in U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations,” *Studies in Defense Policy*, Brookings Institution, October 1981. See page 50 for Barnett’s summary conclusion.

<sup>39</sup> A. Doak Barnett, “U.S. Arms Sales: The China-Taiwan Tangle,” *Studies in Defense Policy*, Brookings Institution, May 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 58-9.

the area will diminish (especially if and when contacts between China and Taiwan increase).”<sup>43</sup> In that latter regard, Beijing and Taipei would bear some responsibility. Taiwan leaders and “a significant portion of the island’s population” should “recognize that their interests will be better served in the long run by some kind of relationship with Beijing than by unrelenting hostility and tension.” But because Taiwan people “do not believe that China would tolerate genuine Taiwanese autonomy,” or were skeptical of the whole idea, Beijing “faces a difficult task” in convincing them that ties with China would be the best option.<sup>44</sup>

Barnett’s 1982 recommendations were fairly close to what emerged in the August 1982 communiqué, but they were not consistent with the Reagan Administration’s subsequent Taiwan policy. He thus had more in common with Alexander Haig and John Holdridge than he did with George Shultz and Paul Wolfowitz. More generally, he was in the mainstream of opinion among China specialists. It is only slightly simplistic to conclude that for him and others Taiwan-U.S. relations and cross-Strait relations should be a function of U.S.-China relations.

### The Harding Years (1983-1994)

Barnett left Brookings in 1982, moving across Massachusetts Avenue to take a position at Johns Hopkins’s School of Advanced International Studies. Replacing him was Harry Harding, a brilliant, younger political scientist born in 1946. He was trained at Princeton and Stanford, had taught for over a decade at Swarthmore and Stanford, and had a long list of publications to his credit. He was the first of a series of baby-boomer China specialists to work at Brookings.

Harding’s first Brookings book, which was published in 1987, focused on China’s internal situation and the prospects for continued economic and political reform. But the topic had an external dimension—what could and should the international community do to sustain reform, and there was passing coverage of Taiwan.<sup>45</sup> Harding posited two major forces affecting China’s external stance, including towards cross-Strait relations. One was economic and political reform. The other was nationalism. Reform gave Beijing a stake in good relations with the United States and its Asian neighbors, and so should be nurtured. Nationalism would encourage Chinese goals and actions that would complicate those relations. Harding argued that reform had the upper hand but that over time it was not a sure thing. Among other things, a greater salience for nationalism would undermine the U.S. interest in, as he put it, “a peaceful future for Taiwan and its people.”<sup>46</sup>

Although Harding acknowledged correctly that nationalism would remain an “emotionally salient” issue for Chinese leaders, he was relatively sanguine about the prospects for cross-Strait relations. Economic relations between the two sides, which were just beginning, would give China a stake in restraint. Moreover, and more significantly, he saw promise in China’s new political approach. The terms it was offering Taiwan under one country, two systems were more generous than those given to Hong Kong. The promise of a high degree of autonomy and the implication that force would be used under only limited circumstances demonstrated “flexibility and restraint.” And Chinese leaders reportedly had “a more subtle and sophisticated interpretation of the internal political situation on the island.” In this context, he

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Harry Harding, *China’s Second Revolution: Reform After Mao* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

proposed, Washington should avoid misunderstandings and problems over Taiwan through regular dialogue with Beijing, adopt a “prudent approach” to arms sales, and “make clear that it would have no objection to the reunification of Taiwan and the mainland if it occurred through a peaceful and mutually acceptable process of convergence and dialogue.”<sup>47</sup> But there was little discussion beyond these summary judgments. Harding did not explore either what might be required to create such a dialogue or the possibility that Taiwan might have legitimate reasons to object to one country, two systems. He also misjudged the factor of Taiwan’s domestic politics, suggesting that “more representative government” on Taiwan would facilitate a solution to the Taiwan issue. With twenty-twenty hindsight, we know that reality turned out very differently.<sup>48</sup>

The limited discussion of Taiwan in *China’s Second Revolution* is understandable; its focus was China’s domestic reform and whether it could be sustained. A more robust discussion would come in Harding’s second book, which was on U.S.-China relations and published in February 1992.<sup>49</sup> That is, it appeared exactly twenty years after the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué, eight months before the U.S. presidential election, and at a time that the cloud of the 1989 Tiananmen tragedy still hung over U.S.-China relations and loomed as an electoral issue. In *A Fragile Relationship*, Harding inventoried the array of issues that had shaped and would shape the character of the bilateral ties and then assessed prospects for the future. He specified five possible scenarios for the third decade of the relationship. In increasing order of probability they were: “a revived Sino-American strategic alignment, directed at a common enemy; diverse American relations with a fragmented China; a renewed U.S. partnership in China’s modernization and reform; a second period of diplomatic confrontation between Washington and Peking; and an extended strained relationship.”<sup>50</sup> Harding probably favored Scenario Three (U.S. engagement in support of Chinese reform), but was pessimistic about its prospects. As it turned out, the U.S.-PRC relationship between 1992 and 2002 was bifurcated: renewed engagement to support Chinese economic reform once Deng Xiaoping made a policy “re-set,” but continued strains over security matters, particularly Taiwan.

Much of Harding’s examination of Taiwan-U.S.-PRC relations is a solid, comprehensive description of the major episodes that occurred from 1972 to 1992. There are no big surprises but some interesting points. For example, he reports that Beijing was unhappy in the post-normalization period that things had not worked out as it had expected. Specifically, “Taiwan had not experienced the crisis of confidence upon the withdrawal of American diplomatic recognition that Peking had hoped for,” and that Taipei was unwilling to negotiate.<sup>51</sup> He also reveals that an internal PRC policy from the mid-1980s suggested that Beijing should tolerate continued arms sales because it would give Taipei confidence to negotiate (which is one of the ways in which Washington justifies the transfers).<sup>52</sup>

Harding’s treatment of PRC proposals on unification after 1979 and Taiwan’s response is factual, and supports his conclusion that the interaction had led to a significant reduction in tensions. Moreover, he judges that, despite continued Chinese suspicions about American intentions, Washington’s statements and actions on balance had “apparently convinced Peking

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<sup>47</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: the United States and China Since 1972* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

that the United States was prepared to accept . . . peaceful reunification.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, “Taiwan was a remarkably muted issue in Sino-American relations in the late 1980s.”<sup>54</sup> He did note new Chinese concerns that emerged in the early 1990s: that is, growing calls within Taiwan for independence and for greater international space (China, of course, opposed both trends and worried about what Washington would do).<sup>55</sup> Here again, the coverage was somewhat superficial. There is little discussion of Taiwan’s position on one country, two systems, which was already developed by late 1991.<sup>56</sup> And there is some tendency to treat China’s proposals uncritically. For example, he regards Deng Xiaoping’s proposal that negotiations occur between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party as a sign of flexibility, because it recognizes that Taiwan refused to be treated as a provincial-level government.<sup>57</sup> But there is no discussion of why Taiwan might also resist party-to-party talks (because it rejects Taipei’s claim of sovereignty). Finally, Harding did not anticipate the degree to which Taiwan’s democratization would profoundly affect cross-Strait relations, but he was not alone in this. Most other American China specialists did not either.

Having identified Taiwan as one of many difficult issues in U.S.-China relations, Harding draws the sensible inference that its evolution would affect which of his five scenarios would likely occur. Continued improvement of cross-Strait relations would help make a more positive outcome possible. Difficulties in cross-Strait relations, over the island’s security, international space, and the public’s receptiveness to the idea of de jure independence would contribute to a more negative one.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in a confrontational U.S.-PRC relationship, a serious effort to achieve Taiwan independence or a breakdown in social order on the island would lead to the strongest Chinese response, both towards Taiwan (possibly a resort to force) and demands for significant changes in American policy.<sup>59</sup> A Taiwan campaign for greater international space would stimulate a lesser but still serious response.<sup>60</sup> This logic—that developments in cross-Strait relations would shape U.S.-China relations—would play out in the mid-1990s with the Lee Teng-hui visit. Of course, what the United States did with respect to these issues, particularly arms sales, would have an impact on Beijing’s view of Washington’s intentions (see its response to the U.S. approval of the sale of F-16s in 1992).

Harding had the following recommendations for future U.S. policy, which he already judged to be “appropriate and sustainable.”<sup>61</sup> Washington should: continue to emphasize a peaceful and stable future and respond to any PRC coercion; support Taiwan’s membership in international *economic* organizations; not oppose eventual reunification, “as long as it occurs peacefully and with the mutual agreement of both sides”; continue arms sales and the transfer of military technology; and avoid a mediation role in any effort to resolve the fundamental dispute between Beijing and Taipei.<sup>62</sup> These conclusions were in the mainstream of American thinking,

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<sup>53</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-60.

<sup>56</sup> See Richard C. Bush, *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), pp. 39-45.

<sup>57</sup> Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, p. 156.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 302-322. Note that the issues of Taiwan’s international space and American support for its security were the same key issues addressed by Joseph Ballantine and Doak Barnett. These fundamental issues continued over decades.

<sup>59</sup> Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, p. 316.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 345-49; cited passage on p. 347.

but they assumed a continued, gradual, and problem-free engagement between China and Taiwan. They neither anticipated the constraints that Taiwan's democracy would impose on that engagement nor explored substantively what would be required to secure genuinely "mutual agreement."

Harry Harding would leave Brookings in 1994 to become dean of the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University. At the time of his departure, he was working on a new project on "greater China" that examined the ways in which the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were converging, the ways in which they were not, and the implications for the future. This study was never published in book form, but there were several relevant articles that appeared in the early 1990s.<sup>63</sup> One article in particular, part of an edited volume entitled *Taiwan in World Affairs*, focused on Taiwan.<sup>64</sup>

For Harding, the term "greater China" was essentially descriptive rather than predictive. It referred to "the construction or revival of economic, political, and cultural ties among dispersed Chinese communities around the world as the political barriers to their interaction fall."<sup>65</sup> Taiwan was one such community, but it also illustrated a contradiction – that factors fostering continued separation operated simultaneously with those promoting unity.<sup>66</sup> Harding's essay reviewed Taiwan's shifting cultural, economic, and political ties with other parts of greater China as of around mid-1993. His assessment then remains sound: "Taiwan's involvement in a transnational Chinese economy is significantly more likely than its full incorporation into an integrated Cultural China, which is more likely yet than Taiwan's inclusion in a unified Chinese state."<sup>67</sup> On political ties, Harding reported the steps that the Lee Teng-hui government took in the early 1990s to test the waters with Beijing and the strength of status-quo sentiment on the island (in contrast to low support for either "one country, two systems" or independence).<sup>68</sup> But he neither considered the pro-independence stance that the Democratic Progressive Party added to its party charter in 1991 nor anticipated how Taiwan identity would become the most salient issue in domestic politics, to the point that Lee concluded that he would have to co-opt it to keep the KMT in power.

## Interlude

After Harding's departure, there ensued a period in which cross-Strait relations received limited coverage by Brookings scholars. Nicholas Lardy was the principal China specialist at Brookings from 1995 to 2003, but his publications during that period focused on the PRC economy. In 1997, Brookings did publish a book of essays on the economic interaction among China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, particularly in the electronics industry, edited by Barry Naughton of the University of California at San Diego.<sup>69</sup> But this project was not part of the Brookings's research program; the Institution merely published the book. Lardy did predict in his *Integrating China*

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Harry Harding, "'The Concept of Greater China': Themes, Variations, and Reservations," *China Quarterly*, no. 136 (December 1993): pp. 660-86.

<sup>64</sup> Harry Harding, "Taiwan and Greater China," in *Taiwan in World Affairs*, edited by Robert G. Sutter and William R. Johnson (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 235-275.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 253-60.

<sup>69</sup> Barry Naughton, *The China Circle: Economics and Electronics in the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

into the *Global Economy* that China's and Taiwan's entry into the World Trade Association would lead to "stronger trade and investment ties between China and Taiwan that may contribute to a gradual reduction of tensions between the two," which would be in the U.S. interest.<sup>70</sup> Ironically the year (2002) that book was published was when cross-Strait political relations began to deteriorate—in spite of closer economic ties.

The next major publication was Robert Suettinger's *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations 1989-2000*.<sup>71</sup> Suettinger was a career CIA analyst and had served in the executive branch for two decades, most notably as director for China affairs on the staff of the National Security Council from 1994 to 1997. He was a visiting scholar at Brookings from 1999 to 2001, when he did most of the background work on *Beyond Tiananmen*, which was published in 2003. It is a detailed account of American and PRC decision-making concerning the bilateral relationship from the time of Tiananmen until the end of President Bill Clinton's administration. It draws, of course, on Suettinger's time on the NSC but also his rich understanding of events both before and after. It is likely to remain the authoritative description and interpretation of the subject for some time to come, probably until the declassification of the relevant American records.

*Beyond Tiananmen's* principal thesis is that Washington and Beijing had many reasons to cooperate during the last decade of the twentieth century, based on common or overlapping interests, but they did not do so because politics in the two countries constrained leaders from acting on those shared interests. That is not a novel insight, either generally or with respect to U.S.-PRC relations, but Suettinger documents his thesis with extensive and compelling detail. And he reports a number of interesting anecdotes for students of U.S.-Taiwan relations:

--The East Asia Bureau of the State Department was strongly opposed to President Lee Teng-hui's transit of Hawaii in the spring of 1994, and when it conveyed a demarche to Taipei to that effect, Foreign Minister Frederick Chien exploded in anger.

--The Clinton Administration might have anticipated the PRC's strong opposition to the 1994 Taiwan policy review but missed some obvious signals.

--Lee Teng-hui's Cornell speech in June 1995 had more of a political character than either Washington or Beijing had expected, stimulating a harsh reaction.

--The PLA had a significant impact on Beijing's response to Lee's visit and speech.

--The United States response to the PLA's Taiwan-directed exercises in the latter part of 1995 was muted.

--The United States decided that it needed better communication with Lee's inner circle and so instituted the practice of periodic meetings between the U.S. deputy national security adviser and the ROC's National Security Council secretary general.

--The PRC probably lost more than it gained from its actions in early 1996.<sup>72</sup>

Most significant for scholars and practitioners alike, however is Suettinger's vivid account of the U.S. role in the saga of Lee Teng-hui's Cornell visit and the events of March 1996.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Suettinger regards Taiwan as the main driver of U.S.-China relations from about 1994 on. He writes that "Taiwan-related events or issues have become the most likely to create

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<sup>70</sup> Nicholas R. Lardy, *Integrating China into the Global Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), p. 165.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations 1989-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 207-08, 220, 222-27, 226-27, 257-58, 262-63.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212-217; 247-263.

dangerous tensions in the U.S.-China relationship. . . . U.S.-China relations are . . . hostage to the condition on Taiwan-PRC relations.”<sup>74</sup> This is because the framework established by the three communiqués became increasingly incongruous; Beijing and Taipei both concluded that the United States was the key to coping with the other; and Taiwan became a domestic issue in both America and China.<sup>75</sup>

In light of his basic thesis, Suettinger accurately recognizes the irony that it was Taiwan’s own democratization that made the overall situation “more volatile.”<sup>76</sup> That is, politics within all three polls of the triangle were making it more unstable. But beyond this insight is a larger development. For Ballantine, Barnett, and Harding, Taiwan had been an essentially passive element in U.S.-China relations. Taiwan was the square peg that could never be fit into the round hole of stable and positive relations, but that was because Washington and Beijing could never find a way to reshape either the peg or the hole to their mutual satisfaction, not because of Taiwan’s own actions. (In reality, of course, Taipei was a more active factor, seeking to use its influence within the U.S. political system to shape and constrain American policy, but the three chose not to include it in their analysis.) In Suettinger’s treatment, Taiwan had now become an active element, to the point that it was the most dynamic factor in the three-way relationship.

When it came to policy recommendations to address the problems in U.S.-PRC relations, including Taiwan, Suettinger proposed “management” as the best that Beijing and Washington could do: “management of complex goals, multiple disagreements, sensitive emotions, cumbersome bureaucracies, countervailing pressures, unrealistic expectations, and imperfect information.”<sup>77</sup> But when it comes to managing the Taiwan Strait issue, he notes a factor that makes management more difficult: “American intentions . . . are widely misperceived [in China] as being part of some nefarious strategic plot to keep China weak and divided.”<sup>78</sup> He might have added that Chinese has also misperceived at least some of the actions of Taiwan leaders as a “nefarious plot” to permanently separate the island from China, when they do not have that intention at all. Suettinger himself understood that Lee had other motives for his actions. The Cornell project was designed, he reports, to enhance Taiwan’s international stature and to jump-start the 1996 presidential campaign.<sup>79</sup> Regarding Lee’s July 1999 statement that the cross-Strait relationship was a “special state-to-state relationship,” Suettinger accepts without qualification the explanation offered in Lee’s autobiography, that he had been “planning for some time to adjust and clarify the definition of Taiwan’s sovereignty in terms of international law and practice.”<sup>80</sup> Whatever Beijing may have thought, that interpretation is probably correct.

### The Bush Years (2002-present)

Like Ballantine and Barnett, I was the son of missionaries, and it was the experience of living in a Chinese society in my adolescent years that led me to make China the center of my professional life. Like Harding and Suettinger, I was born after World War II, and attended college and graduate school during the years of the Vietnam War and Cultural Revolution. Like Ballantine, Clough, and Suettinger, I spent much of my career in the U.S. government. Yet

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 435, 436.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 435-37.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 212, 215.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

unlike them, I spent much of that time working in the U.S. Congress, on the staff of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives (1983-1995). Moreover, Taiwan itself was the central focus of my government service. The late Stephen Solarz, for whom I worked for nine and a half years, sought to use his position as chairman of the House Asian Affairs Subcommittee to promote democracy and human rights on the island, and Taiwan was all I worked on as chairman and managing director of the American Institute of Taiwan (1997-2002). So I brought a new perspective to my work at Brookings, and my intention upon arrival was to write a book on cross-Straits relations. I had long believed that Americans had only a superficial understanding of the sources of Taiwan's external behavior, both substantive and political, and I hoped to help correct that, at least in a small way.

Yet the first book I published after arriving at Brookings—*At Cross Purposes*—was not on cross-Straits relations but was a set of historical essays on U.S.-Taiwan relations, which M.E. Sharpe published in 2004.<sup>81</sup> I had drafted some of these essays when I was chairman of AIT; others I wrote or completed after I moved to Brookings. All sought to answer questions that had occurred to me during my government service or to otherwise satisfy intellectual interest. And at least some of my findings continue to have relevance for the current day. Thus Franklin Roosevelt's principal reason for deciding during World War II to return Taiwan to China was because he believed that the island was strategically important (specifically, that the ROC could play a significant role in the preservation of international peace and security and that Taiwan would be a good platform for doing so). Concerning American views of Taiwan's legal status after 1945, I discovered that some administrations dwelt on the geographical territory of Taiwan and whether it belonged to the state called China, and others emphasized the ROC, the government with jurisdiction over the island. That remains a key distinction in cross-Straits relations to this day. In exploring the U.S. approach to several cases of human rights abuses on Taiwan, I found that diplomats of the Truman Administration were sympathetic to the Taiwanese majority as they suffered the repression that accompanied KMT rule after 1945, whereas the Eisenhower and Johnson Administrations were generally unconcerned. The Carter Administration on the other hand actively sought to head off the Kaohsiung Incident of 1979 and then mitigate its consequences. In a semi-memoir about Steve Solarz's work to promote democracy and human rights, I concluded that our contribution was not trivial but still tertiary, and that the efforts of the *dang-wai* opposition and KMT reformists were more consequential.

One of the hidden values of American think tanks is that they provide an environment in which former government officials may reflect on what they did while in government (when they have no time to reflect at all). At least in my case, part of that reflection was learning more from the field of international relations (my emphasis in graduate school had been on comparative politics, not IR). Some key themes in that literature informed the research and writing of *Untying the Knot*.

My principal goal in this work was to explain why the cross-Straits dispute was so hard to resolve, despite the fact that China and Taiwan had already demonstrated that they had shared economic interests and the reality that each was an ethnic Chinese society. In answering that question, I argued that there were two substantive points of division—sovereignty and security—and several aggravating factors: domestic politics, decisionmaking systems, the effort of each side to exert leverage on the other, and the role of the United States. The former formed the “knot” and the latter tightened it. The sovereignty issue was made more difficult, I felt, because Beijing chose to interpret Lee Teng-hui's insistence that the ROC was “an independent sovereign

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<sup>81</sup> Bush, *At Cross Purposes*.



state” as compelling evidence that he was a separatist. On security, I argued that the two sides were trapped in a security dilemma driven by each side’s fear of the intentions of the other. In the discussion of politics, I drew on other scholars’ analysis of the formation of a Taiwan identity and how that imposed limits on leaders’ options. On the role of the United States, I introduced the idea of dual deterrence to explain Washington’s actions during the late 1990s and early 2000s

In contemplating how this knot might be untied, I suggested that the two sides would have to address both substantive and aggravating factors. Moreover, they had to accept that deep mutual mistrust made some sort of grand bargain impossible. Rather, an iterative, trust-building process would be more successful over the long run than any attempt to resolve all aspects of the dispute in a single negotiation. In this context, the United States should probably play a limited role, no more than what I called “intellectual facilitation.” Finally, I forecast that if and when leaders of the two sides were prepared to set aside the conflicted coexistence of the Chen Shui-bian period but not yet ready to resolve sovereignty and security issues, the stabilization of cross-Straits relations would be an optimal middle path.

My next book, *A War Like No Other*, was a joint effort with Michael O’Hanlon, my respected Brookings colleague on defense issues.<sup>82</sup> If *Untying the Knot* was about how securing peace was so difficult, *A War Like No Other* made the case that war was not impossible. O’Hanlon and I placed cross-Straits relations in the context of the revival of China as a great power and of the U.S. response. We argued that the prospects for cooperation and coexistence between Washington and Beijing were good, and that the Taiwan Strait issue was the only issue that could produce a big-power conflict, driven under certain circumstances by two different logics. The first was a political logic that might intensify the security dilemma. Each of the two sides would take a sequence of alternating actions that deepened the fears of the other that fundamental interests were under threat. What would be important here was not the objective import of the actions but how the target side interpreted them. Brinkmanship might also come into play. The result would be a conflict caused primarily by accident and miscalculation. (In making this case, I imagined a future Taiwan election where the DPP candidate, whom I modeled on my old friend Tsai Tung-rong, won the presidency and then moved quickly to achieve a new constitution through a referendum.) If the conflict deepened and the PRC took action to stop this highly negative trend, a military logic would take over and escalate into a war between China and the United States. This part of the book, written primarily and properly by O’Hanlon, described the process of escalation and did not rule out a nuclear exchange.

It should be clearly understood that O’Hanlon did not believe that such an apocalyptic outcome was likely. And actually, by the time the book was published in 2007, I had concluded that the worst of cross-Straits relations was in the past, and that Ma Ying-jeou would be elected and then move to stabilize and improve cross-Straits relations. But neither did we believe that the probability of conflict was zero, and our purpose in writing the book was to encourage policy-makers to take steps to reduce that probability even further. (I didn’t anticipate the tensions surrounding the 2008 election, but what I’ve heard about the anxiety in Beijing in early 2008 and the belief/fear that if the UN referendum passed, some sort of military action would be necessary, indicates that the underlying argument of *A War Like No Other* was correct.<sup>83</sup>))

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<sup>82</sup> Richard C. Bush and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *A War Like No Other: The Truth About China’s Challenge to America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> “PLA Leaders Watch Taiwan Strait Stability Before Taiwan Presidential Election,” *Wen Wei Po*, January 23, 2008, Open Source Center (CPP20080123710007); Bill Gertz, “Taiwan Strait Tension Cools Off: China issued warning to U.S.,” *Washington Times*, April 17, 2008.

In a way, *Uncharted Strait*, my next book on cross-Strait relations picked up where *Untying the Knot* left off.<sup>84</sup> In the latter, I had suggested that Taiwan and China might optimally pursue the stabilization of their ties if resolution of their dispute was impossible, and that is precisely what Hu Jintao and Ma Ying-jeou did after 2008, under the slogan of “peaceful development.” *Uncharted Strait* offered a review of that process during Ma’s first term and then contemplated the prospects for the future. I concluded that the two sides had made good progress in normalizing, liberalizing, and institutionalizing economic relations, and that the Ma Administration had not sacrificed Taiwan’s sovereignty in the process. On the other hand, Beijing and Taipei had made little progress on stabilizing political and security dimensions, despite the desire of some in China to do so. Two causes were at play. First of all, the Taiwan public was not ready to move in that direction. And second, there was a substantial conceptual gap between the two sides, regarding the political and legal status of the governing authorities on Taiwan and whether they constituted a sovereign entity for purposes of both cross-Strait relations and Taiwan’s international role. Essentially, this is the issue of the Republic of China: on Taiwan, there is a broad consensus that this is the negotiating bottom line; on the Mainland, only a few scholars accept that the ROC is an unavoidable issue.

But *Uncharted Strait* had a second and more long-term focus. I argued that there were two modes of interaction within cross-Strait relations. The first was what I called the mode of mutual persuasion, in which Beijing would be willing to accommodate Taipei’s substantive concerns, to a point that the latter was comfortable with the negotiating outcome. The other was what I called the mode of power asymmetry, in which China would exploit its growing relative power advantage over Taiwan and exert pressure on Taipei to concede on Beijing’s terms, even though it was not objectively in its interests to do so. In this mode, China would never attack Taiwan militarily or impose economic sanctions upon it, but the mere fact that it could and might do so would be sufficient to get a vulnerable Taiwan to yield, even if it preferred not to. I do not believe that China will shift to a strategy of pressure in the foreseeable future, but its patience is not infinite and Taiwan cannot assume that such a shift won’t occur. In my view, it is not only in Taiwan’s interest that Beijing remains in the mode of mutual persuasion but also in the interests of the United States and even China. But that is less likely to happen if Taiwan strengthens itself economically, conceptually, militarily, and regarding its relations with the United States. That in turn is more probable if (and perhaps only if) Taiwan’s political leaders improve how the political system functions, so that it is more capable of addressing the challenges that the island faces.

## Evaluation

In looking over sixty years of Brookings publications concerning Taiwan and cross-Strait relations, several key themes are clear. First of all, individuals matter. Unless a think-tank like Brookings has a senior scholar on staff who specializes on U.S.-China-Taiwan relations, it cannot produce analysis of those subjects, and there were times since 1952 that such specialists were lacking.

Exposure to Taiwan itself was not inconsequential. It mattered that Joseph Ballantine and Ralph Clough had served on Taiwan as diplomats and that I travelled there in many different capacities since the time I lived there as a graduate student in 1975. Harding had also made a

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<sup>84</sup> Richard C. Bush, *Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

number of trips to attend IIR's Sino-American conference while he was still teaching at Stanford<sup>85</sup> and Suettinger did so occasionally. Barnett had visited Taiwan as early as November 1949, when he was a reporter, but the essay he wrote in 1949 focused on the effort of Chiang Kai-shek and his allies and their continuing struggle to retain their influence in the Kuomintang and against the Communists, not about the situation on the island itself.<sup>86</sup> A search of IIR files revealed that Barnett certainly visited Taiwan in 1965, 1977, and 1986. That the 1977 trip took place in April is interesting, for that was the same month that *China Policy* was published. That is, at the time of his visit he had already made up his mind about how the United States should address Taiwan and cross-Straits relations as it negotiated normalization with Beijing.<sup>87</sup>

Travel to Taiwan was one of several ways that Brookings scholars fostered what Clough had called the “innumerable personal relations between Americans and the Chinese on Taiwan.” Yet just because some Brookings scholars had these personal relationships says little about how they viewed the broader policy issues. That would depend on what types of Taiwan people they knew (government officials, mainstream scholars, business executives, *dangwai*/DPP activists, overseas Taiwan Independence activists, etc.) and the ideological and political biases that both sides brought to their contacts. Also important, of course, was the nature of their encounters (quick trips for conferences, extended visits, work assignments, etc.) Whatever the case, more contacts were likely better than less.

Second, context mattered. That is, the context of U.S. relations with and policy toward both Taiwan and China tended to dictate the issues on which Brookings scholars focused. The goals that each government set in their relations with the other two members of this triangle changed over time and so the principal topics of discussion. For example, as long as Beijing's policy toward Taiwan was “liberation,” with the implication it would use force to attain that goal, no American scholar would argue that the United States should completely end its security commitment to Taiwan. There might be a debate on how best to provide that security (see Barnett's discussion of the F-X fighter) but the goal remained. When Chinese leaders shifted from liberation to peaceful unification, the issues became more complicated. From 1949 to 1979, the sovereignty question was focused exclusively on the ROC's role in the international system (diplomatic relations and membership in international governmental organizations). It was only after 1979, when Beijing had essentially won the struggle in the international system and began to focus on the parameters of unification, that the sovereignty question became more complex—that is, how Taiwan and its government might be part of a unified China.

Next, timing matters. If the goal is to affect future policy, then recommendations and the analysis that backs them up should be deployed as the government concerned is moving towards decision points. Doak Barnett's first book on U.S. policy towards China, published in 1971, appeared at a time that the Nixon Administration was signaling a shift, but he could not know how fast that shift was occurring, because Nixon and Kissinger operated in great secrecy. The work appeared after the American ping-pong team had been to China and around the time of Kissinger's secret trip. His second volume was more timely, coming as it did early in the Carter Administration. Although I myself did not finish *Uncharted Strait* as early as I had wished, it was available at the very beginning of the second Obama Administration and fairly early in Ma Ying-jeou's second term. (My best timing was with *Perils of Proximity* on China-Japan relations

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<sup>85</sup> Communication from Harry Harding to the author, February 5, 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Barnett, *China on the Eve of the Communist Takeover*, pp. 304-11.

<sup>87</sup> I am deeply grateful to Titus Chen of the Institute for International Relations for his assistance in securing information concerning Barnett's travel to Taiwan after 1949.

in the maritime domain, which was published right after the ramming of a Japan Coast Guard vessel by a Chinese fishing boat near the Diaoyutai.)

Finally, domestic politics matters. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the early Brookings books on policy towards Taiwan and China was that authors ignored the poisonous politics in the United States concerning those two countries. The McCarthy episode, which ruined the careers and reputations of many capable members of the Foreign Service, left a very harmful legacy, and the pro-Taiwan and anti-China lobbies severely constrained the policy environment for a long time thereafter and made objective discussions of U.S. interests and policy difficult. Scholars like Barnett and like-minded officials in the Executive Branch had to be circumspect in their conversations. (And truth to tell, the government in Taipei contributed to this highly politicized environment.) Suettinger's *After Tiananmen* was really the first Brookings book to place the impact of politics on policy at the center of his analysis, not only in the United States but also in China and Taiwan.

It is fair to say that all the Brookings scholars who considered Taiwan in their scholarly work, either centrally or peripherally, were within the mainstream of American views on the subject. Each of us was realistic about China's goals regarding Taiwan, East Asia and the United States, but none of us ruled out the possibility that Washington and Beijing under the right conditions could craft a cooperative relationship. None of us believed that Taipei would be willing to pursue objectives identical to the United States, but we understood that the island's capitulation to Beijing would be contrary to U.S. interests and that Taipei had influence mechanisms within the American political system. None of these scholars, myself included, totally divorced Taiwan from the larger context of U.S.-PRC relations, but the extent to which we emphasized the part or the whole was a function of personal background and knowledge, time period, and the relative focus of our analysis.

This evolution of the issues in U.S.-PRC-ROC relations explains, I think, the shifting focus of Brookings scholars' attention, from Taiwan's security and international role (Ballantine and Barnett) to the consequences for the ROC of U.S.-PRC normalization (Clough) to the gradual thaw in cross-Straits relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Harding) to the tensions of the mid- and late-1990s (Suettinger), and so on. But this is to be expected. Brookings scholars are tasked with doing policy-relevant research rather than comprehensive analysis that wholly or partly has little to do with the imperatives of policy (i.e. they create applied knowledge, not pure knowledge).

There were two aspects of Taiwan's own evolution that Brookings scholars did not anticipate. The first was democratization. The ROC's authoritarian system had been a fixture for so long that it was hard for Brookings scholars or anyone else to imagine a radical departure from that status quo. It was perhaps even harder to envisage that Chiang Ching-kuo, who had spent much of his career as the enforcer of KMT rule, would be the one who took the key steps toward democratization in the mid-1980s: picking the Taiwanese Lee Teng-hui as his vice-president in 1984; tolerating the founding of the DPP in 1986; and lifting martial law in 1987. Indeed, "counterintuitive" is the word that probably best characterizes Chiang's reasons for liberalizing Taiwan's political system: that the KMT could more easily preserve its dominant position by opening up the political system rather than increasing repression, and that values could be a new basis for the ROC's relationship with the United States. Similarly, it was far from clear in the early part of Lee Teng-hui's presidency that he would have the skill to extend Chiang's initiatives all the way to full democratization.

The other blind spot of Brookings scholars was how active Taiwan would become within the U.S.-PRC-Taiwan triangle. Taiwan had not been inactive in the 1950s, and Clough provided a good summary of how Chiang Kai-shek and the Eisenhower Administration pursued very different goals in the mid-1950s.<sup>88</sup> Thereafter, Taipei became increasingly passive and the United States and the PRC became the more active members of the triangle, and it was their relationship that shaped the environment for cross-Strait and U.S.-Taiwan relations.<sup>89</sup> The assumption of Brookings analysis from the 1970s into the early 1990s was that Taiwan's passivity would continue. That, in fact, was not the case, and Lee Teng-hui, Chen Shui-bian, and Ma Ying-jeou have, each in their own way, shown an assertiveness that re-shaped cross-Strait relations and ties with the United States. Brookings did not catch up to that trend until Suettinger's retrospective account of the 1990s and until my own work. This does not mean that China has become passive, but both Beijing and Washington had to adjust to Taipei's renewed activism.

This brief survey of how one American think tank talked about Taiwan and its relations with the PRC is just one small window on the broader class of policy research organizations in the United States. They are quite unlike their counterparts in most other countries, where research organizations are often the arms of government agencies and corporations. This difference stems in part from the provisions in our tax law that allow wealthy individuals and entities to reduce their tax bill by making donations to all manner of non-profit organizations; and to the large number of political appointees at the federal level. These two factors incentivize the creations of organizations that are staffed by "used-to-be" and "want-to-be" officials who have the background and expertise to speak in depth to the tough questions of policy. This institutional capacity thereby creates mechanisms by which knowledge can sometimes question the conventional wisdom of government agencies, both through the analysis conducted by think-tank scholars, the credibility that comes from their prior government service, and their availability for policy positions in the future. Their collective objective, which they may or may not attain, is to shape the definition and pursuit of American interests as the scholars and their organizations define them.

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<sup>88</sup> Clough, *Island China*, pp. 16-20.

<sup>89</sup> On Taiwan's growing passivity in the face of improving U.S.-PRC relations, see Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).