

## *Introduction*

In June 1995, Lee Teng-hui, the president of Taiwan, visited the United States, where he spoke at Cornell University, his alma mater, about the island's democratic transformation after decades of authoritarian rule. To show its displeasure, Beijing suspended the semiofficial contacts that it had developed with Taiwan's government and engaged in various displays of military power. Because Washington had allowed Lee to visit in the first place, Beijing also downgraded its relations with the United States.

In March 1996, when Taiwan was holding elections, China mounted even more aggressive displays of military force. The most provocative was launching unarmed ballistic missiles at targets outside the island's ports. The United States, concerned that war might occur through accident or miscalculation and that China might misread U.S. resolve to protect Taiwan, sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the Taiwan area.

In July 1999, Lee Teng-hui stated in an interview with the press that the relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were between two states (or countries—the Chinese term that Lee used is ambiguous). China then unleashed a barrage of propaganda against Lee, and Chinese fighter aircraft patrolled further into the Taiwan Strait than usual. To prevent tensions from escalating, the United States sent diplomats to both Beijing and Taipei to encourage restraint.

In March 2000, it became clear that Chen Shui-bian, the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), might win the Taiwan presidential election. Historically, the DPP had advocated establishment of a republic of Taiwan completely separate from China. At a press conference a few days before voters were to cast their ballots, China's premier, Zhu Rongji, declared

in threatening tones that “Taiwan independence means war.” Because Beijing had already in effect declared that Chen was the independence candidate, Zhu’s bluster suggested that a Chen victory would be a *casus belli*. Chen did win the election, and Washington again sent envoys to urge restraint.<sup>1</sup>

In 2002 and 2003, as part of his campaign for reelection, Chen made a series of statements that Beijing again interpreted as evidence that he was preparing to disrupt the status quo. It believed that his proposals to institute referenda and write a new constitution signaled that—under the cloak of democratizing Taiwan—he would seek to make the country independent. In response, China issued increasingly shrill warnings. The United States sought in various ways to dissuade Chen from any such course, and on December 9, 2003, President George W. Bush declared in the presence of China’s premier, Wen Jiabao, that “we oppose any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo. And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose.”

Yet the Taiwan Strait area is not always as tense as it was or appeared to be in the summer of 1995, March 1996, July 1999, March 2000, or late 2003. However, those episodes demonstrate with exceptional clarity that the China-Taiwan dispute is dangerous and could erupt in war. They show just as clearly that if war broke out, the United States might be one of the warring parties if it decided that its own national interests required it to defend Taiwan against China—which happens to possess nuclear weapons. They also reveal that this is an odd sort of quarrel, one in which China’s hostile reactions are not a response to a military threat but to the political threat that Beijing perceives in the travel and comments of Taiwan’s leaders and in certain outcomes of its elections.

Indeed, from a broader perspective, it seems implausible that there would be much of a conflict at all. Other regional conflicts in the news—in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Cyprus, and the Middle East, for example—have a set of common characteristics. They involve populations that are socially distinct but live in close physical proximity. Often there are multiple divisions among these populations, including differences in religion, language, ethnicity, and social customs. A mutually beneficial economic division of labor is lacking, and one group often dominates the other. Long, bitter memories of past conflict infuse current hostilities with what is an almost fight-to-the-death intensity. Paramilitary forces ( Hamas, the IRA ) that see it in their political interest to use violence to undermine and destroy efforts to resolve a conflict peacefully often are among the actors in these tragic dramas.

Because people live cheek by jowl, such violence results in at least a low-level civil war. Moreover, each of the conflicts mentioned has been the object of vigorous international and U.S. peacemaking efforts. In Northern Ireland and the Middle East, plans emerged that seemed to secure a foundation for an enduring peace but then collapsed to some degree in the process of implementation. In the case of Bosnia, the jury is still out.

The conflict between China and Taiwan certainly began in a similar way. After Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army seized control of the Chinese mainland from Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party—following years of high- and low-level conflict that began in the late 1920s—Chiang's army retreated to Taiwan. From 1949 until the 1980s, the two sides continued to be locked in a bitter military and ideological struggle that precluded any kind of economic or social cooperation. Mao sought to “liberate” the island; Chiang sought to mount a “counterattack” to retake the mainland. Chiang's Republic of China (ROC) fought to preserve its international recognition as the government of all of China; Mao's People's Republic of China (PRC) fought just as hard to wrest that status from it. The United States was caught in the middle. Clearly, the political conflict in the Taiwan Strait did not begin in the era of presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian.

Yet the Taiwan Strait conflict today is very different from some other regional conflicts, both in its underlying configuration and in its prospects for resolution. First of all, China and Taiwan are separated by about 100 miles of water, removing the opportunity for easy infiltration (à la North Vietnam into South Vietnam) and the sort of communal conflict endemic in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland until the late 1990s. To be sure, the two sides have formidable military capabilities, and they are acquiring more. But this is a case in which a tall fence, in the form of the Taiwan Strait, makes it possible for them to be better neighbors.

Second, the people involved are socially and culturally the same. The population of Taiwan is made up of two major groups, both of which came from China. The first are descendants of people who migrated to the island from southeastern China beginning in the sixteenth century (the so-called Taiwanese); the second were refugees who arrived before 1950 as the government and armed forces of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party fled the Chinese mainland after being defeated by the communists (the so-called mainlanders).<sup>2</sup> Taiwan and the PRC share a common written language; differences in the spoken language are merely dialectical deviations from a common base. Religion is not a source of conflict at all. Politics aside, people in China and Taiwan have much in common.

Most important, the two sides found compelling reasons to set aside some of their ideological differences for the sake of pragmatic cooperation. In order to remain globally competitive, Taiwan companies moved production from the island to the mainland beginning in the late 1980s. China welcomed the investment, which created jobs and contributed to its own economic development, in the process of which Chinese factories became a link in the global supply chain.

## **The Cross-Strait Knot**

And so a paradox presents itself. The economic and social interaction between Taiwan and China is broad and deep, yet a bitter political conflict that could take a violent form continues. The two societies have much in common, and their economies are complementary. Taiwan companies use mainland production facilities to maintain their profitability, and Chinese workers, engineers, and officials benefit as a result. Such interaction fosters some mutual understanding among certain sectors of the two societies, and yet political leaders in Beijing and Taipei mistrust each other's motives and intentions. Each side arms itself against any attempt by the other to irreversibly change the status quo. Through weapons systems such as submarines, cruise and ballistic missiles, and long-range bombers, China acquires the capacity to deploy its military power well beyond its borders and so deter Taiwan from moving toward *de jure* independence. Taiwan acquires advanced defensive systems to deter a mainland attack and to defend the island if deterrence fails. The absence of direct dialogue aggravates their mutual suspicion. Although each side understands that it has little or nothing to gain and much to lose from military conflict, war could come through accident or miscalculation if not deliberate action. Some hope that economic interdependence will be the prelude to political reconciliation. Others claim that Taiwan cannot resist an increasingly powerful China and should cut the best deal it can. Yet both reconciliation and Taiwan's submission to China's power seem remote possibilities.

Another curious feature of the conflict in the Taiwan Strait is the role of the United States. To be sure, for decades Washington has emphasized its "abiding interest" in a peaceful resolution of the dispute. It sells advanced weapons to Taiwan to maintain something of a military balance, and it has signaled that under certain circumstances it would come to Taiwan's defense if the PRC attacked the island. Yet unlike in the Balkans, the Middle East, or Northern Ireland, the United States has been reluctant to play a central role

in reducing the risk of war by trying to foster a settlement. Washington has sought to contain the situation in the Taiwan Strait and create a positive environment in which progress might occur, but it steers clear of special envoys, shuttle diplomacy, and mediation. Despite the real possibility that the United States might be drawn into a war between China and Taiwan, it has kept a cautious distance.

What explains the mismatch between Taiwan and China's economic cooperation and their political-military stalemate, between America's strategic stakes and its diplomatic diffidence? If human interchange in a variety of fields were not occurring, the conflict between Taiwan and China would be more understandable. But the economic and social interaction between the countries is quite robust. Why is the political dispute so difficult to resolve that it has become increasingly militarized? Will economic and social interaction attenuate the political disagreements and so facilitate a more stable and less conflict-prone relationship? Is there a mutually acceptable basis on which Beijing and Taipei might resolve their differences? Is there anything that the United States, which is inextricably a part of the dispute, can do to mitigate it? Or is this a problem that is likely to endure in spite of any countervailing forces?

Those are the questions that this book seeks to address, and it is important to address them. Whether the goal of U.S. policy is to resolve the Taiwan Strait dispute or only to try to manage it, U.S. decisionmakers must understand why it is so intractable. If Washington, without properly understanding the problem, decides to break with past policy and attempt to facilitate a solution, it could easily make the situation worse. Even if the goal is just to avoid conflict and preserve some measure of stability, knowing where to strike a balance requires a clear sense of what motivates the two contending forces in the first place.

By way of background, chapter 2 provides an overview of Taiwan's history and its relations with both China and the United States until the late 1980s. Chapter 3 presents the paradox in more detail. It charts on one hand the growing economic and social interaction across the Strait and on the other the development of the political stalemate that has existed since the early 1990s. Beijing's explanation for the impasse is that the island's leaders have sought to permanently separate Taiwan from China. For more than two decades, the PRC has offered a formula for unification—"One country, two systems"—that would give Taiwan home rule but reserve for itself the status of exclusive sovereign, including the right to represent China in the international community. Beijing has interpreted Lee Teng-hui's and Chen

Shui-bian's words and deeds as evidence of a separatist agenda. I reject that view as a misunderstanding of their fundamental positions and argue instead that although both opposed the PRC's formula for unification, they were not against unification in principle. Rather, they focused on the terms and conditions of any reassociation. Specifically, they sought a formula for unification that accepted Taipei's claim that its government was sovereign and that it had, among other things, the right to participate in the international system. In effect, Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian were as worried about *how* Taiwan was to be a part of China as *whether* it was. Or, to be more precise, they focused on the legal identity of the government in Taipei and its relationship to the Chinese state.

Chapters 4 and 5 address two issues that form the substance of the dispute between Taiwan and China: sovereignty and security. Chapter 4 elaborates on the previous discussion, exploring in more depth the concept of sovereignty and the related idea of the state and how the two pertain to the dispute. Taiwan does score well on a number of the formal criteria for statehood and sovereignty. The one where it is most deficient—participation in the international system through diplomatic relations with other countries and membership in international organizations—is the one where the PRC has used its considerable leverage to exclude Taiwan. Taiwan's case also is complicated by confusion over what territory its government claims as its sovereign domain. This analysis of sovereignty pinpoints the two questions that would have to be answered in any settlement of the dispute. First, would the government of Taiwan have a right to rule the territory under its jurisdiction except in those areas where it chose to cede that right? Second, would it have the right to participate as a full member of the international community? How Beijing applied the one-country, two-systems formula in Hong Kong—where it has rigged the political system to prevent outcomes that it opposes—is particularly relevant in attempting to answer the first question. Also germane, in a negative sense, is how Taiwan's situation is different from that of Western Europe, where countries have been willing to delegate and pool their sovereignty in the interest of closer economic integration. Unlike those nations, which were recognized as sovereign states at the outset, Taiwan is fighting for Beijing's acceptance of its claim to sovereignty in the first place and resisting Chinese efforts to undermine that claim.

The other core issue, security, is addressed in chapter 5. I argue that the two sides are locked in a security dilemma in which each fears that the other threatens its fundamental interests and so acts to counter the threat. More-

over, each fears that if it takes the initiative to break the stalemate by offering concessions, the other will exploit its goodwill, leaving it more vulnerable. In an important sense, of course, the dilemma that traps China and Taiwan is not the classic one of international relations literature, in which the mutual threat is military. In this case, it is Taiwan's potential political actions that create insecurity in Beijing. But to forestall such actions, China acquires advanced systems from Russia and improves the fighting capability of the People's Liberation Army. Taiwan's armed forces respond by seeking to purchase as much defensive weaponry as they can from the United States. The political character of the problem is magnified by Taiwan's reliance on Washington not only for arms but also for its commitment to come to Taiwan's defense if attacked, which is an obvious source of resentment and insecurity in Beijing. But that commitment is not an unqualified advantage for Taipei either. Like the junior partner in any alliance, it worries that the United States will abandon it; Washington, on the other hand, fears that Taipei might entrap it in a conflict that it does not want. Taiwan's insecurity, its dependence on the United States, and its fundamental mistrust of China's intentions dictate that Beijing would have to do a lot to persuade Taipei to give up its alliance with the United States.

The sovereignty and security issues are the two substantive strands of the cross-Strait knot. They are twisted strands, because Taiwan's claim of sovereign status strengthens its justification for U.S. security assistance. Three aggravating factors tighten the knot, making the substantive issues even more difficult to resolve.

The first, discussed in chapter 6, is domestic politics in each country. In Taiwan, history, the politics of opposition, and how the democratic system currently functions all constrain the freedom of its leaders to bargain with Beijing. Harsh Nationalist Party rule after 1949 created among the Taiwanese the strong sense that they were different from mainlanders. They also began to conceive of Taiwan as a separate country and to develop an intense fear of outsiders. Their sense of having an exclusively Taiwanese identity plus their grievances after decades of repression at the hands of the Nationalist Party fueled their opposition to its rule and, in some quarters, gave rise to the desire for a Taiwan independent of China. It was the Democratic Progressive Party, the party of Chen Shui-bian, that led the opposition, and to this day the DPP has a clause regarding Taiwan's independence in its charter.

Yet Taiwanese identity politics has focused more on securing a democratic system and gaining international respect than on creating a separate state, a Republic of Taiwan totally independent of China. And, dialectically,

the democratic system that emerged in the 1990s forced the opposition DPP to moderate its goals relating to Taiwan's independence in order to secure public support. Politics nevertheless has solidified an island-wide consensus *against* the one-country, two-systems proposal. But as a practical matter, it also makes it hard to secure broad approval of a package that addressed the sovereignty and security issues in a manner more to Taiwan's liking, if the PRC were ever to offer one. The electoral system has fostered the representation of radical views and the fragmentation of political parties, and constitutional defects complicate relations among the various parts of the governmental system. The rules of the legislature give small minorities a veto over controversial proposals, and the constitution requires a three-quarters margin to enact constitutional amendments.

On the mainland, nationalism and politics within the elite have had a similar effect. Policy is refracted through a personalized leadership system in which principal officeholders must build consensus for their initiatives, and their freedom of action varies by issue and over time. Taiwan is a particularly radioactive matter because the lack of resolution of the cross-Strait impasse has long deferred China's national unification. Any top leader who mishandles the issue is vulnerable to attacks from his competitors and key institutional groups like the military. Those responsible for PRC policy on Taiwan are reluctant to stray too far from the default position (the one-country, two-systems approach formulated more than two decades ago) and remain alert to any sign that Taipei is moving toward a permanent separation.

Politics within the communist leadership can be particularly delicate at times of a major succession, which is usually a gradual affair. Those in the retiring generation seek to keep their hand in important policy issues, none of which is more important than Taiwan. Members of the rising generation are reluctant to reveal their preferences on key policy issues, particularly regarding Taiwan, for fear of derailing their bid for power. Thus Jiang Zemin, who dominated Taiwan policy since the mid-1990s, was slow to cede control of decisionmaking to his successor, Hu Jintao.

Public opinion in China can also affect the handling of Taiwan policy. The "public" has different layers, with intellectuals who have connections with the party-state often having more influence on policy than the general population. Yet as the mass media become more competitive, popular nationalist sentiment can become more extreme than the regime propaganda that inspired it and so place limits on the leadership. That is especially true if the leadership is divided on an issue like Taiwan; if U.S.-China relations are poor; and if public opinion is mobilized by particular events. Periodic crises



in cross-Strait relations have evoked flurries of Chinese commentaries and proposals whose recurring theme is that Beijing must be more resolute in dealing with Taiwanese (and American) perfidy. The danger for the paramount leader, of course, is that opponents will seek to use public criticism of his policies to mount a challenge to his leadership.

The second factor aggravating cross-Strait relations, discussed in chapter 7, is the decisionmaking process in both Beijing and Taipei. The policy process in each capital is more pluralistic and institutionalized than was the case twenty years ago, particularly when neither government is in a state of crisis. Still, each government is institutionally prone to read the worst into each other's intentions and into those of the United States. Moreover, because the cross-Strait issue is crucial to the survival of leaders in both Taiwan and China, top leaders still tend to control it, particularly in times of tension, and that centralization increases the possibility of misinterpretation. Thus at various points China has misread the motivation behind Taiwan's initiatives and exaggerated the threat that they pose to China's core interests. At a minimum, such misconceptions limit Beijing's willingness to make constructive concessions; at worst, they foster a tendency to overreact, which then deepens Taiwan's sense of insecurity. The Taipei government has had similar problems.

The third complicating factor, covered in chapter 8, is the attempt of each side to gain advantage over the other. Taiwan exerts significant effort to reenter, in some capacity, the international organizations that it was forced to depart twenty or thirty years ago. Having engineered that departure, China is ever vigilant in blocking Taipei's efforts to reenter. In addition, China takes advantage of the openness of Taiwan's political system to advance its interests. As in Hong Kong, China pursues a united front strategy in Taiwan, using the business community and the political parties opposed to Chen Shui-bian to check him and, in the long-run, create a better climate for unification on its terms. The zero-sum quality of this game complicates any effort to ameliorate the dispute.

A special object of the leverage game is U.S. policy, and the role of the United States is addressed in chapter 9. Taiwan devotes considerable energy to preserving the support it receives from the United States and to securing a stronger and more reliable U.S. commitment—which includes cultivating friends in Congress as a check against unfavorable actions by the executive branch. Beijing works to dilute administration support for Taiwan so that the latter will be in a less advantageous negotiating position. The core of Washington's "one-China policy," however, is to emphasize process, partic-

ularly peaceful means to resolve cross-Strait problems, rather than the substantive issues that divide China and Taiwan. It thus has sought to restrain China from using force and Taiwan from taking political initiatives that China might conclude justify the use of force. The United States has, on the other hand, eschewed any formal role as mediator.

What are the prospects of resolving this dispute, of untying this twisted and tightened knot? There is, of course, the possibility that China's strategy of economic enticement and its united front tactics will wear down Taiwan's resistance and produce an agreement based more or less on China's terms. Chapter 10 assumes such a scenario to be unlikely into the foreseeable future because of the strength of Taiwan's national identity; it examines instead whether there are ways to reconcile the substantive issues at play and ameliorate the aggravating factors. Regarding the sovereignty issue, some type of confederation would in the abstract satisfy the minimum objectives of each side: Beijing would get a form of unification and Taiwan would preserve its claim that its government retains sovereignty within a national union. And indeed, various Taiwanese political forces have suggested such an approach, although so far the PRC has rejected it. On the security side, there appears to be no simple *substantive* formula that would allay Taiwan's sense of insecurity, certainly not enough to lead it to cut its ties to the United States; it also seems that so far China has preferred to exacerbate Taiwan's sense of insecurity rather than relieve it. It is more feasible to begin a process of taking conditional and reciprocal steps (involving, for example, confidence-building and arms control measures) that over time would give Taiwan sufficient assurance that Beijing would not renege on any commitments that it made. As for the aggravating factors, if there is to be any mitigation of the corrosive effects of the leverage game, Beijing and Taipei would have to agree to a truce in the international arena and Beijing would have to pledge not to meddle in Taiwan's politics. With respect to China's domestic politics, national leaders might have a hard time selling a change in the one-country, two-systems concept after having sung its praises for so many years. But the larger political problem probably lies in Taipei, where a system that creates radical minorities and then gives them veto power might well fail to approve a substantive offer from Beijing that if viewed objectively would be seen to work in Taiwan's favor. To even start the process of negotiation, Beijing would have to abandon the preconditions it has imposed, and given Taiwan's sense of insecurity, it would have to accept a gradual process to produce a series of interlocking agreements rather than one grand bargain. In sum, if there is a deal to be had based on the current positions of the two sides,

China would have to make more concessions to get the process going and to bridge substantive differences. Taiwan, with its choice-averse political system, would have the harder job securing ratification of any agreements produced.

Such a negotiation process appears to dictate a limited role for the United States, and neither side necessarily trusts Washington's credibility enough to allow it to play a more central role. Beijing in particular has opposed internationalizing the dispute, except when it decides that it needs U.S. help to block Taiwan's actions. Taiwan could mobilize its influence in the U.S. political system to block any trend in negotiations that it did not like, even if it sought U.S. involvement in the process at the outset. Moreover, the United States is a party to the dispute, since it is the sole source of Taiwan's security and thus much of its psychological confidence. That support would be a key issue in negotiations between Taiwan and China, and how it was addressed would determine whether the security dilemma was resolved. In that respect alone, it is hard to see how Washington could be an honest broker and maintain both Taipei's and Beijing's confidence.

Nor is it clear what substantive value the United States might contribute to untying the cross-Strait knot. Given the positions of the two sides, the contours of the content necessary for any agreement are fairly apparent. What is missing is the political will on each side to make the necessary concessions, the mutual confidence that each side will keep its part of a bargain, and the domestic political capacity, particularly in Taiwan, to ratify any agreement. Those are not gaps that Washington can—or should—fill; direct dialogue between the two parties is far more likely to succeed in that regard. However, the United States may be able to play a useful role that speaks to the defects of the decisionmaking process on each side—that is, Washington might act as intellectual facilitator, interpreting the views of one side to the other, in order to reduce the possibility of misperception. In addition, there inevitably would be discussions between Washington and Taipei when security issues were under negotiation. Finally, the United States might serve as a guarantor of whatever agreement was reached to improve the chances that the two parties would live up to their obligations.

What the three parties should do if the knot cannot be untied is the subject of chapter 11. There is, of course, the possibility that over time the PRC's basic strategy will work and Taiwan will accommodate itself to the reality of China's power. Economics will trump political principles and military insecurity. Given the strength of the Taiwanese national identity and the defects of the political system, that seems unlikely. The task then will be to stabilize

the situation to prevent future crises. For example, during his campaign for reelection, President Chen Shui-bian proposed that Taiwan write a new constitution and ratify it by referendum. Beijing judged that proposal to be tantamount to creating a new state, which it vowed to oppose by force if no other checks were placed on Chen. Once he had won another term and after encouragement from the United States, Chen retreated from his proposal and pledged to pursue only domestic political reform and do so according to established procedures. The PRC nevertheless believed that his restraint was more apparent than real and that his goal remained the permanent separation of Taiwan from China. It warned the Bush administration that Washington would have to impose strict limits on Chen in order to guarantee that China would not resort to military action against him.

The prospects for a military conflict in Chen Shui-bian's second term probably are not as dire as China initially believed. Preventing conflict will require Chen to manage domestic politics so that institutional reform remains his agenda and Beijing comes to understand that such an agenda does not threaten its fundamental interests. The United States will have to continue to emphasize dual deterrence, encouraging restraint on Taiwan regarding the content of a revised constitution and on the PRC regarding its response.

Such mutual restraint would reduce the chance of a conflict, but it would not ensure that one would not erupt through accident or miscalculation. Any war would have horrific consequences for China and Taiwan and pose enormous challenges for the United States and other nations in the international community. Nor would a truce concerning the revision of Taiwan's constitution foster stability. That, it seems, would require China to adopt a new approach to how to protect its equities and Taiwan to change its view of what is most important. Beijing's current strategy—ignoring the Chen administration and depriving it of policy successes, quarantining Taiwan in the international community, increasing Taiwan's insecurity by building up China's military, and meddling in Taiwan's politics—is yielding diminishing returns. It would gain more by initiating a limited engagement with the Chen administration, which could reduce misunderstanding about both sides' intentions; facilitate the opening of transportation links (so far blocked by the sovereignty dispute); and allow Taiwan more international space. Such steps would have a positive impact on public opinion in Taiwan, particularly among the approximately half of the population that favors some accommodation of China.

Taiwan, in addition to showing restraint on its cross-Strait initiatives, needs to emphasize substance instead of symbols. There is an all-too-common tendency on the island to focus on status and terminology instead of the underlying sources of national power. Because China's power will continue to grow, Taiwan must take steps to strengthen itself economically, diplomatically, psychologically, militarily, and politically. Certainly it should do so if the dispute with Beijing is likely to continue, but self-strengthening would be valuable even if there was the promise of settlement. And if the stalemate persists, the United States should continue what has been its usual policy: dual deterrence. That is, Washington would try to restrain Beijing from using military force and Taipei from taking political initiatives that might lead Beijing to react militarily.

Whether or not the Taiwan-China knot can be unraveled, all parties concerned must understand how the strands are twisted, tied, and tightened. Better understanding of the dispute is the first step toward making it less dangerous—and away from exacerbating it through bad analysis of the nature of the problem, including how each party views the intentions of the other. This study seeks to contribute to that understanding.