



Military Confidence-Building Measures: Averting Accidents and Building Trust in the Taiwan Strait

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Much attention has been paid in recent years to escalating tensions across the Taiwan Strait. Especially in the aftermath of the reelection of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian in March 2004, political relations between Beijing and Taipei have entered a deep freeze. Chinese leaders refuse to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, and People's Republic of China (PRC) officials periodically warn ominously that China will not stand idly by if President Chen continues to take steps aimed at permanently separating Taiwan from the mainland. Chen Shui-bian, for his part, is unwilling to accept Beijing's "one-China" principle and instead seeks to promote the national identity of Taiwan and consolidate its status as an independent, sovereign state. The growing potential for Cross-Strait military conflict has provoked concern in Washington as well as in other regional capitals.

The rising danger of war rightly deserves the attention of policymakers and analysts. Consideration should be accorded, however, not only to deterring the planned use of military force but also to avoiding an unforeseen and unwanted accident between Chinese and Taiwan military forces that could escalate to a wider conflict. The possibility of a mishap—for example, a collision between two aircraft—is real and may be growing because of the increased numbers of sorties conducted by both sides along the "centerline" of the Taiwan Strait. This article advances the argument that the potential for miscalculation or accident that could escalate to conflict should not be ignored. To avert an incident that could trig-

ger an unplanned war, as well as to build trust between the two sides of the Strait, confidence-building measures (CBMs) should be implemented to reduce the chance of an armed clash arising from miscalculation or accident and provide the means to defuse a crisis should one occur.

Increased Air Activity Along the Centerline of the Taiwan Strait

Increased air and naval activity in close proximity to the centerline of the Taiwan Strait has heightened the potential for an accident. Both governments occasionally accuse the other side of crossing the centerline and threaten retaliation in response to continued transgressions. The centerline was drawn by the United States when it signed the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan in 1954. An addendum to that treaty marked a buffer zone into which American planes would not intrude. The eastern boundary of this buffer zone is now referred to as the centerline of the Strait.¹ Although the buffer zone is generally observed by the three parties, as well as by civil aviation authorities, the exact course of the line was unspecified until May 26, 2004, when Taiwan's Defense Minister Lee Jye defined the line during a legislative session. He pointedly threatened to shoot down Chinese military aircraft should they cross the centerline of the Taiwan Strait. "Whenever their aircraft or vessels are approaching the middle line, our aircraft and

vessels will be standing by. . . . Once they keep going east and enter our ‘hunting zone,’ we will take care of them,” he maintained.² Lee Jye’s definition of the centerline proved inaccurate, however, and Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) later issued a correction, saying that the line should run from 26°30’ north latitude, 121°23’ minutes east longitude to 24°50’ north latitude, 119°59’ minutes east longitude, to 23°17’ north latitude, 117°51’ minutes east longitude.³

Although Beijing and Taipei have maintained a tacit understanding about the centerline for the past five decades, the mainland officially denies that such a line exists, claiming that because Taiwan is part of China, there cannot be a centerline over a body of water that belongs to China. In a chat with netizens about Chen Shui-bian’s May 20, 2004, inauguration address on *The People’s Daily’s* “Strong Nation’s Forum,” Zhu Xianlong, deputy director of Beijing Union University’s Institute for Taiwan Studies, asserted: “We do not recognize the existence of a centerline. The mainland can cross over Taiwan’s so-called centerline at anytime.”⁴

Nevertheless, the Chinese have castigated Taiwan for deliberately sending its military jets across the centerline. An article in the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA’s) *Liberation Daily* contended in late May that a number of Taiwan fighter jets had been detected “suddenly flashing across the sky over the Taiwan Strait and slyly flying at low altitude toward the territorial waters of the mother mainland.” The article cited this episode as “only one of the many malicious provocations by Taiwan fighter jets.” The article warned that Taiwan fighter jets that cross the centerline and enter PRC airspace would be destroyed or forced to land on a mainland base. China’s “deadly blow” would include “attacking the supporting forces on Taiwan.”⁵

A spokesman for Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense denied China’s charge that its fighter planes had crossed the centerline, insisting that Taiwan’s “current national defense policy is to prevent war, maintain stability in the Taiwan Strait, and ensure national security.” He

claimed that Taiwan’s military planes and ships conducting various operations do not cross the centerline of the Strait. Should mainland vessels or planes transgress the centerline, Taiwan would “take appropriate action,” he warned, noting that the military always follows the guidelines of “no provocation, no display of weakness, and no avoidance” in conducting operations to maintain peace and safety in territorial waters and airspace.⁶

Both PRC and Taiwan fighters have stepped up their sorties in the Strait in recent years, including flights by jets occasionally crossing the centerline either inadvertently or deliberately. Prior to the latter half of the 1990s, PLA aircraft refrained from flying any distance into the Strait. According to a Taiwan MND spokesman in August 1999, the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) began to fly into the Taiwan Strait following Beijing’s 1996 military exercise in which China launched missile tests off the coast of Taiwan.⁷ The PLAAF flew approximately 1,400 sorties in the Taiwan Strait area during that episode.⁸ It wasn’t until June 1998, however, that the PLAAF began to increase its flight activity near the centerline.⁹ That year Chinese fighters flew 464 sorties along the centerline. The frequency of those sorties jumped to 1,226 in 1999 and since then has remained in the range between 1,220 and 1,380 sorties annually.¹⁰

China’s increased air activity over the Strait is directly related to its growing dissatisfaction with Taiwan’s policies, which are perceived by Beijing as provocative. A few weeks after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui declared on July 9, 1999, that a special state-to-state relationship existed between Taiwan and the mainland, the PLAAF crossed the centerline for the first time. A U.S. official said that China, “which rarely sends planes over the Taiwan Strait, has flown more than 100 sorties with three different types of aircraft, including advanced Sukhoi-27s recently acquired from Russia.” Another senior administration official indicated that Taiwanese aircraft had flown a similar number of times and “ventured over the centerline of the 100-milewide Strait.”¹¹ The PLAAF also sent its fighter jets to

the centerline of the Strait prior to Taiwan's elections in 2001.¹²

In the largest air exercise conducted by the PRC in the Taiwan Strait to date, on September 27, 2004, the PLAAF mobilized six models of aircraft, including Su-27, Su-30, J-8, and J-10 fighters as well as various bombers, and flew more than 30 sorties toward the centerline of the Strait.¹³ According to one source, the exercise was unusual in many respects. First, the PLAAF rarely flies so many different models of aircraft at the same time. Second, the number of sorties was much higher than in the past. Third, the fighters participating in the maneuvers took off from air bases in Nanjing and Guangzhou and then flew to sea. During previous coastal training exercises involving aircraft stationed at two different bases, the planes conducted "base change" operations, flying from their home base to the second base and then returning to their home base. Fourth, whereas in previous exercises the PLAAF had returned to their home base after approaching the Strait, on September 27 the aircraft regrouped at a designated point over the sea. They then formed into columns and flew back to their base in formation, which was described as making them appear "unprecedentedly 'mighty.'"¹⁴

In response to the PLAAF's show of force in late September, Taiwan scrambled a large number of fighter jets, and the situation that day was described by MND officers as extremely tense. Beijing's political intention in conducting such a large exercise was apparently discussed by Taiwan military analysts, but no consensus was reached. Some believed the exercises were carried out in response to the statement by Taiwan Premier Yu Shyi-kun a few days earlier. He suggested that Taiwan should rely on a cold-war-style "balance of terror" to safeguard national security in the face of intimidation from Beijing. Yu publicly asserted, "If you fire 100 missiles at me, I should be able to fire at least 50 missiles at you. If you launch an attack on . . . Kaohsiung, I should be able to launch a counterattack on Shanghai."¹⁵ Other experts rejected this explanation, claiming that such an exercise would have

required at least a month of preparations for flight plans. Another theory posited that the military maneuvers were primarily a long-distance training exercise for PRC fighter pilots but may have been timed to send a signal to Taiwan and the United States before the U.S. general elections and the Taiwan Legislative Yuan elections.¹⁶

Prior to the September 27 episode, senior Taiwan military officers expressed concern that China would step up PLAAF flights to the centerline or even cross the line in response to objectionable policies pursued by Taipei. For example, before Taiwan held its first ever referendum simultaneous with the March 2004 presidential poll, *United Daily News* interviewed 24 Taiwan generals about the planned referendum. Several of the generals cited increased PLA sorties approaching the centerline as a possible consequence.¹⁷

The Danger of an Accident Is Present

The potential for miscalculation or accident that could escalate to conflict is growing. Increased sorties by PRC and Taiwan fighters in the Taiwan Strait, including jets occasionally crossing the centerline either deliberately or inadvertently, pose such a risk, especially in the absence of a communications link between the two militaries that could be used in a crisis to clarify both sides' intentions. Senior Taiwan civilian officials acknowledge that Republic of China (ROC) and PRC planes are flying in close proximity to each other, pilots are locking onto aircraft from the other side, and both sides are conducting patrols very close to the centerline of the Strait.¹⁸ Moreover, besides the danger of an accident between military forces, there is the danger of an accidental collision of a combat aircraft and a civilian aircraft, as about 340 international flights and 730 domestic flights fly over the Taiwan Strait every day.¹⁹

According to Ken Allen, a leading expert on the PLAAF, a military incident at the centerline

of the Strait also could involve two or more combat aircraft pilots transitioning from radar search mode to lock on mode, a collision between a reconnaissance aircraft and a reacting fighter, or actions taken by aircraft from one or both sides while reacting to an incident between two ships near the centerline. The possibility also exists of one aircraft crashing because of sudden engine malfunction while in the same area as an aircraft from the other side of the centerline, but the air controllers on the ground from both sides may misinterpret the cause and scramble more aircraft to deal with what they consider a provocation.²⁰ In the event of a collision, the proximate cause may be unclear. A wingman may witness the result but not the cause of the accident, as occurred in the case of the midair collision between China's F-8 fighter and the U.S. EP-3E reconnaissance plane on April 1, 2001. Rather than investigating the incident, the Chinese leadership accepted the wingman's version of events, which complicated efforts to defuse tensions and resolve the crisis.

Other possible triggers of military conflict include (a) accidents/border violations during intelligence collection missions, (b) accidental firing of guns/missiles, (c) intimidating exercises, (d) a submarine incident, (e) hijacking or defection of planes/ships, (f) blockade/quarantine practices, (g) PRC searches of ships en route to Taiwan, (h) naval incursions across the centerline, and (i) collisions of ships.²¹

U.S. officials first publicly expressed concern about the possibility of a mishap that could escalate to conflict in 1999, after Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's "two states theory" sparked increased military sorties by the PRC that were responded to by Taiwan fighters. Acknowledging that both Taiwan and China had flown a "fairly large number of sorties," a U.S. State Department spokesman cautioned that "any time you have military aircraft flying this close to each other in these numbers, there is concern about accidents. We do have such concern and we don't think either side should be taking steps that will increase tensions across the Taiwan Straits." U.S. officials

also have urged the establishment of mechanisms between China and Taiwan to avert accidents and miscalculation as well as to enhance their capabilities to manage an unplanned incident. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly made such a plea in testimony to the House International Relations Committee on April 21, 2004: "It is also time that the two sides begin exploring confidence-building measures that reduce the chance for military miscalculation and accidents and improve the quality of communications in the event of a crisis," Kelly stated.²²

Washington's worries about an accident in the Taiwan Strait that could raise political tensions or escalate to a broader military conflict have been dismissed by many PLA and ROC military officers as unfounded. Taiwan MND officials say they are relatively unconcerned about the possibility of a mishap occurring between Chinese and Taiwanese forces. They express confidence that if such an accident were to occur, it would be managed prudently by both sides and would not escalate out of control. For example, a senior MND official interviewed two weeks after the September 27 episode, when the PLAAF flew an unusually large number of planes in the Taiwan Strait, denied that the danger of an accident had increased in recent years and dismissed the need for hotlines or other CBMs to reduce the chances of escalation following a mishap. For the time being, he insisted, "CBMs are needed for political reasons, not military reasons." He added, however, that if the military balance tilts toward the PRC, especially in air power, the danger of an accident may increase.

The confidence of MND officials is largely based on Taiwan's unilateral rules of engagement (ROE) and the patterns of behavior established by both sides of the Strait over the past five decades. Taiwan's ROE require that ROC pilots take the first shot and suffer the first fatality. If a Taiwan fighter is fired on, the pilot cannot return fire before receiving authorization from the minister of defense. At sea similar ROE exist that require ROC surface combatants to sail a certain distance from PLA Navy ships. There is a tacit

understanding with the mainland that ROC planes carrying supplies to the outer islands can cross the centerline without interference.²³ Ships that sail to Kinmen and Matsu use specific routes that are known to the other side, and schedules are regular and predictable.

The ROE followed by the PLAAF are less clear but likely exist. During the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis, for example, the PRC's Central Military Commission established the following three ROE. (1) The Air Force could not enter the high seas to conduct operations; (2) if the Nationalist Air Force did not bomb the mainland, the PLAAF could not bomb Quemoy and Matsu; and (3) the Air Force was not allowed to attack the U.S. military but could defend against any U.S. aircraft entering Chinese territory.²⁴ Similar PLAAF ROE probably exist for the situation with Taiwan at this time. A recent article published by the PLA's *Liberation Army Daily* may provide some insight into current ROE.

In accordance with the latest combat regulations, if Taiwan fighter jets fly close to or toward the centerline of the strait, mainland China will immediately give warnings, evict them, intercept them, or fire at non-targets. If the Taiwan armed forces attack mainland's planes and naval vessels from outside the centerline of the strait, then mainland China will immediately counter-attack or pursue and attack them.²⁵

The danger of a conflict resulting from an accident or miscalculation that escalates out of control is not a concern of the PLA, according to senior Chinese military officers. Echoing their Taiwan counterparts, PLA officers emphasize that tacit self-restraint measures are already in place that are effective in managing unexpected incidents between the two militaries. "We have successfully managed accidents and [avoided] possible escalation," asserted a major general from China's National Defense University. "We don't need CBMs to handle accidents."²⁶

Unless tension is dangerously high and one side or the other is seeking to incite a conflict, the Chinese believe that accidents are not likely to escalate to war or even a political crisis. Accidents are considered tactical, not strategic, problems. A major general from the PLA General Staff's China Institute of International Strategic Studies (CISS) contended that historically accidents have only triggered a war when the political environment was exceedingly tense and war served at least one of the parties' interests. "Generally speaking, Cross-Strait relations are not at that stage of tension," he maintained. "Both sides are trying to avoid military conflict."²⁷

Another PLA major general from the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) similarly declared, "there will only be a war if we want one." Expressing the conviction that the ROC military would cooperate with the PRC in the event of an accident, the officer stated, "this is proven by past experience."²⁸ A military researcher at another leading think tank affiliated with the PLA observed that China's assessment that accidental conflict is unlikely derives from the belief that "ROC forces are under the mandate of the political leadership and will not give up their self-restraint policy."²⁹ He maintained that a tacit "code of conduct" is already in place that consists of "unilateral measures" designed to avert a military mishap.

Only one Chinese expert of dozens interviewed maintained that the danger of an accident leading to armed fire and even unwanted conflict exists and could be mitigated through CBMs. The researcher, a retired military officer, asserted that PLA fighters are operating with growing frequency in the Taiwan Strait and occasionally deliberately cross the tacit centerline. ROC fighters are regularly scrambling to intercept PLAAF aircraft. Such activities could cause a collision, he suggested, that would not serve either side's interests.³⁰

If Chinese and Taiwanese pilots continue to operate in compliance with their unilateral ROE, it would seem unlikely that an accident would occur. There is, however, the possibility that an

individual “cowboy” pilot could take provocative actions that might cause a collision, as occurred when a Chinese F-8 rammed into a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance plane. In that instance, Chinese pilot Wang Wei was described by the EP-3 pilot, U.S. Navy Lieutenant Shane Osborn, as engaging in harassment: flying too close to the EP-3—within three to five feet—and making gestures at his American counterparts.³¹ Following that incident, senior MND officials privately expressed anxiety to their American counterparts about the danger of a similar accident between Taiwanese and Chinese forces. The inability of the United States to establish quick communications with Chinese military or civilian officials after the accident raised concerns about how Taiwan would communicate with the mainland to defuse tensions in the event that a comparable incident occurred.³²

There also is cause to be concerned about a preplanned accident by either Taiwan or the PRC, although neither side of the Strait discusses such an event. The PLAAF or the ROC air force could be ordered to provoke an incident over the Taiwan Strait in order to meet certain domestic political needs. Moreover, if Taiwan revises its primarily defensive military strategy and adopts a more offensive doctrine, the danger of an accident escalating to a political or military crisis would increase. Currently the PLA has little concern that Taiwan would launch an attack on the mainland and thus would not likely overreact to a military mishap. If Taiwan were to alter its clearly defensive ROE, the mainland might be more likely to open fire on ROC aircraft if one of China’s fighters inexplicably went down.

Cross-Strait CBMs Viewed from China and Taiwan

Both Taiwan and China have called for the establishment of a Cross-Strait military CBM. Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian explicitly endorsed the pursuit of Cross-Strait military CBMs

on March 18, 2000, in his election victory speech in which he stated: “With the prerequisite of ensuring state security and the people’s interests, we are willing to negotiate on cross-strait direct transportation and trade links, investment, a peace agreement, a military mutual confidence-building mechanism, and other issues.”³³

Prior to Chen Shui-bian’s election, his Democratic People’s party (DPP) published a White Paper on national defense that included a long section on Cross-Strait CBMs.³⁴ CBMs were portrayed as a means of averting conflict as a result of accident or miscalculation as well as an instrument to build trust and foster goodwill between the two sides of the Strait. Taiwan’s 2002 and 2004 defense white papers also contained sections on Cross-Strait CBMs, including a list of CBMs that could be implemented in the near term, mid-term, and long term.

More recently President Chen Shui-bian reaffirmed his commitment to the creation of a military CBM across the Taiwan Strait. On October 10, in a speech marking the 93rd birthday of the ROC, Chen called on the PRC to “formally end the state of hostility across the Taiwan Strait and establish a military mutual trust mechanism through consultations and negotiations.” In addition, he proposed that China and Taiwan “review the armament policies of both sides and seek to establish a ‘Code of Conduct across the Taiwan Strait’ as the tangible guarantee of permanent peace.”³⁵ A month later, Chen released a 10-point summary of key points developed at a November National Security Council meeting that he chaired to elaborate on the planned Code of Conduct. In the military sphere, Chen offered assurances that Taiwan would never develop weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and called on the PRC to renounce the development of WMDs. He also endorsed a military buffer zone from which aircraft and ships from both sides would be banned unless absolutely necessary and with advance notification. In this area, he called for a Taiwan Strait consultations mechanism modeled on the U.S.–U.S.S.R. 1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) and the 1998 U.S.–PRC

Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA).³⁶

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council Chairman Joseph Wu has also publicly advocated a military CBM agenda with mainland China. He has proposed such ideas as exchanging observers to military exercises, establishing emergency hotlines, and entering into agreements not to fire the first shot and to refrain from crossing the centerline of the Taiwan Strait.³⁷ Wu also proposed a four-stage process aimed at deescalating regional tensions and promoting greater Cross-Strait interaction. In the first stage, already under way, Taiwan pursues a conciliatory policy, including unilateral goodwill gestures. In the second stage, Taiwan and China would engage in negotiations on substantive issues such as currency exchange, the protection of investments, the avoidance of double taxation, legal arbitration, the protection of international property rights, tourism, the repatriation of illegal immigrants, joint efforts to combat Cross-Strait crime, and direct transportation links. Through the negotiation of these substantive issues, the two sides would slowly build confidence and mutual trust. In the third stage, Taiwan would seek to establish an interim framework for peace and stability to govern activities between the two sides before a final settlement can be found. Military CBMs would be implemented in this phase, and political negotiations would begin. In the fourth and final stage, China and Taiwan would resolve their political differences and reach a final settlement.³⁸

China officially proposed the establishment of a Cross-Strait CBM for the first time on May 17, 2004, in a statement issued by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the Chinese Communist party Central Committee. The initiative was depicted as one of seven positive paths that Cross-Strait relations could take under the precondition that Taiwan accept the mainland's "one-China" principle.³⁹ According to senior military researchers, the recommendation to include the establishment of a Cross-Strait CBM mechanism in the statement was made by the PLA. They cited increasing military input in

decision making on Taiwan policy and responding to appeals from the ROC military to engage in CBMs as reasons for the PLA's initiative.⁴⁰

Bolstering China's military capabilities to deter Taiwan's independence and provide greater options if deterrence fails are deemed necessary but insufficient approaches to dealing with the challenge posed by what the Chinese term "creeping independence." To entice Taiwan's people to become part of China, a growing number of Chinese scholars recognize that Beijing has to offer incentives. CBMs are viewed as providing tangible benefits to Taiwan. "The entire policy toward Taiwan includes both push and pull," noted a PLA major general from the AMS, adding that "CBMs are part of the pull."

In the absence of agreement on the one-China principle, however, PLA officers stressed that CBMs would benefit Chen Shui-bian's goal of achieving "peaceful independence" and therefore would not be possible.⁴¹ Because of the asymmetrical threat perceptions in China and Taiwan, many Chinese argue, CBMs would provide reassurance and alleviate Taiwan's concerns about an attack from China but would do nothing to ease Beijing's worries about Taiwan's drift away from the mainland.

From Beijing's perspective, CBMs require a political foundation. In contrast to Western experiences in confidence building that emphasize a bottom-up approach in which preliminary trust-building measures lay the groundwork for more advanced steps, the Chinese prefer a top-down approach in which political principles are agreed to first. Without trust and concurrence on broad strategic principles, the Chinese see nothing to be gained from implementing CBMs. Such a top-down model has been followed in China's relations with many of its neighbors, including Russia, the former Soviet states on China's border, Vietnam, and India. "If the Taiwan authorities don't change their mind[s] about independence, then CBMs are useless," asserted a Chinese arms control expert who worked in China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1990s.⁴²

Chen's reelection for another four-year term

has heightened Beijing's vigilance against possible provocative moves that could challenge China's sovereignty over Taiwan. To warn Chen against crossing Chinese redlines and to prepare for the possibility that the use of force may be necessary to prevent Taiwan from going independent, China is accelerating its military buildup. According to a major general from the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences, there is a consensus in China that steps are necessary to make Taiwan feel more insecure, especially in the face of a widespread belief on the island that China is bluffing and would not dare to attack the island.⁴³ CBMs that would enhance Taiwan's security are thus deemed contrary to Chinese interests as long as Taipei rejects one China.

China's judgment that keeping Taiwan exceedingly insecure serves Chinese interests should be reexamined, however. Building greater military capabilities to coerce or attack the island has to some extent led to negative consequences for China. For example, faced with the deployment of more than 600 missiles along the mainland's coast, many in Taiwan now argue that Patriot missile defense systems are inadequate to defend the island and instead advocate the acquisition of long-range ballistic and cruise missiles that could be used to attack the Chinese mainland in retaliation for a Chinese missile attack. Despite reluctance to appropriate the funds for the arms package approved by the United States in April 2001, particularly from Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, renewed pressure is building for purchasing the Aegis defense system and the Joint Strike Fighter, which is in part motivated by China's continuous missile deployments and purchase of large numbers of advanced fighters from Russia.

Some Taiwan officials have even endorsed the development of a nuclear deterrent, although President Chen Shui-bian subsequently pledged that Taiwan would not pursue a nuclear program.⁴⁴ Washington shut down secret attempts by Taiwan to develop nuclear weapons in the 1970s and 1980s, but blueprints and expertise undoubtedly remain in place.⁴⁵

China's efforts to squeeze Taiwan diplomatically, causing it to become increasingly isolated in the international community, also have stimulated Taipei to fight back rather than submit to Chinese pressure. Annual campaigns to join the United Nations and the World Health Organization are pursued with even greater vigor than in the past. Perceptions of vulnerability have led Taiwan's leaders to emphasize in a bolder way Taiwan's separateness from the mainland rather than encouraging them to be conciliatory. President Lee Teng-hui's special state-to-state formulation and President Chen Shui-bian's claim that there exists "one country on each side of the Strait" are only two examples. Taipei insists that it will negotiate with China only on the basis of equality. To the extent that Beijing's military and diplomatic intimidation succeeds in making Taiwan feel more insecure and vulnerable, it reduces, rather than increases, the prospects for Cross-Strait political dialogue.

Cross-Strait CBMs: Unilateral Steps Followed by Bilateral Measures

To minimize the chances of an armed clash arising from misunderstanding or miscalculation and to build trust between the Taiwanese and Chinese defense establishments, military CBMs should be implemented. Although agreement on thorny political issues such as sovereignty will likely be arduous, especially in the near term, CBMs are relatively easy to negotiate and put in place. They can be tacit and informal and based on mutual consensus without formal, legally binding agreements. As such, they are ideally suited to the Taiwan situation. Cross-Strait CBMs could begin with an initial phase of unilateral declaratory measures that evolve into a succession of reciprocal declaratory statements and actions. They could be followed by modest, easy-to-negotiate bilateral initiatives and gradually build to more complicated and advanced measures.⁴⁶

Although better political ties between China

and Taiwan would facilitate the discussion and implementation of CBMs, progress in this direction should not be conditional on the resolution of Cross-Strait political differences. Movement on this front might even provide momentum that could push political efforts forward. To some degree, both China and Taiwan have undertaken unilateral measures to provide limited assurance to the other side. A list of additional *unilateral* CBMs would include

- **Transparency Measures:** Both Taiwan and China publish a defense White Paper every two years. Greater detail about military doctrine, weapons acquisitions, military capabilities, and defense policy could be included. In addition, each side could list the unilateral CBM steps it is taking to build mutual trust and prevent accidents. China could begin to provide regular advance notification of military exercises and troop movements. Taiwan already announces a detailed calendar of military exercises at the beginning of each fiscal year in July.⁴⁷ Beijing also could contribute more detailed data to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and agree to an arrangement whereby Taiwan arms purchases also are reflected in the register.
- **Operational Military Constraints:** Beijing could join Taiwan in publicly declaring the coordinates of the centerline of the Taiwan Strait. Then both sides could unilaterally affirm that each will refrain from flying military aircraft across the centerline. Another step could be unilateral declarations to keep a certain distance from the centerline, in effect creating a “no-fly zone.”

- **Declaratory Statements:** Taiwan could broaden its recent promise not to develop nuclear weapons to include other weapons of mass destruction. China could publicly state that its pledge not to initiate the first use of nuclear weapons includes Taiwan. Beijing could also forswear the use of military force against Taiwan except under the sole condition that Taipei declare juridical independence. Both sides could publicly express their intentions to resolve disputes peacefully and eventually to sign a joint statement ending hostilities across the Taiwan Strait.

Unilateral CBMs, although helpful in easing tensions and mitigating unwanted conflict, are not likely to have a major impact unless accompanied or followed by bilateral measures. A list of *bilateral* CBMs would include

- **Communication Links:** The establishment of bilateral hotlines is an important step in fostering a more predictable and less crisis-prone environment in the Taiwan Strait. In November 1997, Taipei’s China Rescue Association and China’s China Marine Rescue Center agreed to set up a hotline to facilitate marine rescue work in the Strait.⁴⁸ Additional links could be set up between the two defense ministries or between military commanders. These could be used to clarify intentions and exchange information in the event of an unexpected event or accident. Meetings to review the functioning of a communications link and suggest upgrades or changes would provide another forum in which to expand contacts between the two militaries.

- **Military Exchanges:** Limited visits by retired Taiwan military officers and civilian national security experts already have taken place. These could be regularized and expanded to include active duty officers as trust builds. Exchanges could take place between National Defense Universities on both sides. Discussions could include broader Asia–Pacific security issues such as the South China Sea, protecting sea lines of communication, proliferation, and nontraditional security issues such as counterterrorism, piracy, smuggling, and illegal immigration. Contacts also could be promoted between PRC and Taiwan military personnel stationed abroad or studying in third countries.
 - **Make Rules of Engagement Explicit and Establish a Buffer Zone:** The two sides could explicitly agree to avoid crossing the centerline in the Taiwan Strait and specify their respective rules of engagement. A “buffer zone” of several miles on each side of the centerline in which specified air and naval activities would be prohibited could be agreed to. Limits on the scale and location of military exercises in the air and at sea could also be agreed to.
 - **Information Sharing:** Military representatives could be assigned to Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China’s Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) to serve as liaisons. They could be used to pass on information before the installation of a hotline between the two militaries.
- Eventually a working group could be set up in the SEF–ARATS channel to discuss CBMs.
- **Maritime Cooperation:** The navies of China and Taiwan are engaged in many activities in addition to their wartime activities and exercises that relate to maintaining the safety of the waters and security in the Taiwan Strait, including pollution control, search and rescue operations, combating piracy and smuggling, assistance in conducting explorations for natural resources, and carrying out patrols of fisheries. Collaborative efforts between China and Taiwan in some naval and maritime activities in which their interests converge would enable the development of habits of cooperation that can play a role in building trust. The two sides could study the cooperative models of other navies, undertake joint scientific and technical projects, jointly plan for cooperative responses to oils spills and other environmental disasters, and practice joint search and rescue maneuvers.
 - **Conflict Avoidance Arrangements:** China and Taiwan could negotiate an agreement aimed at preventing dangerous military activities and containing their consequences if they occur. Such an agreement would include codes of conduct for military forces and mandate modes of consultation and communication in crises. It could also provide for discussions of measures to promote safe maritime practices, the establishment of communications procedures when ships encounter each other, the interpre-

tation of the Rules of the Nautical Road, and the avoidance of accidents at sea. A Maritime Risk Reduction Center could be set up to facilitate the exchange of information and support the implementation of CBMs and other bilateral agreements.

- **Missile Restraint Regime:** At a more advanced phase of confidence building, China and Taiwan could establish limits on the numbers and location of deployments of ballistic missiles and ballistic missile defense systems.
- **Additional Operational Military Constraints:** Advanced CBMs could include constraint measures that prevent the emplacement of large numbers of troops and weapons in a specified zone to limit the ability of parties to mount large-scale offensives. Restrictions could be set on the types, scale, frequency, and timing of military exercises, and both sides could agree not to hold exercises in important air routes and sea lanes and at sensitive political junctures.

Conclusion

Suspicion and mistrust impede the consideration and implementation of military CBMs between China and Taiwan. Asymmetrical threat perceptions on the two sides of the Strait further complicate any effort to achieve stability through CBMs. Taiwan's perception of the PRC threat is based mainly on Beijing's unrelenting military buildup and its refusal to renounce the use of force against the island. China's perception of the threat from Taiwan emanates primarily from the fear that Taipei is on a path toward *de jure* inde-

pendence that can be halted only through the credible threat of force.

To avert an incident that could trigger an unplanned war, as well as to build trust between the two sides of the Strait, CBMs that reduce the chance of an armed clash arising from miscalculation or accident and provide the means to defuse a crisis in the event one occurs should be implemented. As a first step toward establishing the Cross-Strait military CBM that both sides profess to seek, Taipei and Beijing should take incremental steps beginning with unilateral CBMs and followed by bilateral measures. For progress to be made, both sides must have the political will to proceed. CBMs are initial steps to ease suspicion and misperceptions, but they cannot succeed in the absence of a genuine desire on the part of Taiwan and China to attempt to alter the negative dynamic of their security relationship.

Beijing's policy toward Taiwan has failed to achieve China's near-term objective of deterring Taiwan independence as well as its longer-term goal of promoting reunification. A thorough reassessment of China's approach is long overdue. CBMs should not be rejected out of hand by China based on fears of providing legitimacy to Taiwan's claim to sovereignty, solidifying Taiwan's opposition to one China, and enabling Taiwan to achieve "peaceful independence." Beijing should recognize that its policy of making Taiwan as insecure as possible by intimidating Taipei politically and militarily is partly to blame for Taiwan's reluctance to go to the bargaining table. Just as an exceedingly secure Taiwan that audaciously seeks to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait is a danger to Chinese interests, so too is an extremely insecure Taiwan that continually looks for ways to prevent a further deterioration in its bargaining position. Beijing's military buildup and its unremitting efforts to deny Taiwan a voice in the international community have heightened Taiwan's sense of insecurity and produced counterproductive results.

Beijing should therefore recast its Taiwan policy to emphasize winning support from the

Taiwan populace for closer Cross-Strait relations. Opposition to Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organization and the passage of an antiseccession law in the National People's Congress only serve to alienate Taiwan's people from the mainland. Moreover, such Chinese policies make it unviable for any political party in Taiwan to advocate a Cross-Strait *modus vivendi*. The pursuit of CBMs in the military and political realms would send a positive message to Taiwan's people. As for Taiwan, it should recognize that achieving Cross-Strait stability necessitates providing Beijing with credible assurance that it will not pursue juridical independence. To create a more favorable atmosphere in which a confidence-building process can take hold, Taipei must convince Beijing that CBMs aren't part of its plan to achieve permanent separation from the mainland.

About the Author

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Notes

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40. Interviews in Beijing, August 2004.

41. Interviews in Beijing, August 2004.

42. Interview, Beijing, August 10, 2004.

43. Interview, Beijing, August 7, 2004.

44. Following the “balance of terror” remark by Taiwan Premier Yu Shyi-kun, Vice Defense Minister Tsai Ming-hsien told an international forum on Asian security that Taiwan would not make “the first strike” but needs weapons to create “an effectively frightening deterrent.” After Taiwan withstands the first strike, China must “pay a heavy price” during the second strike, Tsai said. “I can’t go into detail, but we have already made such preparations,” he said (*Central News Agency*, October 16, 2004). The *Taipei Times* argued that it is “foolish” for some in the Pan Green camp to believe Taiwan can avoid spending money on defense because the United States is compelled to defend the island. “In the end it comes down to Taiwan’s need for nuclear weapons. The ability to obliterate China’s 10 largest cities and the Three Gorges Dam would be a powerful deterrent to China’s adventurism,” it said (*Taipei Times*, August 13, 2004).

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