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China Maritime Report No. 26: Beyond the First Battle: Overcoming a Protracted Blockade of Taiwan

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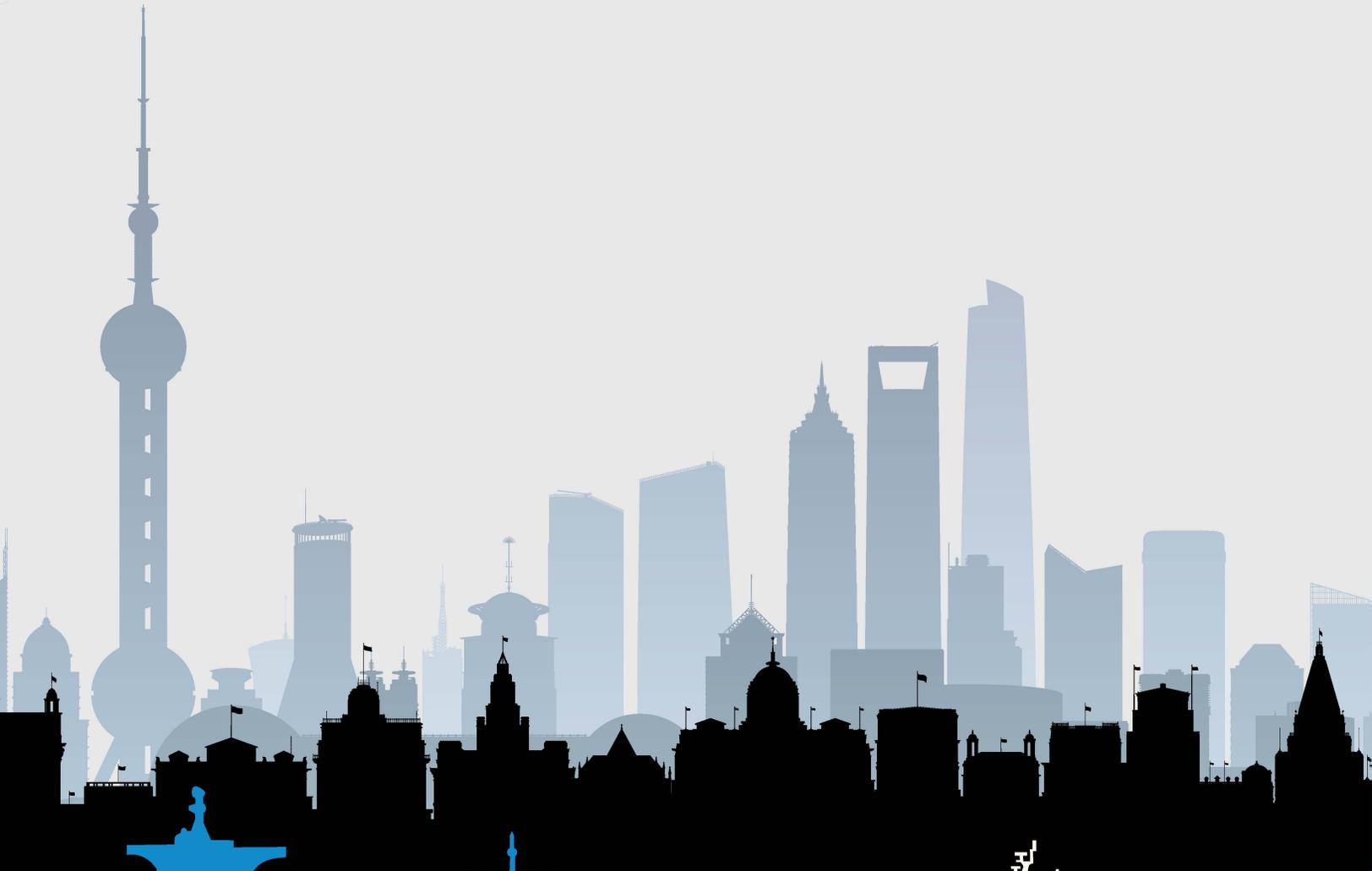
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Summary

If there is a war over Taiwan, an extended Chinese blockade is likely to determine the outcome. While a blockade might include intercepting ships at sea, the primary focus would be on sealing airfields and ports, particularly on the west coast of Taiwan. China could sustain that type of blockade indefinitely. Penetrating a prolonged blockade and keeping Taiwan alive would require a serious U.S. investment in systems and operational concepts that we currently do not have. Unless we make that investment, we may win the first battle, defeating an attempted landing. But we cannot win the war.

Introduction

Maneuvers by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in August 2022 marked the first time the PLA has openly signaled that a blockade of Taiwan is among the military courses of action for which it plans and trains. Chinese forces established closure areas near Taiwan's major ports for what the Chinese media called "joint blockade and joint support operations" (联合封控和联合保障行动).¹ Training events included establishing air superiority and conducting maritime and land strikes and anti-submarine warfare, with explicit reference to Taiwan targets and Taiwan forces, and the need to interdict U.S. forces deploying into the area.² Chinese commentators emphasized that both the proximity to Taiwan ports and the encirclement of Taiwan were unprecedented for PLA exercises³.

There is danger that the exercises we observed will foster a false belief that breaking a Chinese blockade would be a straightforward task easily within the capability of current and projected U.S. forces. It would not be. In a serious military conflict over Taiwan, the kind of blockade China would impose would be vastly more difficult to counter. In this author's assessment, nothing the United States armed forces are doing or planning to do is sufficient to prevail in that conflict.

The Blockade in China's Calculus

An integrated air, maritime, and information blockade of Taiwan appears in four different forms in the PLA's range of options against Taiwan.

As a coercive measure. We may divide potential Chinese military attacks against Taiwan into two major categories: on the one hand, actions to punish and coerce Taiwan, forcing it to change its behavior back to ways that are more acceptable to Beijing; and on the other hand, actions to conquer Taiwan and compel its unification with the People's Republic of China (PRC). In that first category of coercive measures, the menu of options includes saber-rattling exercises (as seen last August); seizure of small Taiwan-controlled islands; limited air and missile strikes; and a limited, demonstrative blockade of Taiwan.

¹ 李秉宣 [Li Bingxuan] and 韩学扬 [Han Xueyang], 东部战区接续开展联合演训组织联合封控和联合保障行动 ["The Eastern Theater Conducts Successive Joint Exercises to Organize Joint Blockade and Control and Joint Support Operations"], 新华社 [Xinhua News Agency], August 9, 2022, www.mod.gov.cn/topnews/2022-08/09/content_4917758.htm.

² Liu Xuanzun, "PLA extends 'Taiwan encirclement' exercises with anti-submarine warfare, showcases unrivaled area denial capability; 'drills will not stop until reunification', *Global Times*, August 8, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202208/1272446.shtml>.

³ 央视新闻客户端 [CCTV News Client], 解放军历次台海演习中力度最大一次 专家：逼近合围台岛 前所未有 ["The PLA's Most Powerful Taiwan Strait Exercise yet. Expert: The Proximity to and Encirclement of Taiwan is Unprecedented."], 央视新闻 [China Central Television News], August 6, 2022, http://www.news.cn/tw/2022-08/06/c_1128895175.htm.

As a prelude to invasion. If Beijing is determined to conquer Taiwan, then a major amphibious landing is one of its main options. Setting favorable conditions for the landing would require at least partial air, maritime, and information superiority around the landing operation. A limited blockade would be among the supporting lines of effort.

As an alternative to invasion. A landing of the size required to conquer Taiwan, especially in the face of vigorous U.S. military intervention, would be of unprecedented scale and complexity with a high chance of failure. An alternative course of action would be to forego the landing and impose the tightest blockade possible, slowly strangling Taiwan until it submits or collapses. Unlike the previous two forms, this blockade would continue for as long as necessary for China to prevail.

As the fallback after a failed invasion. War with the United States would entail enormous costs for China and endanger every other national objective, including the Communist Party's hold on power. That is true even if China wins, and the threat to regime survival is even greater if it is seen to have lost. Chinese leaders might be able to sell Party elites and the general public an interpretation where China had achieved a political victory despite the military failure, and in that case, it might be possible to reach some formula to end the conflict. If not, however, the PLA would continue the fight by whatever means available, meaning an indefinite blockade to eventually compel surrender.

The discussion below will focus on the latter two options, where the blockade becomes the primary battlefield for the remainder of a long conflict. This report will argue that while a Chinese blockade might begin with traditional stop-and-search actions, readily countered by a superior naval force, both Chinese operational doctrine and the military and geographic situation will drive them to a concept of operations vastly more difficult for U.S. forces to counter.

How the Chinese Discuss Blockade

Chinese theoretical writings discuss strategic blockade (战略封锁) as a major type of operation, on par with island landing operations, strategic counter-air attack, and space warfare.⁴ Studies of international law and historical blockades examine the First and Second World Wars, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S.-Vietnam War, the Falklands War, and others.⁵ Many of the studies focus on traditional operations to intercept and board merchant ships, including the inevitable mathematical calculations of how large an area an intercept force can cover.⁶ (There is a strong current of operations research number-crunching among Chinese military academics.)

⁴ 肖天亮 [Xiao Tianliang], editor-in-chief, 战略学 [*The Science of Military Strategy*] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2020), p. 228. Translated by the U.S. Air Force China Aerospace Studies Institute (CASI), <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/2913216/in-their-own-words-2020-science-of-military-strategy/>.

⁵ 杨辉 [Yang Hui], 第一次世界大战期间英国对海上封锁国际法的创制 [“The British Creation of International Law on Maritime Blockade during World War I”], 安阳师范学院学报 [*Journal of Anyang Normal University*], no. 3 (2021), pp. 70-76; 葛汉文 [Ge Hanwen], 海上封锁: 历史经验、战略功用与当下效应 [“Maritime Blockade: Historical Experience, Strategic Utility and Current Effects”], 世界经济与政治论坛 [*Forum of World Economics & Politics*], no. 1 (2022), pp. 77-95; 朱振光 [Zhu Zhenguang] and 李成刚 [Li Chenggang], 浅析马岛战争中英军联合海上封锁作战的经验教训 [“Experiences and Lessons of the Joint Maritime Blockade Operations by British Forces in the Malvinas Islands War”], 军事历史 [*Military History*], no. 1 (2013), pp. 39-42; 李健 [Li Jian], 海空封锁--马岛登陆作战 [“Air and Sea Blockade: Malvinas Landing Operation”], 军事科技 [*Military Science and Technology*], September (2013), https://www.81.cn/jskj/2013-09/18/content_5512815.htm.

⁶ 宋小艺 [Song Xiaoyi], 战时台湾地区的管控问题研究 [*Research on the Management and Control of Taiwan in Wartime*], Master's Thesis for East China University of Political Science and Law, May 2021; 高辅刚 [Gao Fugang] and 张高 [Zhang Gao], 海上封锁拦截行动效能分析 [“Analysis of the Effectiveness of Maritime Blockade and Interception

PLA doctrinal writings, on the other hand, describe a more robust and multi-faceted operation. The 2006 *Science of Campaigns* from the PLA National Defense University describes a joint blockade campaign (联合封锁战役) as a large-scale, long-term operation asserting air, maritime, and information dominance in the blockade zone, involving all PLA services as well as the People's Armed Police and People's Militia. In addition to traditional intercept-and-board operations at sea, the joint blockade campaign involves firepower strikes against key facilities in Taiwan, destruction of ports and airfields, mining of maritime approaches, and both kinetic and non-kinetic attacks on information systems and infrastructure.⁷ It notes that operations in a strait allow extensive use of land-based weapons and forces and that navigation is severely restricted.⁸ In sum, U.S. forces attempting to penetrate the blockade from the mainland side of the Taiwan Strait would operate in a tightly constrained and heavily contested maneuver zone.

Of note, Chinese articles about the August 2022 exercises used a new term for joint blockade, *lianhe fengkong* (联合封控).⁹ The only time they used the traditional term for blockade—*fengsuo* (封锁)—was when quoting Western observers. Officially translated as “blockade and control,” *fengkong* had previously appeared in PLA writings about border defense operations, but not in connection with sea blockade.¹⁰ This author's tentative conclusion is that *fengkong* combines the concepts of maritime blockade with establishing air, sea, and information control, but this awaits further evidence.

Military Terrain

The principal factor shaping a potential blockade of Taiwan is the geography of Taiwan itself.¹¹ There are few deep-water ports, and those on the east coast are isolated from the rest of the island by steep mountains and narrow, low-capacity roads that are easily severed. The central mountain range separating separate east from west climbs to over 12,000 feet within 30 miles of the east coast.

Yilan (宜兰) is the only east coast city with a major highway to Taipei, and has one modest-sized port, but the four-lane National Freeway 5 features multiple long tunnels (including the 13-kilometer Hsuehshan tunnel) and stretches of highly elevated roadway.¹² The highway is an engineering marvel, but it would be easily cut in a military conflict. The two alternatives are National Highway 9 across

Operations”], 军事运筹于系统工程 [*Military Operations Research and Systems Engineering*], Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 2014), pp. 30-32, 60.

⁷ 张玉良 [Zhang Yuliang], ed., 战役学 [*Science of Campaigns*], (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2006), p. 292 in original, p. 329 in English translation by CASI available here:

[https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2020-12-02%20In%20Their%20Own%20Words-%20Science%20of%20Campaigns%20\(2006\).pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2020-12-02%20In%20Their%20Own%20Words-%20Science%20of%20Campaigns%20(2006).pdf)

⁸ Zhang, *Science of Campaigns*, pp. 40-42 in CASI translation.

⁹ Li and Han, “The Eastern Theater Conducts Successive Joint Exercises to Organize Joint Blockade and Joint Support Operations.”

¹⁰ 袁志强 [Yuan Zhiqiang], 边境联合封控行动组织指挥问题浅探 [“A Brief Exploration of the Organizational Command of Joint Border Closure and Control Operations”], 国防 [*National Defense*], No. 1 (2017), pp. 23-25; 中国人民解放军军语 [*PLA Dictionary of Military Terms*] (Beijing, Academy of Military Science Press, 2011), pp. 133, 165.

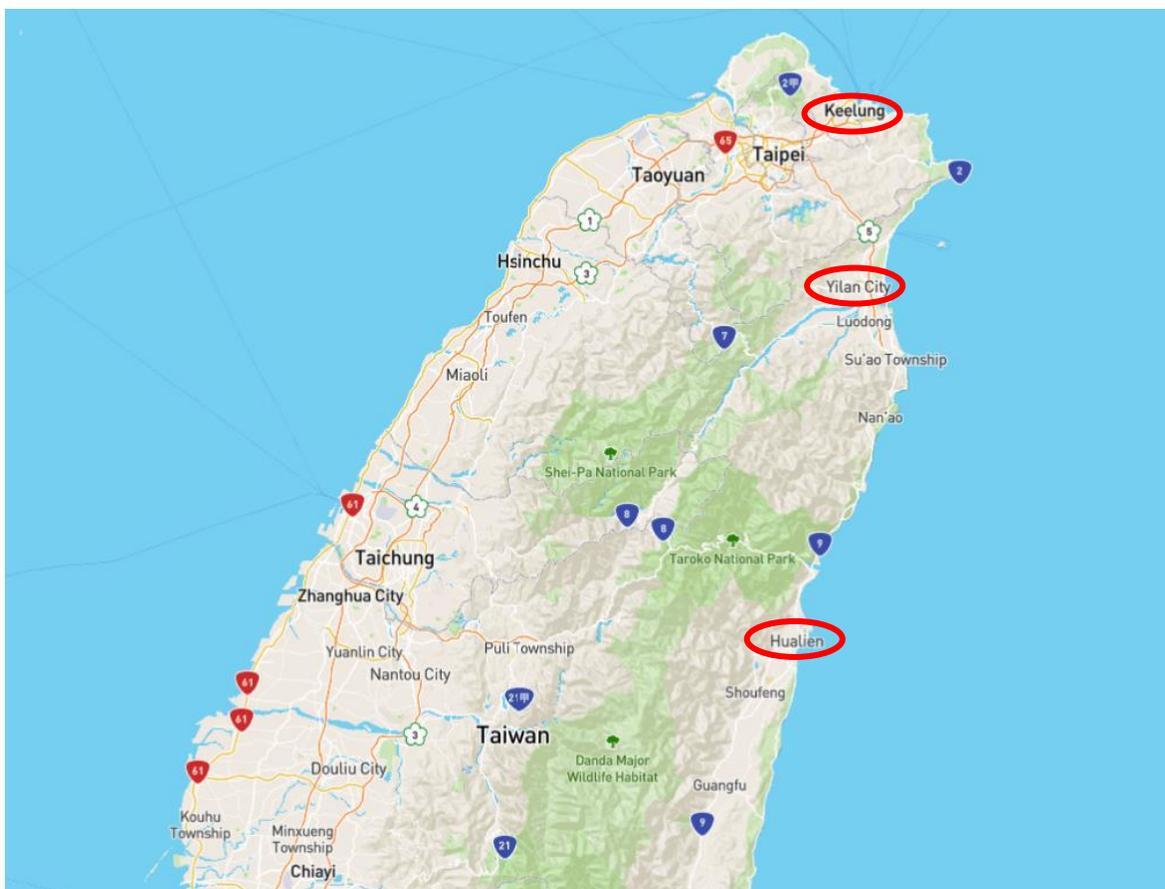
¹¹ The terrain analysis below is based on the author's examination of available geographic and geologic resources.

¹² “Taiwan,” World Port Source, www.worldportsource.com/ports/TWN.php; Caroline Gluck, “Asia's longest road tunnel opens,” BBC Taipei, June 16, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/5086548.stm>; Huang Tzu-ti, “Freeway No. 5 to be toll-free Sept. 21, 25 for Moon Festival,” *Taiwan News*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3534145>; Flickr, www.flickr.com/photos/136372730@N04/24575422250/in/photostream/lightbox/

the mountains and National Highway 2 around the coast. Both are low capacity with many vulnerable points.

Hualien (花蓮), halfway down the east coast, has a small port, but the two roads connecting Hualien to the western half of Taiwan, while spectacularly scenic, are of extremely low capacity and difficult to keep in service. National Highway 8 climbs the Taroko Gorge and is notorious for extremely narrow stretches, hairpin turns, and sheer drops.¹³ It is frequently closed altogether for years on end due to earthquakes and landslides.¹⁴ The Hualien-Yilan stretch of National Highway 9 has sections literally carved into the cliff face.

Keelung (基隆) on Taiwan's short northern coast has a good port and better highways to Taipei, but those roads run through densely urbanized terrain and squeeze through several narrow bottlenecks between mountains. Once combat operations are underway, especially after the PLA has achieved air superiority, those lines of communications will be in extremely poor condition. In addition, Keelung is nearly as exposed to Chinese shore-based strike assets as the west coast ports are.



Taiwan's Military Terrain (Map source: www.marinetraffic.com)

¹³ "Driving the infamous Taroko Gorge Road in Taiwan," Dangerous Roads, <https://www.dangerousroads.org/asia/taiwan/70-taroko-gorge-road-taiwan.html>.

¹⁴ "Taiwan: Authorities close sections of district roads 7 and 8 in Yilan and Hualien counties as of Oct. 19 due to landslides," October 9, 2022. https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2022/10/taiwan-authorities-close-sections-of-district-roads-7-and-8-in-yilan-and-hualien-counties-as-of-oct-19-due-to-landslides?origin=fr_riskalert; Wang Chun-chi and Jake Chung, "Hualien tunnel to partly reopen," *Taipei Times*, February 6, 2016, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2016/02/06/2003638955>.

The one remaining piece of flat land on the east coast, Taitung (臺東), has only a tiny port. Its cross-island highway, National Route 20, rivals the Taroko Gorge highway for spectacular beauty and extreme fragility. It recently reopened after a 13-year closure.¹⁵

In sum, the east coast ports are as useless for U.S. blockade running as they are for a Chinese invasion. Any effort to get more than trivial amounts of cargo into Taiwan therefore has to go through the west coast ports.

Air delivery also faces severe geographical challenges, driven by the proximity to the Chinese mainland. Advanced surface-to-air missiles along China's coast can range most of Taiwan, and the few airfields that are sheltered are all on the east coast, facing the same land transportation constraints as the eastern ports.¹⁶ Taiwan's proximity to the mainland also allows ample time to scramble fighter jets to reinforce an air blockade when U.S. cargo aircraft are approaching.

How a Blockade Might Unfold

If the PLA were attempting an invasion of Taiwan, the initial blockade would focus on setting the conditions for a landing—gaining air superiority to protect the landing fleet, isolating Taiwan to prevent U.S. reinforcement and resupply, and disrupting Taiwan communications for both operational and psychological purposes. In this phase, the PLA would be seeking to capture ports and airfields for use by PLA forces, so firepower strikes would be limited to the degree necessary to seize and then reopen the facilities under PLA control. The PLA also would need to clear obstacles emplaced by Taiwan or U.S. forces, potentially including mines and deliberate damage to port facilities inflicted by defending forces.¹⁷

If the invasion failed, however, or if Beijing chose blockade as a primary course of action without attempting an invasion, then the PLA calculus would be different. With no incentive to keep ports and airfields open, PLA forces would mine the approaches and the ports themselves, damage port facilities and the routes for onward movement of materiel, and sink or scuttle vessels in shipping channels.

The battle for air superiority would begin with PLA Rocket Force suppression of Taiwan air defenses, followed by the Air Force operating under the protection of long-range surface-to-air missiles along the Chinese coast. The PLA could not prevent incursions by advanced U.S. stealth aircraft, but it could readily attack any cargo aircraft attempting to land in Taiwan and subject all possible landing strips to repeated bombardment. Unless U.S. forces were able to dismantle the PLA integrated air defense system, this author's assessment is that the PLA could sustain the air blockade for months if not years without exhausting its inventory of air-to-air or surface-to-air weapons.

¹⁵ Wayne Chang, "One of Taiwan's most beautiful roads has reopened," CNN Travel, May 6, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/taiwan-southern-cross-island-highway-reopens-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁶ These include the Russian-built S-400 (SA-21, 400 km range) and S-300PMU (SA-20, 200 km range) and Chinese-built HQ-9B (300 km range). *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China: 2022 Annual Report to Congress*, U.S. Department of Defense, November 2022, pp. 61-62; Kenneth W. Allen and Cristina L. Garafola, *70 Years of the PLA Air Force* (Montgomery, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2021), p. 98.

¹⁷ The following description of a Chinese invasion operation is drawn from multiple analyses by Western observers. Examples include Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2017), pp. 77-124; Lonnie Henley, "PLA Operational Concepts and Centers of Gravity in a Taiwan Conflict," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 18, 2021; Michael Casey, "Firepower Strike, Blockade, Landing: PLA Campaigns for a Cross-Strait Conflict," in Joel Wuthnow, Derek Grossman, Phillip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* (Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 2022), pp. 113-138.

The PLA would attempt to sever all modes of communication off the island and disrupt communications within Taiwan. The initial missile and air strikes would include long-haul communications facilities such as satellite ground stations and undersea cable landing sites. Counter-space targeting would include jamming or destructive attacks on communications satellites. Follow-on strikes would prosecute mobile and backup communications equipment, with air superiority enabling the use of PLA reconnaissance aircraft and drones to track and target a dwindling number of mobile systems.

What it Would Take to Penetrate a Blockade

The maritime blockade might include traditional efforts to intercept, board, or destroy cargo ships at sea. The Chinese exercises in August 2022 highlighted such operations, and, as mentioned above, PLA writings address technical details such as the number of ships required for a given ocean area.¹⁸ If a landing operation had already failed, however, it is not likely that the PLA would have many warships left for the task. And if the blockade were the main PLA line of effort, with no preceding invasion attempt, then the initial battle probably would feature U.S. forces destroying the PLA fleet east of Taiwan. Unfortunately, that would not end the war, and conditions for the remainder of the conflict strongly favor China.

After U.S. forces won the first battle—whether by defeating the invasion or by sinking the Chinese fleet—they still would face the requirement to get hundreds of tons of cargo into Taiwan, day after day, month after month. How much of what is an unanswered question; there does not seem to have been any rigorous assessment of Taiwan’s wartime consumption rates, domestic production, strategic reserves, or expected losses to Chinese fire strikes. But the materiel requirements are certain to be large, not to mention the psychological importance of regularly penetrating the blockade to sustain Taiwan’s will to fight.

That means that U.S. forces must get cargo ships into the west coast ports on a regular basis, in the face of extensive mining and hostile fire, close to China and under conditions of Chinese air superiority. After weeks or months of conflict, it might be that the PLA had exhausted its magazine of long-range weapons, but its much larger inventory of short-range strike assets would remain largely untapped. Long-range artillery, land-based anti-ship missiles, patrol boats with missiles or torpedoes, even older third generation fighters dropping gravity bombs would pose a significant threat. China could reseed minefields between U.S. incursions using a wide variety of platforms. Each cargo vessel the PLA managed to stop would become part of the obstacle array the next one had to navigate.

Resupply by air could be symbolically important if it were feasible, but that seems extremely unlikely. Whatever wizardry U.S. stealth and electronic warfare can achieve, there is no way to hide a large cargo jet or make it anything but a fat, slow, and extremely vulnerable target. Even in an uncontested environment, airlift would be woefully inadequate for the volume of fuel and other essentials Taiwan needs to survive. With the Chinese air defense array in place and the PLA Air Force operating over Taiwan, air resupply in the volumes required is simply impossible.

Counter-Blockade and Cost Imposition

At this point in the discussion, U.S. interlocutors often posit that the United States could seal off China’s access to international markets, particularly its access to imported fuels. With or without a specific U.S. blockade, there is no doubt that a war would severely disrupt China’s foreign trade and cause massive damage to its economy (and everyone else’s as well). It has long been this author’s

¹⁸ Gao and Zhang, “Analysis of the Effectiveness of Maritime Blockade and Interception Operations,” pp. 30-32, 60.

contention that the economic, political, and diplomatic cost of a war are among the main factors that deter Beijing from attacking Taiwan, in addition to and probably more important than the military balance. If seizing Taiwan were easy and cheap, they would have done it long ago. If Chinese leaders decide to attack anyway, it will be because they have consciously accepted that enormous cost. The question then becomes how long the world's second largest economy can sustain the conflict in the face of a U.S. blockade. That is hard to answer, but the easy part seems to be, a heck of a lot longer than Taiwan can. We are not on the winning end of that cost-imposition contest.

Implications for Force Design, Operational Concepts, and War Preparations

In this author's observation, U.S. thinking about a potential Taiwan conflict focuses on winning the first battle, either thwarting a landing attempt or stripping away a PLA Navy blockade effort east of Taiwan. (This presumably was the thought behind U.S. Pacific Fleet commander Admiral Paparo's "resounding yes" on whether his forces could break a Chinese blockade.¹⁹) There has been much less thought about what happens after that, about how to keep Taiwan alive through months if not years of a close-in Chinese blockade.

The requirements for running a blockade differ markedly from those for defeating a landing. The latter has two key aspects: protecting U.S. ships and aircraft from China's long-range weapons, and sinking as many as possible of the ships carrying Chinese forces across the strait. Both tasks are extremely difficult, but the requirements are straightforward and play to the strengths of the U.S. military-industrial complex. Running a blockade, in contrast, presents extreme operational challenges for which the solution is not obvious, and furthermore runs contrary to deeply held beliefs about what kind of operations U.S. forces should prepare for.

In order to succeed, U.S. Navy escorts must operate in a tightly constrained and fiercely contested battlespace west of Taiwan, protecting cargo ships and themselves from a wide variety of simultaneous threats. They must perform extensive mine clearing and obstacle removal under fire, with their backs to the Chinese coast; get the cargo ship into port and unloaded; then get it out again and safely away so that it does not become another obstacle. They must do this not once but repeatedly, many times per week, for as long as the conflict continues. This requires a different force structure and different operational concepts.

The Chinese integrated air defense system is a key enabler for Chinese forces in this battle. Disabling that system would not solve the problem, but it would significantly reduce the strain on U.S. forces operating in the Strait. If the air defenses were down, U.S. airpower could help protect warships and cargo ships from attack, and Chinese airpower would be a correspondingly smaller factor. Disabling the integrated air defense system would also create a more balanced air fight over Taiwan, making air resupply difficult rather than impossible, though still of limited capacity.

Blockade-running requires that cargo ships go deep into harm's way, constituting a planning and force development challenge on its own. Obtaining the ships would be relatively easy if the U.S. government were willing to indemnify ship owners for all financial losses, including loss of the ship itself. This could be arranged on short notice if the funds were available. Crewing the ships would be more problematic, however, requiring revitalization of the U.S. Merchant Marine as a warfighting force to operate the cargo fleet under combat conditions. Taiwan-owned ships, and possibly their crews, might be available without an indemnity, but those details would need to be negotiated.

¹⁹ John Feng, "Superior U.S. Forces Could Break China's Blockade of Taiwan: Navy Commander," *Newsweek*, October 5, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-taiwan-blockade-invasion-us-navy-pacific-fleet-admiral-samuel-paparo-1749139>.

All of this requires that Taiwan be able to bear the pain China will inflict. Part of the capacity to endure hinges on U.S. supplies of critical weapons and munitions, but the vast majority is in the hands of Taiwan's government and people. Taiwan could increase its resilience by hardening facilities, shifting to mobile rather than fixed systems, increasing stockpiles of critical munitions and materials, working out what its wartime consumption requirements would be under strict rationing, conducting regular continuity of operations drills, and opening the discussion with its own people about how the society could stand up to extended deprivation and Chinese punishment. Psychological resilience is as important as physical preparations.

All of this leaves us only a few options.

- One, continue our current course, building a U.S. force designed to defeat a Chinese invasion but not to penetrate a close-in blockade of Taiwan ports and airfields.²⁰
- Two, build a force that can defeat the blockade as well as the invasion.
- Three, admit we cannot save Taiwan from Chinese conquest and give up trying.

Option three has the advantage of being honest, as well as saving a great deal of the resources we are investing in efforts to defeat the invasion. But it is politically unacceptable, in this author's judgment.

Option one has the advantage of not requiring greater effort than we are currently devoting. Its main disadvantage is that if this war happens, we cannot win with the force we are currently building. Taiwan will be devastated, a great deal of blood will be shed on all sides, and the U.S. and global economy will suffer enormous harm, all in a failed attempt to prevent a U.S. ally from being defeated and occupied. If we persist on this course, we are left hoping that China gives up after a failed invasion, or better yet, that it never calls our bluff in the first place.

That leaves option two, building a force that can actually win. Whenever this author has outlined this conundrum to U.S. force planners, however, the inevitable answer is that the force we would need to penetrate a blockade is not the kind of force we need for everything else we care about in the world. That leaves the question of what we actually mean when we say that China is the pacing threat for U.S. force development. Does it mean that we use China as the justification for our preferred systems and force structure? Or does it mean that we actually build a force that can win?

War over Taiwan has only two possible paths: either China wins quickly, because Taiwan surrendered or because the United States could not save them; or the war drags on for months or years, with Taiwan suffering greater and greater pain until we rescue them or they surrender.²¹ Winning the first battle is meaningless if we cannot win the war, and there is no path to U.S. victory that does not include the long blockade.

²⁰ These efforts include long-range anti-ship weapons, measures to counter Chinese missile threats to U.S. ships and airfields, and continued emphasis on U.S. undersea warfare assets.

²¹ A variation on China winning quickly is if Beijing finds a formula that lets it claim political victory despite the failed landing, and we allow it to sustain such a claim.

About the Author

Lonnie Henley is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He retired from federal service in 2019 after more than 40 years as an intelligence officer and East Asia expert. Henley served 22 years as a U.S. Army China foreign area officer and military intelligence officer in U.S. Forces Korea, at Defense Intelligence Agency, on Army Staff, and in the History Department at West Point. He retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2000 and joined the senior civil service, first as Defense Intelligence Officer for East Asia and later as Senior Intelligence Expert for Strategic Warning at DIA. He worked two years as a senior analyst with CENTRA Technology, Inc. before returning to government service as Deputy National Intelligence Officer for East Asia. He rejoined DIA in 2008, serving six years as the agency's senior China analyst, then National Intelligence Collection Officer for East Asia, and culminating with a second term as DIO for East Asia. Mr. Henley holds a bachelor's degree in engineering and Chinese from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and master's degrees in Chinese language from Oxford University, which he attended as a Rhodes Scholar; in Chinese history from Columbia University; and in strategic intelligence from the Defense Intelligence College (now National Intelligence University). His wife Sara Hanks is a corporate attorney and CEO specializing in early-stage capital formation. They live in Alexandria, Virginia.

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