



## SITTING OUTSIDE THE NETWORK: REASSURING THE STABILITY OF THE TAIWAN STRAIT UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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### Abstract:

The US security policy toward East Asia since Obama administration's policy of "Pivot" had transformed its security partnership with the East Asia allies. The US moved away from the hierarchical relationship where it maintained close bilateral cooperation with each country and moved toward an interconnected security network that requires a substantive contribution from allies. Though this security network is not a collective defense system, the US expected its allies, Japan in particular, to expand their roles on regional security. Cross-alliance cooperation is expected to be more frequent. Taiwan is excluded from this transformation due to its unique political dispute with China. This article argues that the emerging security network in East Asia has an unintended consequence: It increases the risk of armed conflict in Taiwan Strait because the US will find it difficult to convince China that its allies will not be involved in Taiwan Strait. The conclusion suggests that the US and its allies can take several steps to credibly reassure China as the US strengthens relations with its security partners.

**Keywords:** Alliance politics, security network, cross-Strait relations, reassurance

**Título en Castellano:** *Sentado fuera de la red: Reasegurando la estabilidad del Estrecho de Taiwan bajo la administración Trump*

### Resumen:

La política de seguridad de Estados Unidos hacia Asia oriental desde la política de la administración Obama de "pivote" había transformado su asociación de seguridad con sus aliados. Estados Unidos se alejó de la relación jerárquica en la que mantenía una estrecha cooperación bilateral con cada país y se trasladó hacia una red de seguridad interconectada que requiere una contribución sustantiva de los aliados. Aunque esta red de seguridad no es un sistema de defensa colectiva, Estados Unidos espera que sus aliados, Japón en particular, amplíen sus funciones en la seguridad regional. Se espera que la cooperación entre alianzas sea más frecuente. Taiwán está excluido de esta transformación debido a su singular disputa política con China. Este artículo sostiene que la red de seguridad emergente en Asia oriental tiene una consecuencia no intencionada: aumenta el riesgo de conflicto armado en el estrecho de Taiwán porque a Estados Unidos le resultará difícil convencer a China de que sus aliados no se verán envueltos en el Estrecho de Taiwan. La conclusión sugiere que Estados Unidos y sus aliados pueden tomar varias medidas para tranquilizar creíblemente a China, mientras Estados Unidos fortalece las relaciones con sus socios de seguridad.

**Palabras Clave:** Política de Alianzas, red de seguridad, relaciones en el Estrecho de Taiwan, reaseguro.

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## 1. Introduction

For years, since the 1995/96 missile crisis, the Taiwan Strait has not been a place of military confrontation. Although the passage of anti-succession law in 2005 raised political tensions between Taipei and Beijing, these tensions did not escalate to militarized stand-offs. There were persistent diplomatic struggles between Taipei and Beijing, but military threats and conflicts were absent. Bilateral trade and investment thrived between Taiwan and China. The Ma In-jeou administration brought a period of relatively peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations. The relations soon cooled down after the pro-independence Democratic Progress Party returned to power in 2016. Although the cross-Strait relations worsened, the Taiwan Strait is still quite stable comparing to other area hot spots such as the Korean Peninsula or South China Sea.

Several researchers have discussed the stability in the Taiwan Strait. They explain the root causes and analyze possible changes in the future.<sup>2</sup> It is generally agreed that the US deterrence has been the main source of stability in Taiwan Strait ever since the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954. The US force stationed on the island supported Chiang Kai-shek's defense against the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the Cold War. Its unyielding defense commitment toward Taiwan since the establishment of diplomatic relationship with China in 1979 maintained the *de facto* independence of Taiwan. Beijing, Taipei, and Washington together formed such a stable trilateral relation that none of the three parties would dare to unilaterally alter the *statu quo*, due to the high cost of a multilateral conflict.

Studies on Taiwan frequently address the question of the *statu quo*, assessing the definition of *statu quo* and the possibility of changes.<sup>3</sup> It is stated that the changes can be initiated by any of the three parties in Taiwan Strait: China may unilaterally use force (or threaten to use force) against Taiwan; Taiwan may declare *de jure* independence and pass a new constitution; the US may withdraw its possible defense commitment<sup>4</sup>. The changes are linked to the foreign policy of the three parties. There are few discussions on the impact of an external actor in cross-Strait stability. Indeed, it is doubtful that any third party will risk the rage of China interfering or intervening militarily in the cross-Strait relations (unless there are fundamental

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<sup>2</sup> See Er, Lam Peng: "China and Japan: A Clash of Two 'Anti-Status Quo' Powers?", *China: An International Journal*, Vol.15, n° 1 (March 2017), pp. 83-97; Hickey, Dennis V.: "Parallel Progress: US-Taiwan Relations During an Era of Cross-Strait Rapprochement," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol.20, n° 4 (December 2015), pp. 369-384; Kastner, Scott L.: "Is the Taiwan Strait Still a Flash Point? Rethinking the Prospects for Armed Conflict between China and Taiwan", *International Security*, Vol.40, n° 3 (January 2016), pp. 5492; Li, Yitan, and Zhang, Enyu: "Changing Taiwanese Identity and Cross-Strait Relations: A Post 2016 Taiwan Presidential Election Analysis", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol.22, n° 1 (March 2017), pp. 17-35; Lieberthal, Kenneth: "Preventing a War over Taiwan Essay", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.84, n° 2 (2005), pp. 53-63; Lim, Yves-Heng: "The Future Instability of Cross-Strait Relations: Prospect Theory and Ma Ying-Jeou's Paradoxical Legacy", *Asian Security* (August 2017), p. 121; Schreer, Benjamin: "The Double-Edged Sword of Coercion: Cross-Strait Relations After the 2016 Taiwan Elections", *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol.9, n° 1 (January 2017), pp. 50-65; Tucker, Nancy Bernkopf (2005): *Dangerous Strait: The U.S.-Taiwan-China Crisis*, Columbia University Press; Wenger, Josh, and Chen, Ming-tong: "Prospects for Cross-Strait Political Negotiation: Exploring Win-Sets", *The China Quarterly* (July 2017), p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> See Grossman, Derek et al.: "Correspondence: Stability or Volatility across the Taiwan Strait?", *International Security*, Vol.41, n° 2 (October 2016), pp. 192-197; Huang, Chin-Hao, and James, Patrick: "Blue, Green or Aquamarine? Taiwan and the Status Quo Preference in Cross-Strait Relations", *The China Quarterly*, Vol.219 (September 2014), pp. 670-692; Pan, Hsin-Hsin, Wu, Wen-Chin, and Chang, Yu-Tzung: "How Chinese Citizens Perceive Cross-Strait Relations: Survey Results from Ten Major Cities in China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.26, n° 106 (July 2017), pp. 616631; Tucker, ibid.; Wu, Charles Chong-Han, and Hsieh, John Fuh-Sheng: "Alliance Commitment and the Maintenance of the Status Quo", *Asian Perspective*, Vol.40, n° 2 (April 2016), pp. 197221.

<sup>4</sup> The Taiwan Relations Act does not include a clause of direct military assistance to Taiwan in case of an invasion.



third-party interests-not only military- to be defended). France, for example, suffered economic sanctions after the French government granted a large arms sale package to Taiwan in 1992.<sup>5</sup>

This article discusses a possible orientation of the cross-Strait relations from the perspective of the rational deterrence theory, examining how the external environment will affect China's expectation of cross-Strait deterrence. The article argues that the trilateral relations are not isolated from the security environment. The discussion begins with the shift of the US's alliance strategy in East Asia since the Obama administration. The US's allies are taking more responsibilities in regional security affairs, and the inter-alliance connections are also getting stronger under the US stewardship. Under these circumstances, the US will find it difficult to convince China that its Asian allies will remain outside of the Taiwan Strait, either during peacetime or during a conflict.

The US and its allies have no intention to antagonize China over the Taiwan issue. However, China's concern comes from the structural changes in East Asia security environment. I argue that China will worry that the US's deterrence will become stronger with the assistance of its allies and China will consider that its military options will worsen, as the inter-alliance cooperation will hamper China's ability to threatening Taiwan. As a result, China, in the short term, will be less patient with Taiwan and more willing to employ coercive threats to restrain Taiwan, as these threats will sway Taiwan closer to China's preferable position. In other words, China will be more willing to use force to achieve unification when its probability of winning is still solid. The article concludes that the US will need to present stronger credible reassurances to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The article is organized as follows: first I discuss the relevant literature on the subject, where I introduce the deterrence game written by Suzanne Werner.<sup>6</sup> Then, I discuss the recent developments in the US alliance system in East Asia. Later I present a modified deterrence model to show how China will assess the security environment if a fourth party joins the deterrence game. Lastly, I present my assessment on cross-Strait stability and suggestions for reassuring China.

## **2. Extended deterrence and cross-Strait relations**

Deterrence is a theory and a policy that prevents an adversary from using military force to resolve a political dispute.<sup>7</sup> Deterrent, by definition, is the threat of using military force, an instrument of coercion, trying to influence the decision making process of a potential aggressor.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes states extend such coercive threat to protect other states, and therefore it is called extended deterrence<sup>9</sup>, a situation where a defender seeks to prevent an external aggressor from attacking its ally or its protégé.

Successful extended deterrence relies on establishing credible deterrence threats. A defender should demonstrate strong resolve to use military force and its capability to defend its

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<sup>5</sup> Wellons, Patricia: "Sino-French Relations: Historical Alliance vs. Economic Reality", *The Pacific Review*, Vol.7, nº 3 (1994), pp. 341-348.

<sup>6</sup> Werner, Suzanne: "Deterring Intervention: The Stakes of War and Third-Party Involvement", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.44, nº 4 (2000), pp. 720-732.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, Patrick M (2003): *Deterrence Now*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Schelling, T.C. (2008): *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Huth, Paul, and Russett, Bruce: "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980", *World Politics*, Vol.36, nº 4 (July 1984), pp. 496-526; Russett, Bruce M.: "The Calculus of Deterrence", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.7, nº 2 (1963), pp. 97-109.



protégé.<sup>10</sup> A potential attacker will launch attack if it believes, perhaps mistakenly, that the defender is incapable of defending the target state or the defender lacks the resolve to carry out a retaliation. The main issue in the policy of deterrence rests on the information concerning the intention and capability of the defender. The problem of understanding a deterrent threat, however, is not the lack of information, but the difficulties of interpreting information available to a potential attacker.<sup>11</sup> To reduce uncertainty, a defender usually incurs in a costly signage.<sup>12</sup> If the cost of a defender to abandon its protégé is high, the deterrent threat is more credible for the attacker. For example, the deployment of forces nearby or on the territory of the protégé put the defender's force under the risk of being attacked. It sends a strong signal on the will to defend the protégé.<sup>13</sup>

The US-Taiwan-China trilateral relations is a case of extended deterrence. Although the US and Taiwan had no formal alliance since 1979, the US had a clear policy orientation to forestall PLA's use of force on Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> The US prefers a peaceful Taiwan Strait where the Taiwan government leans toward the US. Taiwan, on the other hand, is a protégé that relies heavily on the US for the provision of security. Taiwan is vulnerable without the US's deterrent. The size of the bilateral military disparity is quite significant. There is little doubt that the PLA will quickly break Taiwan's defenses if Taiwan fights alone. As China's military power has rapidly grown up in recent decades, the imbalance in cross-Strait military strength become more precarious. Recent analysis shows an increasing concern about Taiwan's ability to withstand the Chinese attack before the US intervention and urge Taiwan to increase its defense capability in order to allow the response of the US forces.<sup>15</sup> These recommendations seek to secure the US's ability to intervene in the Taiwan Strait, thereby maintaining its deterrent. The presence of a US deterrent force is commonly recognized as the main factor keeping peace in Taiwan Strait. It becomes even more important as China becomes more capable of conquering Taiwan by force. Since the Cold War this deterrence successfully kept the peace between China and Taiwan. Indeed, professor Robert S. Ross argues that cross-Strait deterrence is more stable than the deterrence existing in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>16</sup>

The Taiwan Relations Act sets up the US's commitment to the defense of Taiwan. Such commitment is constrained by the three communiques between the US and China. The Third Communique (also referred as August 17<sup>th</sup> Communique) is directly related to Taiwan's security since it calls for the gradual decrease of the US arms sales to Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> Due to the lack

<sup>10</sup> Achen, Christopher H., and Snidal, Duncan: "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies", *World Politics*, Vol.41, nº 2 (1989), pp. 143-169; Powell, Robert (1990): *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility*, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Huth, Paul (1988): *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, Yale University Press.

<sup>12</sup> See Fearon, James: "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.41, nº 1 (1997), pp. 6890; Morrow, James D.: "Signaling Difficulties with Linkage in Crisis Bargaining", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.36, nº 2 (1992), pp. 153-172.

<sup>13</sup> See Fuhrmann, Matthew, and Sechser, Todd S.: "Signaling Alliance Commitments: Hand-Tying and Sunk Costs in Extended Nuclear Deterrence", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.58, nº 4 (2014), pp. 919-935.

<sup>14</sup> Chan, Steve: "Extend Deterrence in the Taiwan Strait", *World Affairs*, Vol.166, nº 2 (2003), pp. 109-125.

<sup>15</sup> Murray, William S.: "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy", *Naval War College Review*, Vol.61, nº 3, (Summer 2008), pp. 1238; Shlapak, David et al.: "A Question of Balance: Political Context and Military Aspects of the China-Taiwan Dispute", 2009, at [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG888.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG888.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Ross, Robert S. (2006): *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, Stanford University Press, pp. 13-49.

<sup>17</sup> This promise was not without conditions. The Communique aimed to resolve difference over arms sales to Taiwan. The US recognized that stopping arms sales would leave Taiwan defenseless against PLA invasion. The decrease of arms sales would depend on "the Chinese policy of striving for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question." The article reads "...the United States Government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in



of diplomatic relations and a formal alliance, the US's security obligation on Taiwan has been unilaterally defined by Washington. The commitment had been declared and shown in various public statements and in the US foreign policy. For example, Ronald Reagan disclosed six assurances to Taiwan following the announcement of the Third Communique between China and the US.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to an alliance scenario, the lack of a formal agreement makes the US defense commitments more unpredictable and, thus, its resolve to defend Taiwan is not clear. The US has adopted various forms of signage, alarming China about its resolution to protect Taiwan. Arms sales had been one of the most significant signals.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the US resolve was demonstrated by military exchanges, high level officials visits, and technology transfer. Meanwhile, the US also maintained a clear position on the issue, rejecting Taiwan independence since this was unacceptable to China and might press Beijing to adopt a military solution. The US's ability to protect Taiwan as well as to restrain Taiwan constituted a strong deterrent power. On the other hand, war on Taiwan became very costly for China, and, apparently, there was no immediate loss in maintaining the current status. China was discontent with US's involvement in Taiwan Strait, but challenging the US was not a promising option. The US's extended deterrence created a stable *statu quo*. China refrained from using force and Taiwan refrained from declaring *de jure* independence.<sup>20</sup> The absence of military clashes in Taiwan Strait since the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis suggests that the US deterrence was quite successful.

Although the deterrence theory helps us understand why a potential attacker (China) refrains from using force against the target (Taiwan), the basic deterrence game does not capture the available foreign policy tools for an attacker. Most importantly, it fails to account for the attacker's ability to issue coercive threats.<sup>21</sup> Werner develops a game that allows the attacker to issue threats on target.<sup>22</sup> Figure 1 presents the extensive form of the game. This game represents quite well the cross-Strait deterrence. An attacker makes a  $\chi$  amount of coercive threat (offer) to a target. The attacker backs its threat by pledging to use force. The target thinks and discusses whether it wants to accept. If the target refuses, a conflict will occur, and then the third party decides whether it wants to join. Target concession depends on whether it will receive the help from the third party. The target risks a bilateral war with the attacker under the absence of third party assistance. The optimal amount of threat is mainly determined by the capability (probability of winning) and the cost of war for the defender. The main point of this model is that the attacker can find a proper level of coercive threat that prevents the intervention of a third party.<sup>23</sup>

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quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends gradually to reduce its sale of arms to Taiwan, leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution."

<sup>18</sup> The Reagan administration declared these positions in 1982 to reassure the government of Taiwan and the US Congress after announcing the third joint China-US Communique. The US government confirmed that it would continue to provide arms to Taiwan. The US would not force Taipei to negotiate with Beijing. And the US would uphold the Taiwan Relations Act. Over the past three decades the US government constantly reaffirmed these positions. In 2016 the Congress passed a resolution to formalize these assurances. For the full-text of the resolution, see *H.Con.Res.88 - Reaffirming the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances as cornerstones of United States*, at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/88/text/eh>.

<sup>19</sup> Kastner, Scott L., Reed, William, and Chen, Ping-Kuei: "Mostly Bark, Little Bite? Modeling US Arms Sales to Taiwan and the Chinese Response", *Issues & Studies*, Vol.49, n° 3 (September 2013), pp. 111-150.

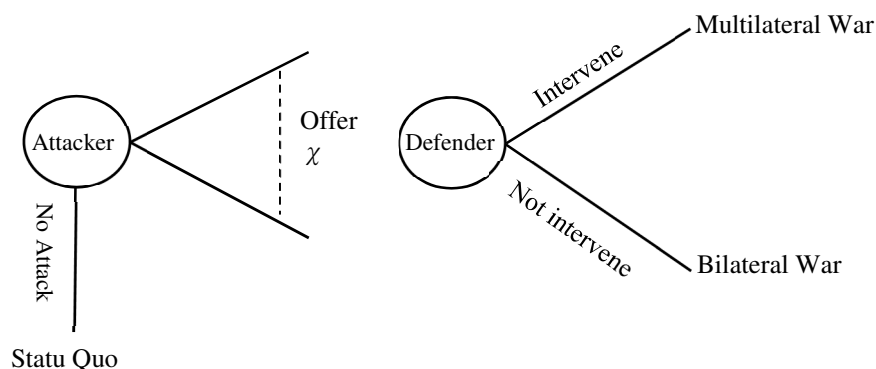
<sup>20</sup> During the Cold War, the US's extended deterrence also made sure Taiwan did not launch military assault against mainland. Chiang Kai-shek was determined to assault the Chinese mainland. The US stopped his operations during early 1960s.

<sup>21</sup> Signorino, Curtis S., and Tarar, Ahmer: "A Unified Theory and Test of Extended Immediate Deterrence", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.50, n° 3 (July 2006), pp. 586-605.

<sup>22</sup> Werner, "Deterring Intervention."

<sup>23</sup> The level of threat is clear under complete information. On the other hand, under incomplete information the uncertainty increases the difficulty to correctly estimate the equilibrium level of threat.

**Figure 1. Werner's coercive bargaining model**



Source: Werner, "Deterring Intervention."

This model points out the dilemma the Chinese leaders faced in cross-Straits deterrence. The US consistently showed resolve to protect Taiwan. China found it difficult to use force against Taiwan. To bend the *statu quo* closer to China's ideal point, the Chinese leaders sought certain level of concession from the Taiwan government that creates a certain atmosphere for unification. In the past China made various latent threats (or offers) to Taiwan. These threats did not trigger military reactions from the US, but they helped achieve China's policy goal. At the minimum, China would want to coerce leaders in Taiwan to refrain from declaring independence. The passage of Anti-Secession Law, annual PLA military exercises<sup>24</sup>, and the PLA aircrafts and naval vessels passing or circumnavigating Taiwan<sup>25</sup> were the examples of these latent threats. These policies intended to give a warning to the leader of Taiwan. They try to influence Taiwan's policy by constraining the available options that the Taiwan leader could choose. Werner's model also explains why China was eager to provide favors to Taiwanese enterprises or sought to control media in Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> China knew clearly that these efforts would not provoke the US intervention, and it could gain influence within the Taiwan society.

From this point of view, the US deterrence success did not rely solely on the US's military capability. Two other factors kept China from challenging the *statu quo*: First, China maintains the option to make coercive threats or lucrative offers to Taiwan. In these cases, Taiwan usually has to respond to China alone. The US does not intervene, nor does it help Taiwan to resist China's demands or offers. China can make flexible moves as long as it does not violate Taiwan's sovereignty by military force. To be sure, those threats do not imply a military conflict as the last resort. Taiwan does not necessarily risk a bilateral war if it resists China's demand. Taiwan usually stands firm against coercion. Taiwan's response to the Anti-Secession Law is an example. Taiwan never recognized that the Law gave China the legitimacy to invade Taiwan. However, China's latent threat did have an impact on the Taiwan society. The fact that Beijing insisted on having the legitimacy to invade Taiwan created pressures on the

<sup>24</sup> These exercises targeted Taiwan because they included amphibious landing operations.

<sup>25</sup> Pan, Jason: "Chinese aircraft fly around Taiwan", *Taipei Times*, 11 December 2012, at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2016/12/11/2003660975> The PLA vessels and submarines frequently passed through Taiwan Strait and the east coast of Taiwan without crossing the Strait midline. Last January, China's new aircraft carrier Liaoning passed by the Taiwan Strait. See "Taiwan Scrambles Jets, Navy as China Aircraft Carrier Enters Taiwan Strait", *Reuters*, 11 January 2017, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-carrier-idUSKBN14V061>.

<sup>26</sup> Wang, Jianmin (王建民): "南台湾经济社会结构对岛内政治与两岸关系影响初析 (A Study on the Impact of Southern Taiwan Social Economic Structure on Taiwan's Politics and Cross-Straits Relations)", *台湾研究 (Taiwan Studies)*, Vol.2 (2012), pp. 16.



Taiwanese government, forcing it to slow down pro-independence policies.

Second, deterrence works if China retains the chance to challenge the *statu quo* in the future. China's growing capability increases its confidence of resisting the US intervention in Taiwan Strait. China seeks to break the deterrence by developing A2AD technology. The Chinese leaders, particularly PLA ranking officers, expect that China's ability to coerce Taiwan will increase in the not distant future. Indeed, some hawkish statements made by a few retired PLA generals seems to suggest that time is on the side of China, and China will soon be able to take Taiwan by force.<sup>27</sup> The shadow of the future is long for China. Apparently, it has no interest in resolving the Taiwan issue immediately. China will probably wait until it has sufficient capability to repel the US intervention. At that time, China will promote a policy of coercive bargaining against Taiwan without the US intervention.

The Taiwan Strait has been peaceful due to a successful extended deterrence. The US showed a reliable commitment to the defense of Taiwan, and its power projection capability to Asia keeps China at bay. China, though not satisfied with the current status, has sufficient reasons not to challenge the *statu quo*. The US and Taiwan are well aware of China's incentives to challenge the *statu quo* in the future. As China becomes more capable of changing the *statu quo* unilaterally, they too will try to raise the deterrent capabilities.

### **3. Hub and Spokes and the US Alliance Pattern in Asia**

During the Cold War, the US adopted a different alignment strategy in East Asia. Unlike the multilateral alliances in Europe led by the US, the US established bilateral security alliances with each major ally in East Asia. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were part of the free world camp, but each of them maintained a security cooperation with the US separately. The US only pursued multilateralism in Southeast Asia (SEATO) and Oceania (ANZUS). Cha argues that the risk of entrapment, the historical mistrust between these allies, and the degree of the US control over individual allies were the main reasons for this alignment decision.<sup>28</sup> These allies were coordinated with the US military closely, but they seldom intervened in each other's security affairs. For example, Japan was not responsible for defending South Korea and South Korea did not assist the defense of Taiwan Strait. These alliances worked independently despite the fact that their security interests were closely connected.

The US's alliance strategy was known as the "hub and spoke" system. The US occupied the center and extended its security and political influence into the East Asian states. The US relied primarily on its own capability to maintain the security of Asia allies, creating hierarchical relations in the alliances similar to those maintained between the Soviets and its Communist protégés.<sup>29</sup> The US supported its major allies in Asia to fight against communist

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<sup>27</sup> For example, Yuan Luo's recent comment on the backwardness of Taiwan military. His article was published on *Global Times*. Luo, Yuan (罗援): "Tongyi: shi juebu dongyao de gangtie yizhi" (Unification is the unyielding steel resolve, 统一，是绝不动摇的钢铁意志), *Global Times*, 25 January 2016, at <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2016-01/8438331.html>; Hongguang Wang also claimed that PLA will invade Taiwan before 2020, see his interview host by *Global Times*. Wang, Hongguang (王洪光): "2020 nian qianhou hui baofa taihai zhanzheng" (War will occur in Taiwan Strait around the year of 2020, 2020年前后会爆发台海战争), *Global Times*, 17 December 2016, at <http://taiwan.huanqiu.com/article/2016-12/9823878.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Cha, Victor D.: "Powerplay: Origins of the US Alliance System in Asia", *International Security*, Vol.34, nº 3 (2010), pp. 158-196.

<sup>29</sup> Hemmer, Christopher J., and Katzenstein, Peter: "Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism", *International Organization*, Vol.56, nº 3 (2002), pp. 575-607;



threats outside or within their states. These Asian allies were on the frontline of the US's struggle with the communist world, and they made different degrees of contribution in the Vietnam War. However, these allies, particularly Japan, did not get involved in the security affairs outside of its territory. The US took full responsibility in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula. Throughout the Cold War, the US never encouraged its security partners to engage in other formal security agreements.

To be sure, the US security commitment to any of its allies in East Asia was connected with other alliances. The "domino theory" was acute in the hub and spoke system. Once the hub weakened its connection with one spoke, the fear of abandonment would have driven other spokes to question the US's commitment with themselves. The US faced this dilemma during the normalization of relationship with China. Its commitment toward Taiwan was partly due to the desire to keep the faith of its allies. The hub and spoke system continued after the Cold War. The US maintained its presence in East Asia. As the multilateral agreements in Asia fell apart, the hub and spoke system was maintained. The US intervened in regional security hot spots helping its allies, including the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Korean Nuclear Crisis during the 1990s.

In the age of counterterrorism war, the security agenda and hot spots in East Asia remained unchanged. The threat of North Korea, the Sino-US dispute over the political future of Taiwan, and East China Sea territorial disputes have occupied the minds of American leaders. The South China Sea dispute caught attention in the last few years because of the China's new activities in the region. The end of major wars in the Middle East and the rising challenges in Asian security affairs encouraged the US to divert more resources to Asia. Since 2011, the Obama administration adopted the policy of "strategic pivot to Asia", aiming at strengthening the US leadership in Asia.<sup>30</sup> It was often referred as "rebalancing". According to the US administration, the US should expand and intensify its presence in Asia. This included new deployments of military forces to Asia, defense cooperation with states in the region, and the promotion of free trade agreements such as TPP.<sup>31</sup>

A major part of the rebalancing policy was focused on strengthening alliance ties. The US started to build (or rebuild) closer security partnership with its Asian allies. The most important cases were Australia and Japan. These countries were both long-term allies of the US and major actors in East Asia politics. They had strong economies and military capabilities to intervene in regional affairs, and they were willing to follow the US's request to take more responsibilities. To be sure, these countries had already been deeply involved in regional security affairs before the Obama administration. For example, Japan wanted to promote its

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Tow, William, and Kersten, Rikki (2012): *Bilateral Perspectives on Regional Security: Australia, Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 214-240.

<sup>30</sup> Obama did not use the term "pivot" in public speeches for fear of provoking China. His Asia policy, however, was commonly referred as "pivot". For more discussion on pivot, see Kelly, Robert E.: "The 'Pivot' and Its Problems: American Foreign Policy in Northeast Asia", *The Pacific Review*, Vol.27, nº 3, (May 2014), pp. 479-503; Ratner, Ely: "Rebalancing to Asia with an Insecure China", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.36, nº 2, (April 2013), pp. 213-8; Ross, Robert S.: "The Problem with the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive Essay", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.91, (2012), pp. [i]-82; Rozman, Gilbert: "Reassessing the U.S. Rebalance to Northeast Asia", *Orbis*, Vol.59, nº 3, (January 2015), pp. 348-360; Silove, Nina: "The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia", *International Security*, Vol.40, nº 4 (April 2016), pp. 45-88..

<sup>31</sup> Manyin, Mark E. et al.: "Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's Rebalancing Toward Asia", Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, 28 March 2012, at <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA584466>.





role in issues of regional security since the end of Cold War.<sup>32</sup> However, the US's efforts to bring these states forward are recent and the inter-alliances cooperation had significant policy implications. It signaled changes in the US alliance policy in Asia.

The role of Japan increased significantly in recent years. It was evident that the US planned to allow Japan to take more responsibilities in regional security affairs. In 2015, the Japanese Diet passed a series of laws under the support of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. These security laws, or "the Legislation for Peace and Security" (hereafter Legislation), allowed the Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) to break the restraints of the Japanese constitution. The JSDF will be able to take a wider role in interstate conflicts. For example, the legislation enhanced JSDF's role in Peacekeeping Operations and relaxed the conditions of JSDF involvement in an armed conflict. It authorized the JSDF to join collective defense operations overseas. The JSDF could perform operation on foreign soil under the consent of the local government. The legislation also set up conditions where the JSDF would provide logistic supports to allies during armed conflict even if such conflict would not violate Japan's territorial sovereignty.<sup>33</sup>

The passage of the legislation suggested that the US wished Japan to take more responsibilities in the future. Japan and the US would be more flexible regarding the JSDF deployment beyond the Japanese territory. The JSDF can project its capability to areas where Japan's security interests are concerned. To be sure, the legislation still set limits about the extent of the JSDF participation in armed conflicts. The JSDF cannot use direct force unless the situation of "direct influence on Japan's security" exists. And, given the anti-militarism that exists in Japan, alive and kicking, the JSDF would face domestic pressures to participate in conflicts far away from Japan.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the legislation opened up opportunities for the JSDF to take a supportive role if the US is engaged in a military conflict with a third party. Japan will also be able to intervene in security affairs connected with its own interests such as the South China Sea dispute or the sea/air lines of communication.

In addition to authorizing the use of force, Japan took steps to strengthen its military capability. Japan relied on the US for nuclear deterrence, but it has maintained a substantive military force since the end of Second World War. Although its military expense as percentage of GDP was relatively low- was less than 1%-, Japan consistently occupied the second place of the military spending among East Asia countries. In recent years, the Japanese government showed an interest in expanding its military capabilities in response to the North Korea missile and nuclear tests and Japan's defense budget has grown for five consecutive years. The government is requesting another 2.5% increase for the fiscal year of 2018.<sup>35</sup>

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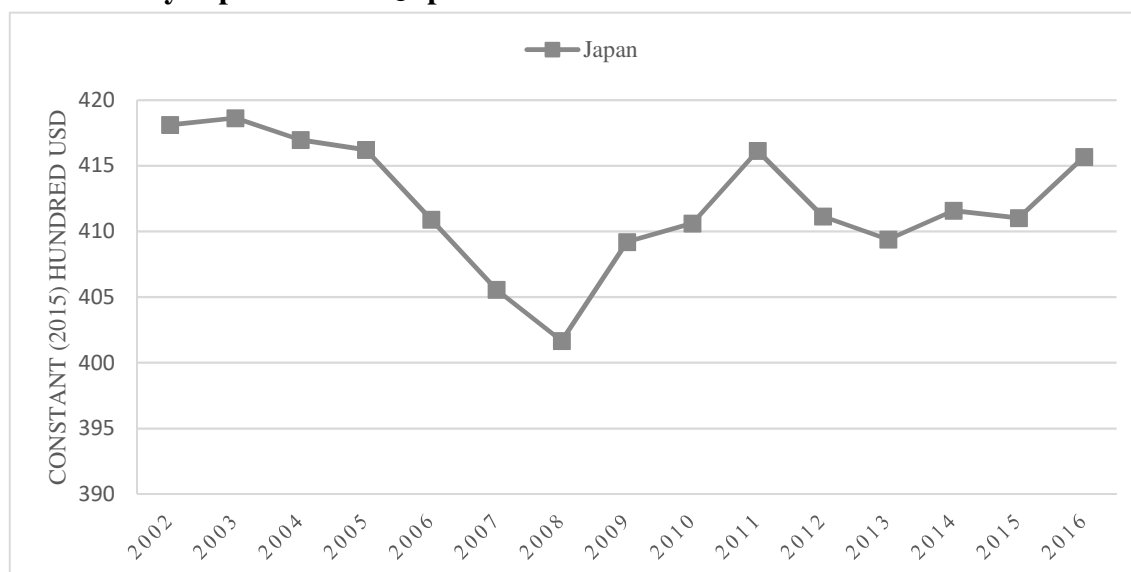
<sup>32</sup> Ashizawa, Kuniko: "Japan's Approach toward Asian Regional Security: From 'Hub-and-Spoke' Bilateralism to 'Multi-Tiered'", *The Pacific Review*, Vol.16, nº 3 (September 2003), pp. 361-382.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed analysis of the content of the legislation, see an article written by Atsuhiko Fujishige, who is an official in the Ministry of Defense. His article is accessible online, see Fujishige, Atsuhiko: "New Japan Self-Defense Force Missions under the "Proactive Contribution to Peace" Policy: Significance of the 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/new-japan-self-defense-force-missions-under-%E2%80%9Cproactive-contribution-peace%E2%80%9D-policy>

<sup>34</sup> Izumikawa, Yasuhiro: "Explaining Japanese Antimilitarism: Normative and Realist Constraints on Japan's Security Policy", *International Security*, Vol.35, nº 2 (September 2010), pp. 123-160.

<sup>35</sup> Pollmann, Mina: "What's in Japan's Record 2018 Defense Budget Request?", *The Diplomat*, 28 August 2017, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/08/whats-in-japans-record-2018-defense-budget-request/>.

**Figure 2. Military expenditure of Japan 2002-2016.**



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*.

Japan also witnessed new military developments. Its new helicopter destroyers, Izumo and Kaga, went into service in 2015 and 2017. The Izumo class destroyers were the largest surface vessels Japan has built since the Second World War. Although the Izumo class flight deck was designed to accommodate helicopters, it was stress its resemblance to a light aircraft carrier that could carry vertical landing combat jets (VTOL) such as F-35b.<sup>36</sup> In the meantime, the US has deployed a squadron of F-35b to Japan in the beginning of 2017.<sup>37</sup> Although neither the US nor Japan ever confirmed the possibility of operating F-35b on the Izumo destroyers, now the conversion of the Izumo helicopter carrier into a full-fledged aircraft carrier, packing F-35B fighter jets is openly discussed and a conclusion is expected by summer 2018 on retrofitting the Izumo.<sup>38</sup> The availability of the Izumo class destroyers open to the JSDF the chance of taking part in the US maritime operations.

In any case, Japan continues to strengthen its security cooperation with the US. In May 2017, Japan sent an Izumo class destroyer to South China Sea for a three-month tour. It participated in a joint passing exercise (PASSEX) with the US vessels in the South China Sea.<sup>39</sup> The helicopter destroyer later joined Indian and US vessels to begin the Malabar exercise.<sup>40</sup> This was the third time Japan joined this annual exercise. The participation of the Izumo class

<sup>36</sup> Gamble points out the possibility of accommodating short-take-off and vertical landing aircrafts. The Spanish Italian aircraft carriers host Harrier II combat aircrafts. The Izumo class has longer deck than those aircraft carriers. See Gamble, Matthew: "Japan's Lethal 'Helicopter-Destroyer': An Aircraft Carrier in Disguise?", *National Interests*, 11 April 2016, at <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/japans-lethal-helicopter-destroyer-aircraft-carrier-disguise-15740>

<sup>37</sup> Insinna, Valerie: "First F-35B Squadron Moves to Japan", *Defense News*, 10 January 2017, at <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/first-f-35b-squadron-moves-to-japan>.

<sup>38</sup> Ryo Aibara: "Japan's defense to mark historic change if Izumo becomes flattop", *The Asahi Shimbun*, 27 December 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Gady, Franz-Stefan: "South China Sea: Japan's Largest Warship Concludes Drill With US Navy Littoral Combat Ship", *The Diplomat*, 20 May 2017, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/05/south-china-sea-japans-largest-warship-concludes-drill-with-us-navy-littoral-combat-ship/>. For the plan of Izumo's tour, see Kelly, Tim & Kubo, Nobuhiro: "Exclusive: Japan plans to send largest warship to South China Sea, sources say", *Reuters*, 14 Mar 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-navy-southchinasea-exclusive-idUSKBN16K0UP>.

<sup>40</sup> For reports on the Exercise, see Kumar, Yogendra: "Malabar 2017's Geostrategic Dimensions", *Gateway House*, 3 August 2017, at <http://www.gatewayhouse.in/malabar-2017-geostrategic-dimensions/>.



destroyer did not represent a projection of military power, but instead an indication that Japan was able to coordinate with its allies for joint operations in case of an armed conflict takes place outside the Japanese territory. The US also brought Japan to coordinate with other allies more closely. Japan was invited to join the 2015 Talisman Sabre, an annual exercise held by Australia and the US.<sup>41</sup> This was the first time the Japanese military went to the South Pacific and partnered with Australia. The security agenda of Japan and Australia gradually merged under the support and patronage of the US. As the Australian PM Turnbull said: “Australia is invested in Japan's success as Japan is invested in ours”.<sup>42</sup>

Japan used to focus its security interests in northern Asia, standing with the US to deal with threats coming from North Korea. Australia traditionally was more concerned about the stability in South China Sea and South Pacific. Their interests became inter-related since the Obama administration. The US introduced Japan into a security agenda where it previously did not participate because it expected that Japan would take an increasing role in the regional security affairs. The result is that Japan is now actively engaged in inter-alliance cooperation and prepared for possible interventions in regional security crisis.

The US also increased its security cooperation with other Asian states by strengthening its military presence. This includes the rotation deployment of the US marines in northern Australia, the deployment of US counterterrorism force in Philippines<sup>43</sup>, and the base enhancement project in Philippines.<sup>44</sup> These policies remained unchanged during the Trump administration. In response to North Korea's missile tests in the first half of 2017, the US sent two aircraft carrier strike groups to the Korean Peninsula.<sup>45</sup> This was a rare concentration of the US naval force. The provocative behavior of North Korea not only increased the US military deployment in North Asia, it also increased the US cooperation with its allies.

Unlike the hierarchical relations the US had maintained in the past, the US increasingly asked its allies to take more responsibilities in the regional security affairs. All this did not fundamentally change the hub and spoke system. An example was the alliance relations in North Asia. Although both Japan and South Korea faced the threat from North Korea, the US still keep the two states apart. The US held military exercises with each one of them but never invited both states to a joint exercise. The joint military actions might touch the sensitive political/historical nerve between Japan and South Korea.

Although the US expected its Asia allies to take an increasing role, it did not make use constantly of the burden sharing argument as what the case with the European allies. On the

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/26/japan-joins-us-australian-military-exercise-in-july-for-first-time>

<sup>42</sup> Hitchings, Anna: “Japan, Australia discuss military, trade”, *news.com.au*, 15 January 2017, at <http://www.news.com.au/national/breaking-news/japan-australia-discuss-military-trade/news-story/602bc3e93f434e226ecbca4ee9f41e98>.

<sup>43</sup> The US deployed forces on Philippines since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack. Due to the limitation of Philippine constitution, the forces stationed there on rotational basis. Heydarian, Richard J.: “As terror threat rises, Philippines reaches to America”, 12 June 2017, at <http://www.atimes.com/article/terror-threat-rises-duterte-pivots-america/>.

<sup>44</sup> This is part of Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). This decision represented the US's interest to invest more in its Asia ally. See Mogato, Manuel: “Philippines Says U.S. Military to Upgrade Bases, Defense Deal Intact”, *Reuters*, 26 January 2017, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-usa-defence-idUSKBN15A18Z>.

<sup>45</sup> LaGrone, Sam: “U.S. Conducting Dual Carrier-Ops off Korean Peninsula Amidst Chinese Concern”, *USNI News*, 31 May 2017, at <https://news.usni.org/2017/05/31/u-s-conducting-dual-carrier-ops-off-korean-peninsula-amidst-chinese-concern>.



2017 NATO summit, President Trump openly urge the NATO members to spend a minimum of 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense as was agreed at the Wales Summit in September 2014.<sup>46</sup> The Trump administration did not make a similar requirement to its Asian allies. Moreover, the US did not push its allies to replace its role in East Asia. On the contrary, it increased its military presence and worked closely with its Asian allies. The US dominance on regional security remained strong. Its leadership prompted its Asian allies to contribute to the regional security.

The result of this efforts was a loosely connected security network between the US allies, although not all allies were connected with each other. Only few US allies (namely, Japan and Australia) established a cross-alliance cooperation. The US carefully maneuvered and monitored the inter-alliance cooperation to avoid disputes. And if the allies had difficulties in cooperating with each other, the US mediated between them. For example, Australia expressed its interests in joining the 2017 exercise Malabar, but India rejected the Australia's request for fear of antagonizing China.<sup>47</sup> The US and Japan voiced their support for Australia and India later agreed to accept Australia's participation as an observer.

The security network in East Asia is still nascent. It is far from a collective defense alliance, nor does it resemble a security community. But it is evident that the allies will increase their cooperation by supporting the other allies' vital security interests. More remarkable, the US's Asian allies will be capable of sharing the burden with the US in regional security affairs. If a conflict occurs in the region, the US allies will be ready to provide military assistance.

The development of the US alliance system focuses on an imminent regional security threat, namely, North Korea's aggression and China's presence in South China Sea and East China Sea. Taiwan Strait is excluded from allies' exercises. China is determined to reject any foreign intervention in the Taiwan issue. It tolerates the US involvement because the US has already been involved since the Chinese Civil War. However, it will not tolerate more interventions from neighboring countries.

Although the Asian states are unwilling to see an unprovoked use of force on Taiwan, their interest in intervening in a cross-Strait conflict remains very low. The Asia allies depend on the US to resolve the issue of Taiwan. Even Japan, who is the most interested country in Taiwan's *de facto* independence, carefully maneuvers between China and the US and avoids being involved in cross-Strait politics. Taiwan is sitting outside the emerging security network. As inter-alliance cooperation becomes more frequent, Taiwan still relies on the informal commitment provided by the US. Even if Taiwan wants to participate in regional security affairs, it will face the objection of the US and its neighbors. The essence of the cross-Strait deterrence

<sup>46</sup> "Donald Trump Tells NATO Allies to Pay up at Brussels Talks", *BBC News*, 25 May 2017, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40037776>. NATO: "Wales Summit Declaration", 5 September 2014, at [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm).

<sup>47</sup> The Indian government denied that China factor was behind its decision, but it was generally believed that India worried that China might increase activities in Indian Sea as response. See analysis by Smith, Jeff: "Why Is India Excluding Australia From Naval Drills?", *The Diplomat*, 1 June 2017, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/06/why-is-india-excluding-australia-from-naval-drills/>. Also see report on India's decision: Miglani, Sanjeev: "India Won't Include Australia in Naval Drills, Fears China Backlash", *Reuters*, 30 May 2017, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-navy-exercises-idUSKBN18Q1VD>; "India Rebuffs Australia's Request to Participate in Malabar Joint Naval Exercise with US, Japan over China Concerns", *The Straits Times*, 31 May 2017, at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-rebuffs-australias-request-to-participate-in-malabar-joint-naval-exercise-with>; Miglani, Sanjeev: "U.S. Carrier Group Leads Biggest yet Drills with India and Japan", *Reuters*, 10 July 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-navy-idUSKBN19V11X>.

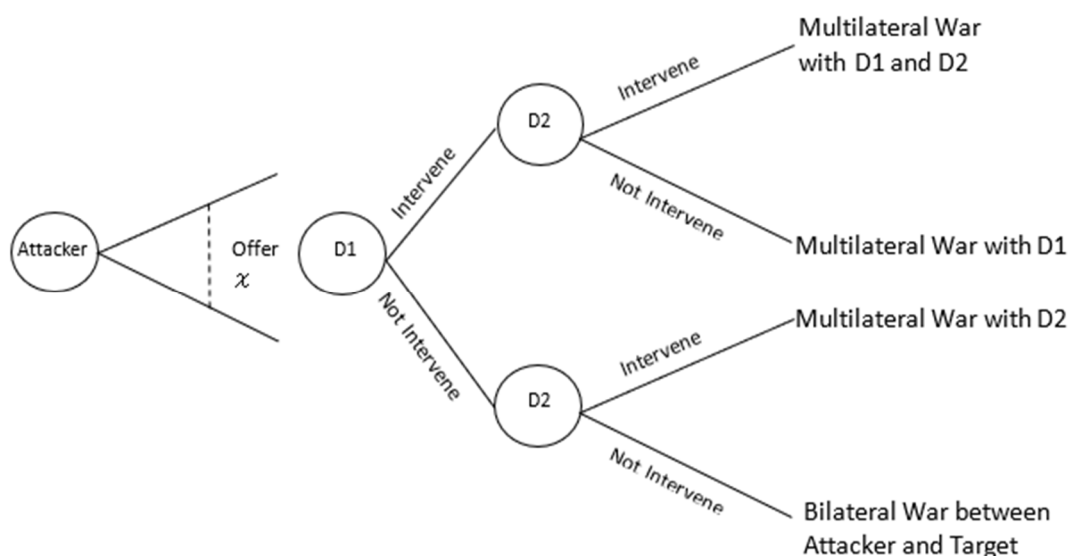


is not different from the past despite the fact that Japan, South Korea, and Australia have begun to take more responsibilities, aiding the US.

Nevertheless, the emerging security network has an impact on the cross-Strait relations. It does not result from the actions of the US allies but instead by the expectations created in China on the behavior of US allies in cross-Strait relations. Now, the US allies are more capable and willing to provide assistance to the US in the case of conflict. They are also more likely to be part of the US deterrence to discourage an attack. The fact that these allies become more active in regional affairs have implications on the cross-Strait relations. Since the US allies will assist the US military when a regional security crisis occurs, for China, the level of uncertainty increases: it becomes uncertain whether the US allies will remain neutral or participate in a cross-Strait conflict. This creates the possibility that a fourth actor could enter in the conflict if China decides to use force against Taiwan.

The inclusion of this fourth actor in the model presented before gives more uncertainty to the model. There will be two defenders who have to decide whether they want to intervene in a conflict between the attacker and the target. Figure 3 shows the extensive form of the game. Once defender 1 (D1) takes a decision, defender 2 (D2) has to decide whether it wants to join. With more states supporting the target, the target is more likely to survive in a multilateral war.

**Figure 3. Werner's Model with Two Defenders**



Source: Werner, "Deterring Intervention."

The decisions of two defenders are interrelated. If one defender refrains from intervention, it affects the probability of winning by the other two actors. To simplify the model and make the model closer to a cross-Strait situation, we assume that D1 is much stronger than D2. The basic dynamic of the game remains the same. Deterrence fails when the target refuses to counteract the attacker's threat, resulting in an attack on the target. In general, the most significant change here is that the presence of D2 increases the deterrent threat and the total amount of defense. War becomes costlier for the attacker and its probability of winning is lower. The attacker will consider the preferences of D1 and D2 when it makes a threat (offer) to the target. And the target will be less likely to concede because it is harder for the attacker to launch attack.



Under a complete information, D1 and D2's policy choice is clear. If D1 intervenes, D2 will choose to intervene because they will prevail in conflict. If D1 does not intervene, D2 will not intervene because of war cost and low chance of winning. The attacker can find the sufficient  $\chi$  amount to prevent the intervention of both defenders. It only needs to know D1's acceptable  $\chi$  amount. However, the amount of  $\chi$  is expected to be smaller here than in the one defender scenario. The reason is that the defenders will share the cost of war. If D1's war cost is lower, the amount of  $\chi$  it can tolerate will decrease.

The game becomes much more complicated under incomplete information. The attacker is uncertain about the resolve of both defenders. The attacker cannot correctly estimate whether they are sincere about their claims of defending the target. There is a higher risk that the attacker issues a miscalculated threat and triggers military responses from either D1 or D2. Moreover, since the attacker needs to understand the resolve of two actors, it becomes more difficult to estimate. The attacker might be correct on one of the defenders but fail to recognize the resolve of another. In that case, the attacker might accidentally enter a conflict with an opponent it does not expect.

The real capabilities of D1 and D2 are not clear. The attacker knows that D1 is stronger, but it does not know whether the defenders are capable of defending the target. Hence it is difficult to estimate the probabilities of winning in a three-parties war or a fourth-parties war. Due to the uncertainty on capabilities, it is also hard to estimate the joint behavior. The attacker does not know if D1 is able to convince D2 to join, or vice versa. Therefore, the attacker may trigger a conflict in which it believes it will prevail in a three-party war, but soon finds that it cannot win such a war. In addition, a fourth-party joining the struggle may catch the attacker off guard and harm its prospects in the conflict. With uncertainty about capabilities, the attacker finds hard to use force because it cannot be sure about the result of the conflict.

In terms of the suitable amount of  $\chi$ , the attacker finds it very difficult to make a precise estimate. It needs to estimate and compare both D1's and D2's acceptable amount and issue a threat that does not exceed the smaller one between D1 and D2. Given that the probability of winning is uncertain, the chance of miscalculation increases. Under such circumstances the attacker may minimize its threat to prevent provocation, or simply does not threaten the target. The attacker finds harder to make a coercive demand since it has greater risk of triggering a multilateral war. In sum, the attacker's position deteriorates comparing to a three-actor scenario.

#### **4. The impact on cross-Straits stability**

Now we apply the model to Taiwan Strait. Other things being equal, if a fourth actor join in a cross-Straits conflict in the future, the probability of winning a multilateral war by China will decrease, and the cost of war will increase. China will expect to meet a stronger deterrent threat, and, under these circumstances, it is more difficult to make a coercive threat on Taiwan. As emphasized above, what matters is China's perception of its future position in a cross-Straits conflict. It does not matter how the US or its allies think or act. China's assessment will determine how it will act in the short run. As the East Asia security network is building up, China will feel its hands tied in the regional security agenda.<sup>48</sup> China sees a hazy future in the cross-Straits relations. It will gradually lose advantage as the US allies become stronger and more active in regional security affairs. The possibility of an US ally intervening in a cross-Straits conflict becomes a genuine concern. China thus has the incentive to act before its position worsens.

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<sup>48</sup> Liff, Adam P.: "China and the US Alliance System", *The China Quarterly*, April 2017, pp. 129.



Japan is the key actor in this scenario. From China's perspective, even if Japan does not join the fighting, it will take the auxiliary role and provide logistic support to the US forces, which will also increase China's cost of war and decrease its probability of winning. This is increasingly a possibility since JSDF has taken a stronger role in security issues overseas. In fact, Japan's naval operations overseas increased significantly. The territorial dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island and Japan's activity in South China Sea make China wary about Japan's military involvement in East Asia. As Japan projects its military capability into the East China Sea and the South China Sea, China will feel less confident about Japan's neutrality in a future cross-Strait conflict.

As an outstanding effect, China's ability to threaten Taiwan will weaken. Uncertainty about a fourth party to join the conflict makes it difficult to calculate the amount of demand that Taiwan will concede. China does not know whether the US will be less tolerant to a China's threat toward Taiwan. The stronger role of the US allies and the increase of inter-alliance cooperation send an unintended signal to China: The US allies will be more prepared to assist the US in the Taiwan Strait. As a result, the US will be more capable of defending Taiwan despite the Chinese military modernization. Leaders in China cannot ignore the possibility of a new partner in the Taiwan issue. If China feels concerned that the US is introducing its allies in the Taiwan Strait, it is a signal that the US takes the initiative for strengthening its deterrent threat against China. China may think that the US is becoming less tolerant over Taiwan, and the US will guard against China's effort of infringing on Taiwan's sovereignty. Then, China will discover that threatening effectively Taiwan is increasingly difficult.

To be sure, I do not argue that an US ally will directly join a cross-Strait conflict and fight against PLA, neither will the US formally allow its allies to initiate a deterrent threat against China over the issue of Taiwan. Any clear signal that a fourth party joins the deterrence will push the US and China to the brink of war. The US is well aware of China's fear to foreign intervention in cross-Strait relations. For the same reason, the US was reluctant to include Taiwan in its policy of pivot to Asia.<sup>49</sup> Yet the problem is not the actions of the US allies during peacetime. Once conflict erupts in Taiwan Strait and the US decides to intervene, the US has no reason to deliberately exclude its allies. It can call upon (or force) its Asian allies to assist in the conflict. China believes that it will not only face the US armed forces if a conflict erupts in the Taiwan Strait. Japan or other US allies may become associated with the conflict either by providing logistic support or intelligence. Even if the US decided not to intervene, its allies may act as a proxy and defend Taiwan for the US's and their own interests. When China considers military solutions, it will not only consider the probability of a US intervention but also the response of the US allies in East Asia. In the past, the role of the US's allies in a possible Taiwan Strait conflict was clear, they lacked the resolve and capabilities to confront China in defense of Taiwan. The inter-alliance cooperation today seems to suggest that these allies can have the capacity to intervene overseas.

The US has not clarified the role of its allies in cross-Strait relations. Indeed, the US has the incentive to keep this information reserved because it will have more options during the cross-Strait conflict. China, on the other hand, can only estimate the probability of having a fourth player in Taiwan Strait after observing the development of the US's alliance system in

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<sup>49</sup> Hickey, Dennis (2013): "The U.S. Pivot to the Asia-Pacific: Implications for Taiwan", in *Taiwan and the U.S. Pivot to Asia: New Realities in the Region?*, Washington, D.C, Wilson Center, pp. 13-24; Mazza, Michael: "Taiwan's Crucial Role in the US Pivot to Asia", *American Enterprise Institute*, July, Vol.9, (2013); Wang, Vincent Wei-cheng: "The U.S. Asia Rebalancing and the Taiwan Strait Rapprochement", *Orbis*, Vol.59, nº 3 (January 2015), pp. 361-379.



Asia. Japan has a territorial dispute with China; it actively participates in South China Sea dispute; and it highly values its relations with Taiwan. China has reason to suspect that Japan may be interested in participating in a future cross-Strait conflict. In addition to the concern over Japan, China also fears that more US allies will join after the conflict begins because the US will not hesitate to invite more allies to openly support Taiwan during conflict.

China's concern is likely to make it more restless. It will be less patient about the prospects of more favorable cross-Strait relations. A stronger US alliance system in Asia will make it more difficult to unify Taiwan despite its growing military capability. If that is true, Taiwan will foresee more aggressive movements from China in the short run. These moves are likely to be a coercive foreign policy backed by military threats instead of a military invasion. For example, China will urge further economic integration with Taiwan; it will gain more influence over the off-shore islands (Quemoy and Matsu). China will attempt to create a favorable political climate in Taiwan, so it may make more demands in the future. This includes manipulating local political organizations, media, and business who rely heavily on the Chinese market. The cross-Strait deterrence will be less stable because China will aim a short-term benefit. In the worst-case scenario, if China believes it is capable of resisting the US intervention, the deterrence has failed, and China can launch a preventive war to seize Taiwan.

### **5. The signals of assurance**

China's concerns cannot be avoided. In fact, it is important to be rather straightforward and clarify that the development of alliance relations in East Asia is relevant to the Taiwan's issue. The problem is that this claim is not credible without a costly signal. The US, as well as its allies, can take actions to keep China patient on the Taiwan issue. Sending a clear signal of assurance can avoid a misperception from China. It stabilizes Taiwan Strait as the US strengthens its alliance ties in Asia. Reaffirming the three communiques between the US and China is another reassurance. However, such policy primarily indicates the conditions of US's security obligation toward Taiwan but not the role of its Asian allies. The US will need to involve its allies in its costly signal.

In general, the US can clarify the scope and extent of Japan's overseas operation. It can guarantee both that JSDF will not enter the Taiwan Strait for military purposes and that the US allies will not become part in the deterrence force during peacetime. To make the signal more credible, the US will intervene between Taiwan and Japan, setting limits on the contacts between Taiwan's military force and JSDF. Moreover, the US will need to clarify the application of the Guidelines for US-Japan Security Cooperation. The US and Japan revised this Guidelines in 2015 and allowed Japan to participate in conflicts affecting Japan's security interests. Both the US and Japan consistently claim that Taiwan is not covered by the US-Japan alliance treaty. They should reaffirm this position with China and clearly separate the East China Sea dispute from the Taiwan issue. The signal will be more effective if made in public. The US should take the responsibility of monitoring security cooperation between Taiwan and its allies and, in the meantime, it should avoid joint-military operations and arms transfers between them.

The signal will be more credible if both the US and its allies make the same reassurance to China. The US allies can also clarify their positions in the issue of Taiwan. Since Taiwan and Japan renamed their representative offices in 2017, some analysts anticipated that Japan will increase the military cooperation with Taiwan.<sup>50</sup> To avoid China's concern, the Japanese

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<sup>50</sup> For example, Japan may provide technological assistance to Taiwan to build submarines. Analysts are generally optimistic about closer Japan-Taiwan ties since the DPP government traditionally had better relations





government needs to clarify its role in Taiwan's defense. It should also clarify that the JMSDF overseas missions will not involve the Taiwan Strait. In practice, Japan should avoid naval cooperation with Taiwan or keep it at the minimum. The JMSDF vessels should avoid getting close to Taiwan as they perform overseas operations. Japan can again declare in public that the new Guidelines with the US does not apply to Taiwan Strait and refute other interpretations. Such declaration is not a cheap talk. Due to the fact that Taiwan always alludes to the Japan's lack of clarity on the application of the Guidelines, making such announcement is costly from the perspective of Taiwan. It will also weaken Taiwan's confidence on relying on Japan. Therefore, such announcement is a costly signal in favor of China.

Taiwan, on the other hand, is not an insignificant player in cross-Strait relations. In a conventional deterrence model, the target can have an irrelevant role in deterrence. But Taiwan's moves could produce an unilateral change in this deterrence scenario. If Taiwan's current pro-independence parties maneuver toward *de facto* independence, China will launch an attack and the US then has to decide whether it wants to intervene. The past experience shows that the US is unwilling to be entrapped by Taiwan. The US will give a warning to Taiwan and signal the lack of resolve to defend Taiwan if Taiwan is moving toward independence. The US will have to reign in Taiwan by withholding its security assistance.

The US may have to restrain its Asian allies and Taiwan, but it does not mean that the US will weaken its position on Taiwan. On the contrary, as China becomes more impatient and its capabilities more intimidating, the US will need to show greater and clearer deterrent by punishment or by denial to discourage a Chinese invasion. To achieve this goal, the US should strengthen the existing bilateral security cooperation with Taiwan. Obama signed a military exchange bill before the end of his term.<sup>51</sup> This bill allows senior military officers to visit Taiwan. It is not clear if Trump wants to satisfy the calls for an exchange program. Sending senior officers to Taiwan will be a strong signal of the US's interest. The US Senate recently backed a proposal to allow US vessels to call at ports in Taiwan.<sup>52</sup> If this bill passes and the administration is willing to carry out these requirement, it will be a strong signal of US support to Taiwan. Meanwhile, the US arms sales to Taiwan should continue. For instance, the US can help Taiwan acquire the necessary technology to build diesel submarines.

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with Japan. For commentaries and analysis, see Fang, bofeng (方柏丰) & Cheng Yanhao(程彦豪): "tairi youhao kanhao Taiwan qianjian shangji rifang niti 'jishu lingjian hezuo'" (Taiwan-Japan friendship! Japan aims at the commercial interests of Taiwan's submarines. Japan may propose cooperation on technology and parts 台日友好！看好台灣潛艦商機日方擬提「技術、零件合作」), *SetN*, 7 August 2017, at <http://www.setn.com/News.aspx?NewsID=170997>; Chang, Chih-Cheng and Chen, Chih-Chin: "Taiwan's Puzzling New Approach to Japan", *The Diplomat*, 16 September 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/taiwans-puzzling-new-approach-to-japan/>; Romaniuk, Scott N. & Burgers, Tobias: "Time to Reset Japan-Taiwan Security and Defense Relations", *geopoliticalmonitor.com*, 26 October 2016, at <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/time-to-reset-japan-taiwan-security-and-defense-relations/>; Dickey, Lauren: "Taiwan's Search for Security Partners: Looking Beyond Washington", *TheNewsLens*, 5 April 2017, at <https://international.thenewslens.com/article/65191>; Gomez, Eric: "A Costly Commitment: Options for the Future of the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Relationship", *Cato Institute*, 28 September 2017, at <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/costly-commitment-options-future-us-taiwan-defense-relationship>

<sup>51</sup> For the content of the bill, see *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/4909/all-info>

<sup>52</sup> See Stokols, Eli: "Senate Panel Votes to Allow Navy to Call at Taiwanese Ports", *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 June 2017, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/senate-panel-votes-to-allow-navy-to-call-at-taiwanese-ports-1498698547>.



## 6. Conclusion

This article argues that the US alliance policy in Asia has gradually shifted since the Obama administration. The US still maintains the traditional hub and spoke alliance system, but it begins to encourage its allies, particularly Japan, to take more responsibilities in regional security affairs. This is evident in the growth of Japanese military and the Japanese involvement in US military operations in Asia.

The growing role of US's allies will have an impact on cross-Strait relations. As Taiwan becomes more confident on holding off China's military attacks, it is more capable of resisting coercive threats from China. It will be increasingly harder for China to achieve its favorite outcome. The concern of the indirect intervention of the US's ally will make China impatient about maintaining the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. Under this incentive, China is more likely to use force or issue coercive threats to Taiwan.

However, cross-Strait relations do not inevitably lead to a militarized tension. The US is the key to stabilize the Taiwan Strait if it makes a credible signal about its intention and resolve. The US shall clarify the degree in which a US ally can be involved in a cross-Strait conflict, and it will show its resolve in assisting Taiwan in an unprovoked conflict. At the same time, the US has to clarify to the Taiwanese authorities that its assistance is not a blank check, avoiding a provocation to China, demonstrating its ability to control Taiwan's internal affairs. The US's allies, particularly Japan, shall provide similar guarantees. They can avoid a direct military cooperation with Taiwan and reaffirm their position on the issue of Taiwan in terms of their alliance obligations with the US.

The transformation of the US alliance system in Asia is an ongoing process. Although the allies are unlikely to form a security community such as the one existing in Europe, a closer partnership is expected. As far as we can observe, President Trump has not abandoned the redesigned cooperation in Asia started under the Obama administration. It is expected that the Trump administration will continue to build ties with its Asian allies. If such ties continue to grow, we can anticipate more discussions between the US and China over the role of the US allies in Asian security affairs, including their role in the Taiwan Strait. As China becomes more concerned about the role of Japan, Philippines, or Australia, the US will need to reassure China concerning its allies' intent and actions in Taiwan Strait.



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