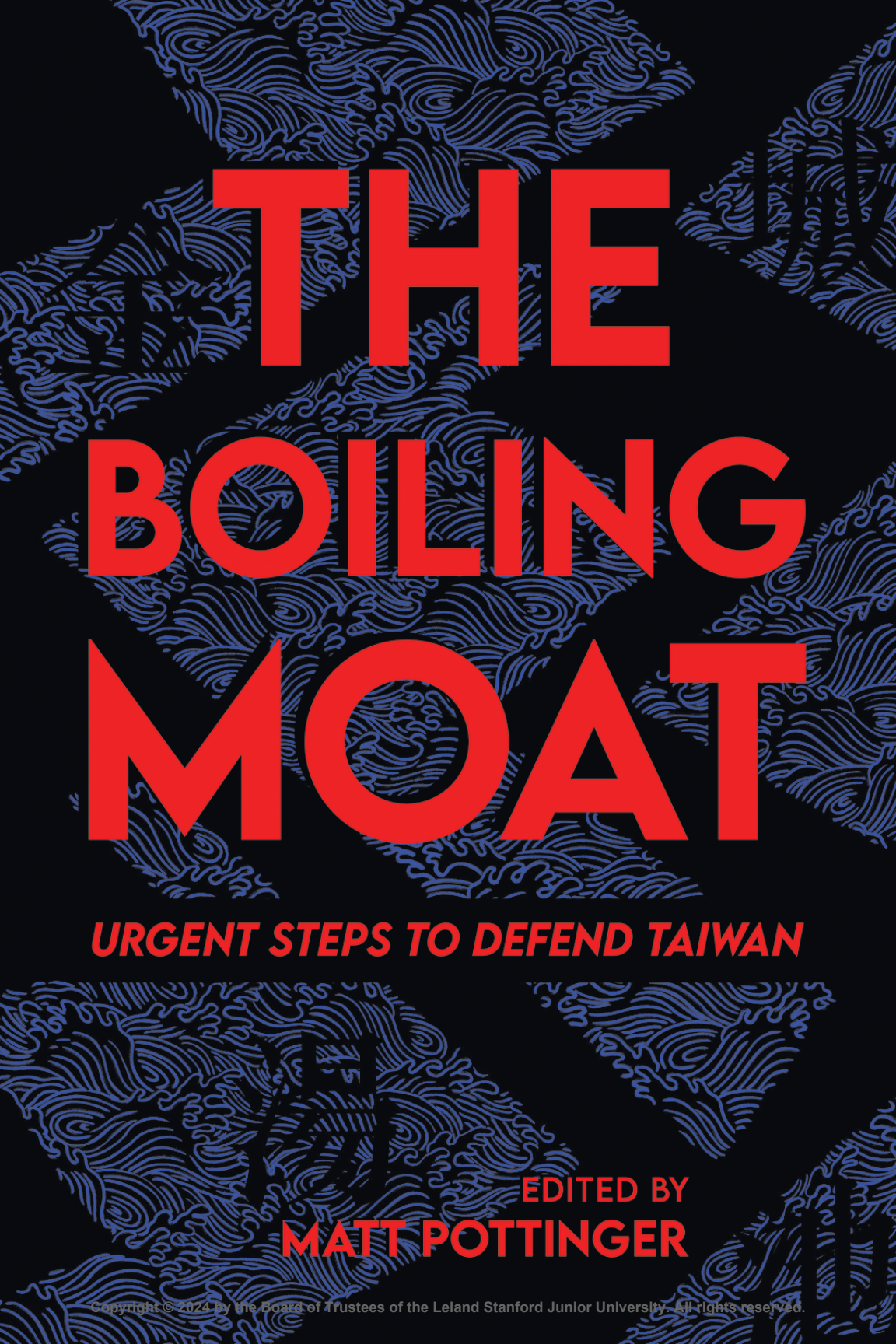




THE BOILING MOAT

URGENT STEPS TO DEFEND TAIWAN

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CHAPTER 11

“The Sun Also Rises”

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There are three nations challenging the security and stability of East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region: China, North Korea, and Russia. All three harbor revanchist territorial objectives, share disdain for prevailing international norms and customs, and operate authoritarian—even totalitarian—political systems. All three have nuclear arsenals. And all three are neighbors of Japan.

Of the three, China casts the longest and darkest shadow and will probably continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

The United States, now wise to China’s crafty security strategy, shifted its conciliatory attitude into a tougher and more competitive set of policies beginning in 2017, after China’s illegal land reclamation and base building in the South China Sea was mostly complete. President Donald J. Trump, channeling widespread frustration and discontent over China’s unfair trade practices, launched a trade war in 2018, further inflaming the US-China relationship.

Thus, the intense confrontation and strong rivalry between the United States and China has grown into a serious security concern with a large potential to escalate into real security crises and conflicts between the two strikingly different values of democracy with free society and authoritarian/autocracy with controlled society, focused on Taiwan and its surrounding waters.

This chapter recommends roles for Japan in helping deter Beijing from pursuing a war to subjugate Taiwan. It lays out steps Japan should

pursue urgently to demonstrate that it has the political, logistical, and combat wherewithal to support its key ally, the United States, in the event of a war. Roles for Japan's Self-Defense Forces include securing airspace, strengthening ballistic missile defense systems, protecting sea lines of communication (SLOC), and providing airborne and maritime intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) beyond the Japanese homeland to encompass the Ryukyu Islands, the Sea of Japan, and the East China Sea. The Japanese government should also coordinate a plan to support a dramatic increase in the number of US troops stationed on or passing through Japanese territory. This requires identifying areas that could quickly be developed into airfields, training grounds, and storage facilities for fuel and ammunition.

The chapter also recommends that the JSDF coordinate with South Korean and US forces to prevent adversaries, such as North Korea and Russia, from opening new fronts in a Taiwan scenario.

Taiwan: Center Stage for a US-China Confrontation

The question of Taiwan's status is often misinterpreted as a purely territorial matter for Beijing. It would be easy to draw that conclusion when Beijing has asserted for decades that Taiwan is an "inalienable" part of China and has cast the matter as an "internal" one with no space for foreign intervention. Xi Jinping, who holds paramount power as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and as chairman of the party's Central Military Commission, has vowed multiple times, including at the 20th National Congress of the CCP in October 2022, that Taiwan's "unification" with China is "inevitable."

But the implications are far larger than that. From an international security point of view, Taiwan's fate is linked to a rivalry for global leadership between free and democratic nations on the one hand and closed, autocratic ones on the other. This is why the competition between the United States and China has become so prominent and increasingly intense since the turn of the century. In this respect, Taiwan is *center stage* in the drama for how this US-China strategic rivalry plays out.

Xi Jinping unequivocally reserves the right to use the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to "solve" what Xi calls "the Taiwan question." If China's moves on Taiwan militarily, there is a strong possibility the United States would intervene with its own military. Japan, as the United States's most important ally, would likely provide support to US military operations and would therefore be subjected to PLA attacks. In such a scenario, Japan's Western Islands chain, from Yonaguni Island through Okinawa to Kyushu, as well as the western half of Japan's mainland, Honshu, would be in the heart of the area of operations. The same is true for the northern half of the Philippines.

From a planning standpoint, the United States should posture its force deployment toward Taiwan based on an assumption of the most difficult scenario—a PLA operation to invade and seize Taiwan.

At the same time, a crisis may not be limited to the "center stage" of Taiwan. North Korea may be tempted (or even encouraged by China) to open a second front on the Korean Peninsula. In such a case, the United States might need to spread its force allocation across both fronts to defend Taiwan and South Korea simultaneously. The United States should preemptively develop allied strategies and operational plans with Japan and South Korea and perhaps with Australia and the United Kingdom. Other allied and like-minded nations could also participate as the geopolitical situation unfolds in real time.

In this scenario, South Korea should be prepared to assume as much of the Korean Peninsula's defense as possible, allowing the United States to allocate as many forces as possible to a Taiwan campaign. Similarly, this type of strategic mission planning would also be effective in a Taiwan-only crisis scenario, where a strong South Korean posture will deter North Korea from opening a second front.

Lessons from the Battle of Okinawa

One example of an island seizure operation that holds lessons today is the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. Though the defenders were defeated in that battle, it nonetheless holds cautionary lessons for Beijing and reasons for hope for Taiwan. The first condition for island seizure

operations is to establish sea and air control near the objective island, as well as reliable logistic supply routes at sea. US forces during the Pacific War had established almost perfect sea and air control through two and a half years of combat, from mid-1942 to early 1945, that led to the annihilation of the Imperial Japanese Navy and Army forces in the Pacific. This provided the attacking US forces the freedom to conduct landing operations. The only means of resistance left for Imperial Japan was “Kamikaze” aircraft attacks against the US amphibious landing forces. The size of defending Japanese forces at the beginning of the battle was 60,000 regular forces and 50,000 locally recruited forces. The strength of US attacking units was 180,000 landing forces (US Army and Marines) and 350,000 support forces (US Navy and Army Air Corps). Logistic routes from forward US supply areas were also secured except for occasional Japanese submarine attacks. Yet even with this overwhelmingly favorable situation at Okinawa, it took almost three months for attacking US forces to seize the small island.

In the case of Taiwan, it may not be easy for the PLA to establish and maintain air and sea control, not only in the Taiwan Strait but also across the ocean areas around Taiwan, where US forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) might intervene. Then, the topography of Taiwan is strikingly different from Okinawa. The land area of Taiwan is roughly thirty times Okinawa’s, and its population is nearly fifty times what Okinawa’s had been in 1945.¹ Finally, Japan in 1945 was thoroughly isolated. Today’s Taiwan has many friends, especially the United States and Japan.

This history underscores the difficulty faced by Chinese planners today. To successfully invade Taiwan, China would have to surge PLA forces and deploy almost a million PLA personnel for various relevant joint operations, including, at minimum, establishing sea and air control; destroying Taiwanese, US, and Japanese forces; bombarding Taiwan heavily; and conducting an amphibious invasion to seize the island itself. So for China, a Taiwan invasion is not an easy task but rather a massive and laborious operation that will need in-depth political-military coordination, precise planning, intense training, sufficient material preparation, and a resilient logistic support posture for all PRC forces.

Japan's Role in a Taiwan Crisis

In a Taiwan crisis, Japan and its self-defense forces will have to bear basic responsibilities for both national defense and protection for surged US reinforcements from Hawaii, the US mainland, South Korea, and perhaps elsewhere. Regarding Japan's national defense, in addition to overall homeland and airspace defense, protection of the southwestern islands, ballistic- and cruise-missile defense, protection of sea lines of communication, and control of maritime choke points (such as the Bashi Channel between Taiwan and the Philippines) are minimum essential missions.

But there are other tasks for Japan too. One will be full-scale logistical support to large numbers of US forces surged to the region: for example, basing hundreds more US military aircraft and providing and distributing fuel, supplies, medical care, and ammunition for surged US forces in a timely manner. Without adequate infrastructure in Japan, actual operations of US forces in a Taiwan crisis scenario are not possible.

Below is a list of Japan's responsibilities to enable surged US forces during a Taiwan contingency:

1. Fundamental JSDF missions as a national defense force:
 - Homeland defense, homeland airspace defense, sea lines of communication (SLOC) defense, and ballistic missile defense (BMD)
2. Additional JSDF missions in a Taiwan crisis:
 - Islands defense and control of choke points in the Southwest Islands chain
 - Sea control in the Western Pacific for the safety of surged US forces
 - BMD against the PLA's DF-21/26 antiship ballistic missiles, for the safety of surged US forces
 - Air and maritime surveillance of the Northwest Pacific and East China Sea (ECS), as well as Sea of Japan (SOJ)

3. Government of Japan tasks to enable combat operations by surged US forces:

- Provide enough airfields for aircraft
- Provide enough precrisis and pre-hostility storage facilities for ground-support equipment for aircraft
- Provide sufficient port facilities to berth naval units
- Provide enough wartime supplies storage facilities for various units
- Provide sufficient ship repair facilities for maintenance and combat damages repair
- Provide enough storage for fuel and ammunition for the war-time expenditures of both naval and air units
- Guarantee timely transportation and distribution of required materials from storage and depot facilities to frontline units, including afloat naval units
- Provide sufficient berthing facilities for US service members near their deployed bases
- Provide primary healthcare facilities for US service members

4. Government of Japan tasks to enhance overall logistics support for surged US forces:

- Provide twenty-four-hours/seven-days-a-week (24/7) operating load and off-load ports and airports for US military supplies and materials
- Provide sufficient 24/7 operational, practical, and realistic combat training ranges within Japan and surrounding waters
- Authorize Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) ships to escort at-sea US Navy vessels that shuttle between Japanese ports and frontline US Navy units
- When necessary, provide logistic support to US Navy units by JMSDF logistic ships
- When necessary, provide air-refueling support to US Air Force (USAF) units by Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) air-refueling tankers

These are the overall tasks and missions for Japan as the principal ally of the United States. If Japan cannot execute these responsibilities, US operations to deter or defeat the PRC over Taiwan would be hindered and might fail. Japan's support roles and responsibilities in a Taiwan contingency will be many times larger than routine operations today.

One way to describe Japan's logistical support role is that it would bear responsibilities and perform tasks similar to what Saudi Arabia did to support US and other allied forces during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm more than three decades ago.

Regarding Japan's current posture, the scorecard is mixed. The missions stated in parts 1 and 2 of the list are fundamental to the JSDF's current operational posture and concept in accordance with Japan's existing security laws, even under the "pacifist" constitution. However, there are also many deficiencies. These include combat sustainability and resiliency capabilities, as well as the logistical support posture of the JSDF. These big deficiencies are the areas where the government of Japan should place the highest priority in its future-force building.

The tasks in part 3 of the list are closely related to civilian infrastructure in Japan, and unfortunately, almost no governmental assessments have been made. In this regard, it is fair to say that Tokyo has no plan to accommodate and enable large numbers of US forces in Japan during a Taiwan crisis. The silver lining is that there are about one hundred nonmilitary airfields with runways longer than 8,000 feet (2,500 meters) capable of handling any type of US military aircraft, and numerous ports deeper than 60 feet (20 meters) in Japan. Tokyo, however, has yet to determine the operational requirements. To correct these deficiencies, the Japanese government will need to take necessary measures, including legislative actions, in the immediate future. Time is of the essence.

Owing to the small land area of Japan and relatively large population (about 120 million), sites that could be allocated for use of add-on fuel and ammunition storage facilities are extremely limited. So, Tokyo will need to convince many local communities to cooperate on this issue.

The tasks listed in part 4 are key operational but not direct combat support tasks like those listed in part 3, but Tokyo has likewise not taken any concrete measures to resolve them, except for logistic support to US units by JSDF units.

In summary, missions and tasks mentioned in this section are the urgent responsibilities of the government of Japan to prepare for a Taiwan crisis. Tokyo has much to do beyond pursuing its recently announced ambitious JSDF force buildup program.

North Korea: The Wild Card

Would the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), on its own or in coordination with China, start military actions amid a Taiwan crisis? The odds are hard to estimate. The possibility of DPRK adventurism increases if the DPRK judges that the United States cannot allocate sufficient forces to the Korean Peninsula due to an overconcentration of US forces to counter China around Taiwan.

Yet the DPRK's military capability, other than its robust missile and rocket forces, looks weak in terms of sustainability and resilience—poor indicators for its ability to fight a prolonged war, given its poor economy and malnourished population. Knowing these weaknesses, the DPRK would have to depend heavily on its first strikes against South Korean and US forces on the peninsula in a fight. But these problems will be its Achilles' heel in future prolonged operations. In addition to this, DPRK's naval and air forces will be incapable of fighting a high-end war against Republic of Korea forces and US Forces Korea.

In the case of a Korean Peninsula crisis, either on its own or simultaneous with a Taiwan contingency, South Korea's role remains the same. Like Taiwan, South Korea must be prepared to survive the DPRK's massive first missile and rocket strikes. These efforts should include fortification of key military facilities and immediate counterstrikes to neutralize the DPRK's follow-on attack capacity.

In addition, South Korea should locate and destroy the DPRK's "tactical" nuclear-armed submarine in the Sea of Japan. Owing to the short distances to Seoul and Tokyo, the DPRK's submarine-launched ballistic missiles, potentially with nuclear warheads, would prove



Black stars indicate where the Tsushima, Tsugaru, and Soya (La Pérouse) straits lie (bottom to top). *Peter Hermes Furian/PIXTA*

difficult to intercept. Japan and South Korea should therefore conduct coordinated antisubmarine warfare patrols in the Sea of Japan on a continuous basis to mitigate this threat.

This new strategic situation in the Sea of Japan will generate a new burden of creating a new JMSDF Antisubmarine Warfare Task Group for 24/7 antisubmarine warfare operations in the Sea of Japan.

Containing a Russian Surprise

Russia may also take supportive military actions in coordination with China’s Taiwan operations. However, eastern Russia is bordered by the

Korean Peninsula and the islands chain of Japan, as well as the Kuril Islands chain and Kamchatka Peninsula. Russia's Pacific Fleet, homeported at Vladivostok, is therefore geographically contained in the Sea of Japan. There is another large Russian naval base at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, on the east coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula, which is a strategic nuclear ballistic missile submarine base, so this force can make only limited contributions to China's Taiwan operations.

Japan should be prepared to contain the Russian fleet in the Sea of Japan by blocking the three strategic straits in Japan—that is, the Tsushima, Tsugaru, and Soya (La Pérouse) straits. This posture could prevent Russia from intervening in support of China's Taiwan operations.

Conclusion

A Taiwan contingency would not be an easy military operation for either the United States or China. For the allies, there are many urgent tasks ahead to deter China and to prevail if deterrence fails. However, the allied nations of the United States, Japan, and South Korea do not yet have a combined operational plan, or even a common strategy, to deal with a Taiwan contingency. Japan, as the United States' most important ally in a Taiwan contingency, will play a critical and irreplaceable role in a Taiwan crisis. There are many tasks that Japan must be prepared to assume for which it is not prepared today.

The US and Japanese governments must develop detailed combined operational plans for Taiwan crisis scenarios today. If not, China will remain in an advantageous position to exploit delays, confusion, and inefficiencies in alliance operations during a contingency.

NOTES

1. Carl H. Marcoux, "Final Conflict on Okinawa," Warfare History Network, May 2004.