

STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY: THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT OR A RECKLESS
GAMBLE? THE FACTORS OF THE 1995-96 TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The United States has used strategic ambiguity as a means to deter war and prevent conflict between China and Taiwan since 1950. The closest these actors came to war was arguably the 1995-96 Crisis in the Taiwan Strait. The research question I investigate in this paper is: Was the United States' use of strategic ambiguity the major factor preventing war in the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis? To determine the presence of strategic ambiguity (the deliberate refusal to explicitly state one's plans and intentions) in the crisis, I analyzed major actions of the United States, China and Taiwan; determined their impacts based on press reporting, official government statements or speeches in response to these actions and observed military action; and found that ambiguous actions resulted in a decrease in tension whereas clear actions resulted in an increase in tension between the actors. Alternatively, I researched other factors (China's domestic and economic situation, China's status in the international community, and China's demonstrated capability to wage war) to determine their role in preventing war. I found that these factors also had a role in preventing war but could not disprove that strategic ambiguity was the major factor. The strategy of ambiguity was found to be of utility still today and should continue to be used by the United States in its policies with China and Taiwan, or other three party relationships.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Research Methodology.....	2
Strengths.....	4
Weaknesses.....	5
2.1 Background of the Issues.....	5
Evolution of the US, China, and Taiwan Relationship.....	6
Origin of the US Use of Strategic Ambiguity.....	6
Relationship since 1971.....	7
2.2 Strategic Ambiguity.....	12
2.3 Theory and Literature Review	13
Deterrence	13
Pivotal Deterrence.....	15
Three Party Deterrence in Practice.....	17
3. 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis.....	19
3.1 Background.....	20
3.2 Hypotheses and Analysis.....	23
Strategic Ambiguity's Role.....	23
Other Factors' Role.....	27

3.3 Implications.....	36
4. Conclusion.....	37
4.1 Why or Why Not Strategic Ambiguity.....	37
4.2 Further Research.....	39
Appendix A: Significant Events.....	41
Appendix B: Public Opinion Poll Results.....	46
Bibliography.....	48

List of Tables

Table 1:	Significant Actions Measuring Ambiguity	24
Table 2:	Strategic Ambiguity Trends	27
Table 3:	Number of International Agreements in Place	33

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Bilateral Trade between China and Taiwan (US Dollars)	28
Figure 2:	Bilateral Trade between China and Taiwan (% of Total Trade)	28
Figure 3:	Indirect Trade between China and Taiwan (US Dollars)	29
Figure 4:	Cross Strait Travel (China to Taiwan)	30
Figure 5:	Cross Strait Travel (Taiwan to China)	30
Figure 6:	Importance of Politics in Life	31
Figure 7:	Freedom of Choice and Control	31
Figure 8:	Composite Index of National Capability	35

1. Introduction

As China continues to grow economically, militarily, and diplomatically, its role as a world power also continues to expand. China's growth has brought increased attention to its domestic activity and policies, its role as an international power, and the expanding capabilities and intentions of its rapidly developing military. Not only have these issues resulted in additional focus on China, but they have increased the importance of United States policies toward China. The continuously evolving relationship between the United States and China and its impacts on the Pacific region, as well as the world, requires detailed attention, effective policies, and skillful decision making in order to facilitate a peaceful future between these powerful states.

From May 1995 to March 1996 the relationship between the United States and China was arguably at its worst since the two countries had re-established a more normal diplomatic relationship after Kissinger's, and later Nixon's, visits to China in 1971 and 1972. As is the case in many, if not all, interstate conflicts, a single event cannot be pinpointed as the cause of the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-96. Most agree it followed a few critical decisions in the early 1990s by the three actors, and their leaders, as well as the economic and political circumstances that beset those involved. These conditions and decisions permitted the conflict to escalate almost to the point of war. But was it the United States' policy of strategic ambiguity, the deliberate refusal to explicitly state its plans and intentions, which prevented the conflict from becoming a war by making China and Taiwan fear the costs of war or fear making decisions that might lead to war?¹

¹ Crawford, T.W. (2003). *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 5.

This paper will develop through four sections. Initially, the subject will be broached by presenting the research design and methodology and stating the design's strengths and weaknesses. Then a history of the relationship between the United States, China, and Taiwan and the evolution of the United States' use of strategic ambiguity in that relationship will be offered. Following, the details of the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis will be presented to include the instigating events, longer term trends both before and after the crisis, as well as analysis of hypotheses to show how strategic ambiguity and other factors impacted the crisis. Finally, from those details and empirical findings, and based on both the theory and practice of three party deterrence, policy implications and recommendations will be drawn showing how strategic ambiguity might be of utility in the future.

2. Research Methodology

The United States has used strategic ambiguity in attempts to deter war and prevent major conflict across the Taiwan Strait for over fifty years.² The research question I am investigating is: Was the United States' use of strategic ambiguity the major factor preventing war in the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis? To answer this research question, I hypothesize that:

H1: The major factor preventing war proved to be strategic ambiguity.

If this hypothesis is valid, I expect to see a decrease in tension when the United States took ambiguous actions and an increase in tension when the United States took clear actions.

Strategic ambiguity is measured in this research through the observation of military actions or displays of force, diplomatic recognition, and other political and public actions. Strategic

² US policy of strategic ambiguity toward China and Taiwan is accepted to have begun in 1950 after the end of the Chinese civil war. Tucker, N.B. (2005). "Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity." in *Dangerous Strait: The U.S.-China-Taiwan Crisis*, ed. N.B. Tucker, New York: Columbia University Press, 188. Benson, B.V. and Emerson Niou, "Comprehending Strategic Ambiguity: U.S. Security Commitment to Taiwan." Working paper. 2001.

ambiguity is present if the actions of the United States appear to be inconsistent over time or perceived to have multiple meanings to either Taiwan or China, or both. An important aspect of this research is the reaction by both Taiwan and China when the United States takes both clear and ambiguous action. The reactions (speeches, press statements, military action) will show the level of influence a clear or ambiguous action had and whether or not there was an increase in tension when these actions were taken. A weakness in this measurement is that ambiguity is a perception and therefore a difficult factor to quantitatively measure. I attempt to overcome this by presenting the major actions of the United States, and objectively quantifying the reactions from China using the statements of leaders and press statements or reports closely related to those actions.

Alternatively, I hypothesize that:

H2: Factors other than strategic ambiguity prevented war.

Sub-hypotheses:

H2A: The domestic political or economic situation in China prevented war.

H2B: China's status in the international community prevented war.

H2C: China's demonstrated (in)capability to wage war against US prevented war.

To analyze the competing hypotheses, events from the historical description of the conflict, plus additional data points (Bilateral trade between Taiwan and China, cross Strait travel, number of mutual defense treaties to which China was a member, Chinese public opinion polls) were examined using the factors in each hypothesis to determine the extent to which those factors helped to prevent or to deter war. To disprove sub-hypothesis H2A, I would expect to find data that clearly shows that Chinese leadership made decisions to prevent war based on domestic politics, economic conditions, or public opinion. This could be from opinion polls that show the public's distaste for war with Taiwan combined with reports of increased government concern for the support of its citizens. I would expect to find that China had a wide range of international

support or alternative alignment options in order to disprove H2B. And I would expect to find that China's military and industrial power was not strong enough vis-à-vis the United States to force Taiwan into reunification in order to disprove H2C.

A factor that is not included, but recognized as likely a key issue in an escalation of conflict is independence rhetoric and action from Taiwan. If Taiwan takes actions that China perceives to be leaning toward independence, it will cause an increase in tension and an increase in the chance of conflict. This research assumes that any movement toward independence would create tension in the relationship between Taiwan and China and any actions that simply maintain the status quo would reduce or maintain tensions. Therefore this hypothesis is not included since pro-independence actions will almost always be a factor in escalating tensions. However, this is a possible area for further study to determine its significance.

Strengths

Although some scholars argue that single case study research is a less than desirable methodological approach, the qualitative, in depth analysis accomplished using this method can lead to valuable results. The efficient use of this single case allows the reader to focus his attention on the factors in the case study, their impacts on strategic ambiguity, and how these factors may carry over to other similar cases of multi-party relationships.

With significant research on strategic ambiguity available, there is a multitude of resources to increase the reader's confidence level of the inferences that can be drawn from this single case. Citing previous studies and presenting a detailed, qualitative, in depth analysis of the single case study should limit the doubts a reader may have regarding this methodological approach. When viewed under the closely focused lens of a single case study, the theory of pivotal deterrence and its bounds may be more precisely defined. In addition, it is extremely

difficult to quantitatively define success or failure when any form of deterrence is used. A large n study requires variables to be definitive and identifiable whereas a case study can address the difficult to define and measure variables in more detail. For this reason, a single case study method can more easily draw on the complex associations of variables present in each individual case and more narrowly show the impacts when forms of deterrence are used.

Weaknesses

A weakness in using this approach is that descriptive or causal inference may be more difficult to determine since the presented data might be considered by the reader to be an outlier case and not an accepted standard for the general study of strategic ambiguity. Analogical reasoning is another weakness in using this method. Variables present and used in this research will almost never be the same as another single case. However, the evidence presented increases one's knowledge of the relationship between the United States, China, and Taiwan and can assist policy makers when making decisions involving this relationship. For that reason I want to share this uncertainty in my results and implications since a single case study from 15 years ago is more than likely not fully representative of the case now. Although the relationship between the United States, China, and Taiwan is very important in today's international community, this single historical case does not share the same characteristics as the relationship these countries share currently even though strategic ambiguity is still used. Although there are factors that carry over from the past, there are many differences that the reader will have to consider and decide to either include or discard in order to completely understand how similar decisions might be made in the present environment.

2.1 Background of the Issues

To ground the research for this project one should understand 1.) the historical relationship between the United States, China, and Taiwan, 2.) the theories and definitions used in the research of this relationship, as well as 3.) where these theories, and this research, fit in the current literature and foreign policies of the involved states. This section will cover those topics.

Evolution of US, China, and Taiwan Relationship

The United States, China, and Taiwan have been embroiled in a complex three party relationship since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Ties between the United States and Taiwan remained strong during the span of twenty-two years between the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the formal international recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China when it was admitted to the United Nations in 1971. The United States continued its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan until 1979 when the US shifted ambassadorial duties from Taiwan to mainland China. The strength of the relationship and commitments made between the US and Taiwan between 1949 and 1979 were the foundation on which the current relationships continue and are a still factor in the US policy of strategic ambiguity. One constant in the relationship though has been that the US has never clearly stated its intention regarding the use of force in a conflict between China and Taiwan. The goal of the United States was neither to spur on Taiwan's leaders by making them believe the US would intervene militarily to assist Taiwan in gaining independence nor allow Chinese leaders to feel they could force Taiwan into unification without the US military attempting to prevent it. It has been a careful balancing act requiring constant attention.

Origin of US Use of Strategic Ambiguity

Not long after the People's Republic of China established itself as the government on mainland China, the US put forth its strategy of ambiguity. The 1950 intervention of the US

Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait ordered by Truman was the first action conducted by the US in attempts to deter both the Chinese and Taiwanese. The strategy was twofold: to prevent the Communist Chinese from launching an attack on the offshore islands and then further on Taiwan while regional attention was being paid to Korea; and to prevent the Nationalists on Taiwan from launching an attack, with minimal chance at success, on mainland China when they felt the Communist Chinese were focused on Korea.³ The Truman administration saw the need for a way to limit the Korean War conflict from spilling over in the region. Both the Communist Chinese and the Nationalists on Taiwan were looking for an opportunity to take advantage of each other. But the US was not ready for either of the groups to gain any additional influence then they already possessed. In order to prevent that, the US had to find a way to deter both parties. It was this first strategically ambiguous act that led to a strategy that is still in place today.

Later, the Eisenhower administration took the strategy of ambiguity and expanded it. Instead of limiting it to simply actions and secretive dealings with both China and Taiwan, they were able to document ambiguity in treaties. In the text of the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954, the US agreed to “act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”⁴ This wording gives the US the leeway it needs to still make a decision on what action would be required of in case of an armed attack in the West Pacific area.⁵ This treaty created the base for all further US acts of strategic ambiguity until the Taiwan Relations Act was approved, and replaced it in 1979.

Relationship since 1971

³ Tucker 188.

⁴ “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of American and the Republic of China,” December 2, 1954. <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/mutual01.htm>.

⁵ Garver, J.W. The Sino American Alliance. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997, 59.

Although the relationship among the US, China, and Taiwan has history dating to 1949, the current situation has its roots in 1971 when the People's Republic of China was admitted to the United Nations as the sole, legitimate government of China. An additional wrinkle to this period being discussed was the Cold War. One should not lose sight that the United States and the Soviet Union were constantly vying for the upper hand between their political methods, ever-growing militaries, and large nuclear arsenals. The Cold War had wide impacts throughout the world but will not be focused on in this project as the impacts of it during the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis are not considered significant. Although there were diplomatic meetings and negotiations between the US and China prior to 1971 after that was when significant advancements were made in their relationship.⁶ On April 10, 1971, in what came to be known as "Ping Pong Diplomacy," the US Ping Pong team, after having been invited by the PRC team to tour mainland China, became the first Americans to make an official visit to China since the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

Following this fairly informal diplomacy, the US National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, made a more formal, but secret trip to China in July 1971. During this visit, not only were diplomatic advancements made regarding the PRC's ascendency to a seat in the United Nations but Kissinger's trip also resulted in an announcement of President Nixon's plans for his own trip to China in early 1972.⁷ In a matter of months, the relationship between the United States and China grew from minimal diplomatic contact or recognition to Presidential visits.

At the conclusion of President Nixon's visit, the first of three Communiqués with China was issued. On 27 February 1972, the Shanghai Communiqué was published with statements

⁶ Timeline of U.S. China Relations <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/china/timeline/timeline5nf.html> and <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/china/timeline/timeline6nf.html>, accessed 15 Oct 2010.

⁷ Author's discussion with Dr. Richard Smyser, one of US National Security Advisor Kissinger's assistants on the trip to China in 1971.

from each state regarding Taiwan. China stated “the Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States.” It continues “the Chinese Government firmly opposes any activities which aim at the creation of ‘one China, one Taiwan,’ ‘one China, two governments,’ ‘two Chinas,’ an ‘independent Taiwan’ or advocate that ‘the status of Taiwan remains to be determined.’”⁸ There was nothing ambiguous about China’s statement but it also did not raise any issue regarding a forced reunification. The US statement was not as strong: “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States does not challenge that position.”⁹ Although acknowledgement of this cross-Strait understanding of one-China is clear, US policy toward it was more opaque. But the US did take positive steps by stating its intention to reduce forces and military installations on Taiwan and increase diplomatic and cultural exchanges between the two states.

Between 1972 and 1978, events throughout the world played a prominent role in the development, or at other times stagnation, of the US-China relationship. In 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed calling for a cease fire and end to the Vietnam War. Simultaneously, President Nixon was immersed in the Watergate scandal. With little domestic political capital on which to stand, President Nixon could no longer continue to push his international ambitions. A year later, after impeachment hearings concluded and with a forthcoming trial, President Nixon resigned the presidency. His successor, President Ford attempted to take over where President Nixon had left off but was not nearly as successful as Nixon and the US relationship with China remained latent. In 1976 President Carter was elected and then took office in January 1977 following campaign promises to establish full diplomatic relations with China. Negotiations

⁸ “The Joint U.S.-China Communiqué, Shanghai.” February 27, 1972.
<http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communiqué01.htm>, accessed 24 October 2010.

⁹ “The Joint U.S.-China Communiqué, Shanghai.” accessed 24 October 2010.

between the US and China proceeded throughout 1976-1978 and finally resulted in the Second Joint Communiqué.

On 15 December 1978, the US and China issued the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with a commencement of normal relations set to begin 1 January 1979. Regarding Taiwan, it stated “the United States of America recognizes the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. Within this context, the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan.”¹⁰ There were concerns in Taiwan that the US-Taiwan Mutual Security Treaty of 1954 (the ambiguous treaty the US signed with Taiwan) was now threatened and it was becoming increasingly clear that the US-Taiwan relationship was eroding in favor of diplomatic relations between the US and China. The US political process, with interest groups and lobbyists that heavily favored Taiwan, had their interest piqued.

Four months later, on 10 April 1979, and made retroactive to 1 January 1979, Congress approved the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) “to help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific.”¹¹ Congress felt that the Executive branch had failed to ensure Taiwan’s security and put forth this act. It stated as policy of the US, “to consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts and embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific and of grave concern to the United States.”¹² This was seen as the impact of actions by Taiwan’s interest groups and lobbyists on Congress resulting in what many in Taiwan perceived to be a prospect of United States assistance, but it certainly was no guarantee. It was a step back toward ambiguity from what

¹⁰ “The Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations,” <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communiqué02.htm>, accessed 25 October 2010.

¹¹ “Taiwan Relations Act,” <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/tra01.htm>, accessed 25 October 2010.

¹² “Taiwan Relations Act,” <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/tra01.htm>, accessed 25 October 2010.

many Taiwanese felt was a clear sign of the United States favoring China by establishing a normal diplomatic relationship. This statement in the TRA is still used today by the United States as a sign of the ambiguity present in their strategy. It is on this statement that President Reagan, in the 1980s, based his wishes to regain some of the past “normal” relationship with Taiwan. President Reagan followed the TRAs policy “to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character” leading to a political uproar in China. The Chinese felt these arms sales were a violation of the previous Communiqués that they had signed with the United States and demanded clarity.

A third Communiqué was signed on 17 August 1982 in which the United States agreed “that it intends gradually to reduce its sale of arms to Taiwan, leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution.”¹³ This Communiqué seemed to satisfy the Chinese enough to be willing to agree to it. However, President Reagan felt he needed to assure Taiwan the US would stand behind any previous agreements, namely the TRA. So President Reagan presented his Six Assurances to Taiwan adding further ambiguity to the situation and providing an example of the US use of strategic ambiguity. These six assurances were presented to Taiwan a month prior to the third Communiqué being released:¹⁴

- 1) The United States would not set a date for termination of arms sales to Taiwan.
- 2) The United States would not alter the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act.
- 3) The United States would not consult with China in advance before making decisions about US arms sales to Taiwan.
- 4) The United States would not mediate between Taiwan and China
- 5) The United States would not alter its position about the sovereignty of Taiwan which was, that the question was one to be decided peacefully by the Chinese themselves, and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China.
- 6) The United States would not formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over

¹³ “Joint Communiqué on Arms Sales to Taiwan,” <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communique03.htm>, accessed 25 October 2010.

¹⁴ “The Six Assurances to Taiwan,” <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/assurances.htm>, accessed 5 November 2010.

Taiwan.

In the late 1980s, Taiwan continued the process of transformation to a democracy, further distancing its type of government from that of mainland China. Be it part of the democratization process or not, cross-strait trade was expanded and there were also increased opportunities for cross-strait travel. It was a time of relative peace across the Taiwan Strait. However, all of this peace was quickly ended with the Tiananmen crisis in June 1989. A number of student protests occurred between April and June 1989 in attempts to push China's authoritarian rulers toward political reform. Chinese leadership responded by ordering the military to the protest sites and using force to overwhelm the protestors.¹⁵ The atrocities that played out in public gave the world a different perspective on China. With the downfall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the strategic relationship between China and the US was no longer as important to the US allowing the US additional flexibility in negotiating with the Chinese. At this point in the early 1990s, with the Soviet Union and any expansion of Communism rapidly losing influence, the pivotal relationship between the US, China, and Taiwan, and the use of strategic ambiguity, became more prominent and is where this project seeks to focus.

2.2 Strategic Ambiguity

The most important definition for this project is that of strategic ambiguity. Strategic ambiguity is defined as the deliberate refusal to explicitly state one's plans and intentions. In the case of the United States' relationship with China and Taiwan, three Communiqués with China (February 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, 1978 Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, and August 17, 1982 Joint Communiqué) and the Taiwan Relations Act with Taiwan help to baseline the United States' ambiguity.¹⁶ The terms in these accords shape

¹⁵ Nathan, A.J. "The Tiananmen Papers." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 80, No.1 (January/February 2001) 2-48.

¹⁶ Gong, G. W. (2000). *Taiwan Strait Dilemmas*. Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press. IX.

the policies and actions of the United States in their relationships with China and Taiwan but at the same time do not commit the United States to any specifics regarding the use of military force. These agreements are formal, documented acts of ambiguity as they do not commit the United States to any clear, forceful action in the case of unification between Taiwan and China.

From the aspect of long term policy, it seems as though strategic ambiguity in many international relationships would be preferred by many, if not all, US policymakers. However, it is useful to ask what US president (keenly aware of the domestic political conditions and his approval ratings) would want to be constrained by a decision made by his predecessors¹⁷ The three Communiqués with China along with the Taiwan Relations Act have been in effect for almost 40 years and spanned the leadership of nine Presidents of the United States alternating between both major political parties. The utility of strategic ambiguity is widely argued by both scholars and policy makers and since there is no universally accepted framework or model to show when strategic ambiguity should be used this study seeks to contribute to the current scholarly work. An end result would be to further identify strategies leading to continued peace in the Taiwan Strait and other multi-party relationships where strategic ambiguity may be of utility.

2.3 Theory and Literature Review

Deterrence

Deterrence theory is the basis of preventing war. Although forms of deterrence have been used throughout history, it was not defined or clearly understood until the Cold War. Deterrence comes from the Latin term meaning frighten or terror. To deter is "to prevent from

¹⁷ Tucker 15.

action by fear of consequences.”¹⁸ Deterrence has become a widely discussed concept with a general definition as the prevention of an unwanted action through some type of influence but not necessarily a direct action. In the case with China and Taiwan, “US deterrence in the Taiwan Strait requires that Chinese leaders believe that the United States can use its military capabilities effectively in a war in the Taiwan theater and that it can inflict sufficient costs on China that outweigh the benefits of unification through war.”¹⁹ Deterrence is not only used as an international action to prevent war, it is used by almost every person in the world on a daily basis. The phrase "If you misbehave, you will be punished" would be the simplest example of the daily use of deterrence. Because it does not require any action to be taken on the part of the actor being deterred, deterrence is a passive activity that can never be proven to have worked. It is maintenance of the status quo and can never be quantitatively proven or disproven. In the example of the misbehavior phrase used above, a parent attempts to lead a child to behave well every day. But if a child behaves badly normally, deterrence may not be the action one would want to use. Deterrence is simply another way of maintaining that status quo, if the status quo is acceptable. The threat of punishment may prevent the child from misbehaving but the child might behave well, or badly, every day without the threat of punishment. With deterrence, one will never know if the deterrent actions worked since it does not require the deterred to take any positive action or show any change in behavior from the status quo.

A weakness in deterrence theory and the use of ambiguity to deter is that in theory, actions must be clear and credible to deter.²⁰ Actions that are both clear and credible seem counter to being ambiguous. Differences in the cultures of the United States, China, and Taiwan also can lead to actions perceived to have different, and unclear, meanings. For example, the

¹⁸ Schelling, T.C. *Arms and Influence*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1966, 71.

¹⁹ Ross (2002), 50.

²⁰ Shulsky, A.N. *Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behavior*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2000. 31.

strategic tradition in China emphasizes the importance of surprise attacks. For this reason, the Chinese might perceive overt US military forces as merely a clear sign of presence and not as a force that will be used, for if they intended to use military force, they would do it using the tactic of surprise.²¹ Simple cultural differences can alter perception and result in different outcomes from actions meant to deter. Scholars over the last twenty years have studied these issues with deterrence and theorized about the circumstances when unclear actions can deter also.²²

Pivotal Deterrence

Advancements in international relations theories over the last fifty years have introduced more specific forms of deterrence. The theory that most closely explains the situations in which strategic ambiguity may be useful as well as why it is useful is that of *pivotal deterrence* between three parties. Crawford states it “began as a gnawing question: How can you deter two sides in a conflict?”²³ Similar to strategic ambiguity (the deliberate refusal to explicitly state one’s plans and intentions) “pivotal deterrence involves the manipulation of threats and promises in order to prevent war. Like other forms of deterrence, it tries to prevent war by making potential belligerents fear the costs, by confronting them with risks they do not want to run.”²⁴ It works when adversaries have poor alternative alignment options, or none at all, and when the pivot state has enough power (diplomatic, military, economic, etc) to sway the balance.²⁵ In this research, only the third of three forms of pivotal deterrence as proposed by Crawford will be used for analysis. The form of pivotal deterrence to be examined is explained as occurring when one adversary (China) will go to war if the pivot is neutral, but the other (Taiwan) will not go to

²¹ Shulsky 34.

²² Caplow’s “Two Against One”, Jervis’s “System Effects” and Crawford’s “Pivotal Deterrence” are three sources that have researched unclear actions and their utility in deterrence.

²³ Crawford ix.

²⁴ Crawford 5.

²⁵ Crawford 2.

war without the pivot's firm allegiance.²⁶ Because pivotal deterrence requires the pivot to act as a sort of moderator between the other two parties, the pivot uses ambiguity in his actions in order to keep both of the other actors unsure of where the pivot's interests lie. For as soon as one side can be sure of the pivot's intentions, there no longer is a pivot to balance the relationship.

Defining these terms of pivotal deterrence shows that these conditions were present during the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis; therefore theoretically making it an ideal situation for the United States to use strategic ambiguity to prevent war. The United States was the pivot with China and Taiwan as the other two actors. In order to deter both parties from pursuing war, the United States first had to make China feel as though its use of force to prevent Taiwanese independence was too great a risk. Also, the US had to refrain from encouraging Taiwan to pursue independence believing that the United States was willing to back Taiwan in a conflict with China over independence. Caplow explains the United States' (mediator) role as the pivot in this situation very clearly: "The mediator stands between contending parties and hinders them from engaging in conflict."²⁷ However, international relationships are seldom so simple. This research will attempt to describe as many of the factors present during this situation in order to show what played a bigger role in preventing the crisis from escalating to war, strategic ambiguity or something else.

The alternative to strategic ambiguity is clarity. Critics of strategic ambiguity have consistently pushed for more clarity on the part of the United States.²⁸ Many of these critics

²⁶ Crawford presents three types of pivotal deterrence: 1) Each adversary will be deterred if it thinks the pivot will align against it (Shakespeare's Henry V). 2) Each adversary will escalate if it has the pivot's firm allegiance (Bismarck Policy). 3) One adversary will go to war if the pivot is neutral, but the other will not go to war without the pivot's firm allegiance (Britain WWI and US-China-Taiwan).

²⁷ Caplow, T. *Two Against One: Coalitions in Triads*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968. 20. In Jervis's "System Effects," he recognizes Caplow's study "the path-breaking study of coalition formation among triads.

²⁸ Kastner, S. L., "Ambiguity, Economic Interdependence, and the US Strategic Dilemma in the Taiwan Strait." *Journal of Contemporary China* 15, No. 49, (November 2006), 651-652. Kastner presents the arguments for strategic clarity as well as the supporters of that argument.

push for a clear policy such as conditional support where the United States would be prepared to use force to assist Taiwan in the event of unprovoked actions by China to force Taiwan into unification. Further, the United States would not support Taiwan in the event that China was responding because of provocative pro-independence actions taken by Taiwan. The intention of the strategy of clarity is to let each actor know what actions are acceptable and what actions are unacceptable. However, policies such as clarity might not be as clear as is argued. It is difficult, maybe impossible, to clearly define a provocative action by Taiwan or an unprovoked action by China. Does the international community make the decision? What if the actions by either China or Taiwan are not clearly made? If the United States seeks to deter through a clear policy, but is unable to distinguish the conditional support action initiators upon which their policy is based, the policy of clarity's weaknesses are exposed.

Three Party Deterrence in Practice

Although it is difficult to prove the utility of deterrence at the moment it was used or that it was successful in maintaining the status quo, post event analysis from interviews and memoirs can explain what happened during significant international conflicts or relationships where it was used. Besides the relationship between the U.S., China, and Taiwan, three party deterrence situations have been present throughout history. Wars over hundreds of years have been marked by attempted deterrence with both failed and successful results. "In both of the great wars it could not be determined for many months after the outbreak whether the United States would join Britain and France. In crucial modern cases, these uncertainties have led most of the powers to overestimate their chances of success when deciding to engage in active hostilities."²⁹

Although a single actor's ambiguity should not be judged to be the cause of both World Wars, this is an example of the consequences that can result if a world power is ambiguous and allows

²⁹ Caplow 154.

events to unravel to the point where war can no longer be prevented. As this paper investigates the utility of strategic ambiguity, one should remember that past events marked by a lack of clarity have resulted in over a hundred million deaths from war.³⁰ But simultaneously it is impossible to count a number of lives saved from situations where ambiguity may have helped to prevent conflict.

Britain's attempts to prevent war between Germany and the alliance of France and Russia were catastrophic and helped drag all of these nations into World War I. Britain's ambiguity with all actors prior to World War I led everyone into one of the deadliest wars the world has seen. Some critics argue that by not making their strategy clear, and not providing a credible threat to Germany, Britain encouraged Germany in its pursuit of war with France and Russia. It is argued that a stronger alliance of Britain, France, and Russia could have deterred the Germans. Alternatively, Britain's ambiguity with the French and Russians did not restrain them enough in their pursuit of war with Germany.³¹ The arguments did not matter in July 1914 when World War I began. What mattered was that the British were perceived to be ambiguous and war followed.

Otto Van Bismarck used ambiguity as a tool in the late 1800s to help prevent war by isolating France and preventing war between Austria and Russia.³² The ambiguity developed through a series of commitments between Germany and its fellow members of the Three Emperors League of 1873. Bismarck sought to neither ally with nor spurn Russia or Austria. As the pivot in this situation, Bismarck's goal was to prevent conflict by keeping both Russia and Austria unsure of Germany's intentions and actions should Russia and Austria go to war with each other. It was not until 1879, when Germany forged a formal alliance with Austria that

³⁰ Estimated 60 million deaths in both World Wars for a total over 100 million deaths.

³¹ Crawford 76.

³² Crawford 47.

Bismarck retreated from his policy of strategic ambiguity. What stands out in this case is that during the period where strategic ambiguity was used (1870-1879) there was no war between the three actors.

These cases are presented above as simply as possible and by no means account for all of the other factors that were at play in the international community. They are presented solely as examples in which ambiguity was present and what the immediate results were. What these historical cases show is that ambiguity can be present when war occurs as often as it can be present when war does not occur.³³ It is the factors present in each case and how ambiguity is used with those factors which determine the success of the strategy, not the strategy of ambiguity alone.

3. 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis

With theoretical and background information having been provided previously as a foundation, the chronology of the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis will now be presented and then the hypotheses will be tested. A short description of the situation at the end of the crisis follows to give the reader a sense of the gravity of the situation and show the results of the decisions of prior years: Multiple news agencies were reporting on the increasing readiness of Chinese military forces and impending missile firing exercises. The President of the United States ordered two Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups toward the Taiwan Strait, with the USS Nimitz transiting at top speed from the tension filled Arabian Gulf in order to arrive as quickly as possible. The Chinese launched waves of missiles and high-powered guns into the Taiwan Strait and amassed over 100,000 combat ready troops and surface to surface missiles along the coast

³³ Crawford uses these two cases (WW1 and Bismarck in the late 1800s), as well as two others, to model his theory of pivotal deterrence. For the sake of familiarity and ease of explanation, I use these two examples also to show a case of successful and a case of failed deterrence between multiple actors.

facing Taiwan. All the while, Taiwanese President Lee maintained his independence rhetoric in the lead-up to elections on Taiwan. It was a tense time with fuses burning on all sides of the conflict. This was the situation of the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis that will be analyzed to determine what factors prevented such a caustic situation from escalating to war.

3.1 Background

As is the case in most conflicts, there is not a single event that can be pinpointed as the cause of the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis. It was the outcome of a series of events that progressed throughout the early 1990s finally escalating to the events described above. As the Cold War ended, US grand strategy underwent changes to adapt to the new international situation. As the US evolved, so did the Chinese. This evolution of Chinese policies occurred in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crisis and at the same time as rapid economic and industrial development in both China and Taiwan. China was dubious of the goals of the United States and felt the US was pursuing a hegemonic role in the Pacific contrary to its public statements.³⁴

With this doubt in mind, China continued to closely monitor the actions of both Taiwan and the United States, keeping in mind the recent Taiwan Relations Act as well as the Communiqués China and the US had agreed to. And then a steady string of actions occurred between 1992 and 1995 that seemed to be at odds with the Communiqués and normalizing relationship the US and China had in the 1980s. In what China considered a violation of the 1982 Arms Sales Communiqué, the US sold 150 F-15 fighter jets to Taiwan.³⁵ These jets were a significant upgrade both in quality and quantity of arms previously sold to Taiwan and more capable than any fighters China had in their inventory although China had also recently upgraded its fighter force with a 1991 purchase of twenty-four highly capable Su-27 fighters from Russia.

³⁴Lampton, D. M. *Same Bed, Different Dreams : Managing U.S.-China relations, 1989-2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. 252-255.

³⁵Ross (2000) 87.

Then in 1994, President Clinton, after Congress had overwhelmingly approved it, signed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, upgrading the US relationship with Taiwan.³⁶ Finally in May 1995, President Clinton, contrary to verbal agreements he had made to China, gave permission for President Lee to visit the United States to give a speech at his alma mater, Cornell University.³⁷

While these perceived pro-independence incidents occurred in the US, in 1993, President Lee Teng Hui appointed Lien Chan as Premier of Taiwan. This was a marked change as both the President and Premier were not of mainland descent. Both leaders promoted pro-independence views causing additional strife with China across the Taiwan Strait. When Taiwan released a white paper on cross-Strait relations in 1994 countering a previously released white paper by the Chinese in August 1993, it again was very pro-independence and added to the already significant list of actions considered worrisome by the Chinese. After receiving visa approval from Congress to visit the United States, President Lee made his trip to Cornell University on 7 June 1995.

China could no longer stand idle watching a pro-independence movement flourish on Taiwan with seemingly endless US support even if that support was driven by domestic political conditions in the United States. China acted by canceling three diplomatic visits to the United States, suspending bilateral discussions over arms proliferation and human rights and recalling its US ambassador for consultations.³⁸ These initial steps were meant to show the gravity of the situation and how serious China was regarding Taiwan's promotion of independence and the apparent US support it was also receiving. Exactly one month after President Lee made his trip

³⁶ Ross (2000) 92. Crawford 191.

³⁷ Ji, Y. "Changing Leadership Consensus: The Domestic Context of War Games," in Suisheng Zhao, ed. "Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan and the 1995-96 Crisis" New York: Routledge, 1999. 115-116.

³⁸ Ross (2000) 94.

to the US (June 1995), Beijing announced that the PRC military would conduct missile tests and fire ground-to-ground missiles in the East China Sea. “The missile tests were aimed at foreign forces interference in China’s reunification and at the schemes for Taiwan independence.”³⁹ It was China’s first show of force to counter the continued pro-independence activity of Taiwan.

Although diplomatic meetings and negotiations were held between the US and China from July 1995 to November 1996, there was limited progress made between the two states. However, President Clinton and PRC President Jiang did reach an agreement at a summit on 24 October 1995 that the Taiwan Strait issue would be dealt with in accordance with the three US-China Communiqués. From a practical perspective this did not alter the relationship between the US and China but merely was a sign from the leaders that negotiations were being conducted. However, China continued to conduct military exercises including missile firings and large scale joint landing maneuvers on offshore islands during this same timeframe.⁴⁰

From November 1995-March 1996, during the most tense months of the entire crisis, there was continued negotiation between the United States and China. On Taiwan, President Lee continued campaigning for the democratic elections scheduled to be held 23 March 1996. In what many consider an effort to sway voters on Taiwan, China announced it was going to conduct additional missile tests in the Taiwan Strait directed at targets within 30 nautical miles of the major Taiwan port cities of Keelung and Kaohsiung.⁴¹ “The use of force was a crucial element in Beijing’s coercive diplomacy. China’s large-scale military exercises and missile tests intended to signal to the United States and Taiwan the tremendous risks inherent in their

³⁹ Ji 120.

⁴⁰“Taiwan Strait 21 July 1995 to 23 March 1996,” http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/taiwan_strait.htm, accessed 26 October 2010.

⁴¹ “Taiwan Strait 21 July 1995 to 23 March 1996,” http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/taiwan_strait.htm, accessed 26 October 2010.

policies.⁴² In response to this threatening display of force aimed at Taiwan, President Clinton ordered two Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups to the area to monitor the situation. The USS Nimitz and USS Independence, accompanied by multiple escort ships remained in the vicinity through the elections on Taiwan, in which President Lee won resoundingly. Tensions gradually diminished and the Taiwan Strait Crisis resided and war was averted.

3.2 Hypotheses and Analysis

Strategic Ambiguity's Role

H1: The major factor preventing war proved to be strategic ambiguity

To measure the presence of strategic ambiguity, military displays of force, various forms of diplomatic measures, and other notable actions were observed chronologically in the years leading up to the Crisis. A complete table of the events and reactions is located in Appendix A but the events that I have judged to play a key role are presented in Table 1 below. An event was judged to have played a key role if it resulted in a combination of multiple press reports, official government statements or speeches reflecting its importance, and observed military action. Ambiguity was determined if an action in the event was inconsistent over time or perceived to have multiple meanings to either Taiwan or China, or both. The key events were also judged in the context of the three Communiqués and Taiwan Relations Act, the documented agreements between the three actors, in order to determine if there was consistency of action over time. Finally, each major event was analyzed and determined to be either ambiguous or clear and also associated to a change (increase, decrease, no change) in the level of tension between the time periods prior to and after that event (how many press reports, critical reactions, statements from government officials, etc.). Analysis shows that there were both ambiguous actions and clear

⁴² Ross (2000) 89.

actions made both prior to and during the crisis. Even if there are clear actions taken in conjunction with ambiguous actions there was most likely an overall feeling of uncertainty in the situation if any ambiguous actions were present.

Military	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No change)	Reaction
USS Kitty Hawk interaction with Chinese Sub	10/27/1994	NO	No change	Minimal press reports, Official Government Statements
USS Nimitz transits through Taiwan Strait	12/19/1995	NO	No change	Not reported until 6 weeks after it happened. Minimal impact.
USS Nimitz and USS Independence ordered to area of operations near Taiwan	Mar-Apr 1996	YES	Decrease	Press reports and official statements. China conducts exercises and missile tests but then tensions decrease. Le Peng speech warning US not to transit Taiwan Strait.
Diplomatic Recognition	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No change)	Reaction
Initial request for overnight stay in Hawaii denied for President Lee	5/4/1994	YES	No change	Insignificant but a factor in decision one year later.
Most Favored Nation Status Extension Terms	5/28/1993	NO	Increase	Press Reports, Official Government Statements
Renewal of Most Favored Nation Status	5/26/1994	YES	No change	Press Reports, Official Government Statements
1994 Taiwan Policy Review	9/1/1994	NO	Increase	Increase tension. Jiang's Eight Points Speech in January 1995.
Permission granted for President Lee's visa to attend Cornell event	5/1/1995	NO	Increase	Press Reports, Military Displays, Official Government statements.
Clinton Jiang Agreement to deal with Taiwan Strait Issue IAW 3 Communiqués	10/24/1995	YES	Decrease	Press Reports, Official Government Statements
Other Actions	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No change)	Reaction
150 F16s Sold to Taiwan	9/1/1992	NO	Increase	Press Reports, Official Government Statements.
Nye (Asst SECDEF) Speech to Chinese Military Officers in Beijing	11/1/1995	YES	No change	Official Government Statements
Perry (SECDEF) answers question "Any response to Chinese aggression towards Taiwan would depend on circumstances"	3/9/1996	YES	No change	Press Reports, Military Displays, Official Government statements.
Christopher (SECSTATE) "One China as defined by Communiqués."	5/1/1996	YES	Decrease	Insignificant, but a sign of renewed ambiguity after the crisis had ended.

Table 1. Significant Actions Measuring Ambiguity

Prior to 1994, there was a fairly consistent policy of ambiguity. I found few major actions that would be considered inconsistent with the formally ambiguous three Communiqués or the TRA. However, I judge five significant actions made by the United States falling on the side of being clear and pro-Taiwan:

- 1) US sells 150 F16s to Taiwan in Sep 1992
- 2) Most Favored Nation Status Extension in 1993 followed by reversal 1 year later
- 3) 1994 US-Taiwan Policy Review upgrading relationship in Sep 1994
- 4) US approval of visa for President Lee to visit Cornell in May 1995
- 5) USS Nimitz transit through Taiwan Strait in Dec 1995 (First time since 1976)

The clarity of these perceived pro-Taiwan actions was followed by increased tension between the United States and China seen in press statements and speeches by Chinese leaders in reaction to each incident. As an example, in response to the US approval of a visa for President Lee to visit the United States to speak at his alma mater Cornell, an act considered to be a clear pro-Taiwan sign by the Chinese and contrary to decisions made one year prior to not approve a visa request, there were five articles written in Chinese media criticizing the actions of Lee and the United States. The Chinese also responded by conducting military exercises and missile tests one month after the visit in addition to recalling their Ambassador to the United States back to China for consultation.

An example of the decrease in tension resulting from ambiguous conduct of the United States during the events of March 1996 is the US ordering of the USS Nimitz and USS Independence Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups to the South China Sea. When China announced its intention to conduct major military exercises and missile tests in the Taiwan Strait in close proximity to Taiwan, even after President Clinton and PRC President Jiang had agreed to deal with the Taiwan issue per the three Communiqués, the US reacted by ordering 2 Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups (CVBG) to the area. In maybe the most powerful action of the entire conflict, the

US made a statement that threatening Taiwan by force was not consistent with previous agreements and would not be tolerated. There was no verbalized threat to use the military power contained in the CVBGs. They were merely ordered to the area. However, the presence of this major military force may have deterred the Chinese from future threatening actions. Although a clear sign of US presence, the unknown intentions of this hugely powerful military force on China's doorstep in the South China Sea must be considered a sign of strategic ambiguity: It was an action inconsistent with all previous actions of the United States and it could have been understood differently by both Taiwan and China. Although causality cannot be proven, within weeks of the deployment of the two CVBGs, tensions decreased and the crisis ended.

The diplomatic and foreign policy choices between 1992 and 1995 made Beijing feel that its flexibility was not being returned by the US. Based on the data points found regarding clear actions (1992 F-15 sales to Taiwan, 1994 Taiwan Policy Review, Most Favored Nation status decisions) and taking into account speeches in response to these actions, most of the actions from 1992-1995 showed a shift by the US and Taiwan toward distancing Taiwan from the PRC and a gradual increase in tension as each of these decisions was made. The Chinese perceived that the previously ambiguous, status-quo policies that were in place in the 1980s that kept peace between these nations had swayed toward being pro-Taiwan. As tensions increased, the Chinese felt the need to react and chose to use military exercises and missile tests in the vicinity of Taiwan as their response. Not until the US and Taiwan returned to ambiguous actions in 1996 did the tensions diminish.

A correlation between clear actions that were considered pro-Taiwan and a rise in tension was observed in the events listed in Appendix A and in Table 1. Also, a decrease in tensions was more prominent when more ambiguous actions were taken. Of the 13 events listed in Table 1,

and summarized in Table 2 below, there were six actions judged clear with four associated to increased tensions and two associated to no significant change. There were seven actions judged to be ambiguous with three associated to a decrease in tensions and four with no significant change in tension. H1 (Strategic ambiguity was the major factor preventing war) cannot be disproven. In order to disprove this hypothesis there would have to be a consistent decrease in tensions when clarity was present and an increase in tension, or even conflict, when ambiguity was present as well as a sign that some other factor was having a greater impact. This was not the case in the actions leading to the crisis, those occurring during the crisis, and those that led to ending the crisis.

	Tension		
	Increase	Decrease	No Change
Ambiguous	0	3	4
Clear	4	0	2

Table 2. Strategic Ambiguity Trends

Other Factors' Role

H2A: The domestic political and economic situation in China prevented war.

I define the domestic situation China in terms of both economics and politics. To quantify the economic situation, bilateral trade statistics between China and Taiwan are presented to show the increased cross strait trade between China and Taiwan seen in the early to mid 1990s.⁴³ Figure 1 displays bilateral trade between China and Taiwan in terms of US dollars per year. Figure 2 displays bilateral trade between China and Taiwan in terms of the share of the total percentage of trade for each country. For example, in 1990, the percentage of imports from China to Taiwan (Red column) was approximately 0.5% the total share of goods that Taiwan imported from the rest of the world and approximately 0.25% to the total trade (Green Column). Looking closer at Figure 2, one should notice that the bilateral trade is only 3% of the total trade

⁴³ Barbieri, K., Omar Keshk, and Brian Pollins. (2008). Correlates of War Project Trade Data Set Codebook, Version 2.01. Online: <http://correlatesofwar.org>.

that is being conducted by these countries. However, after looking at the following indirect trade amounts in Figure 3, this percentage increases five-fold to 15% and thus should be considered statistically significant.

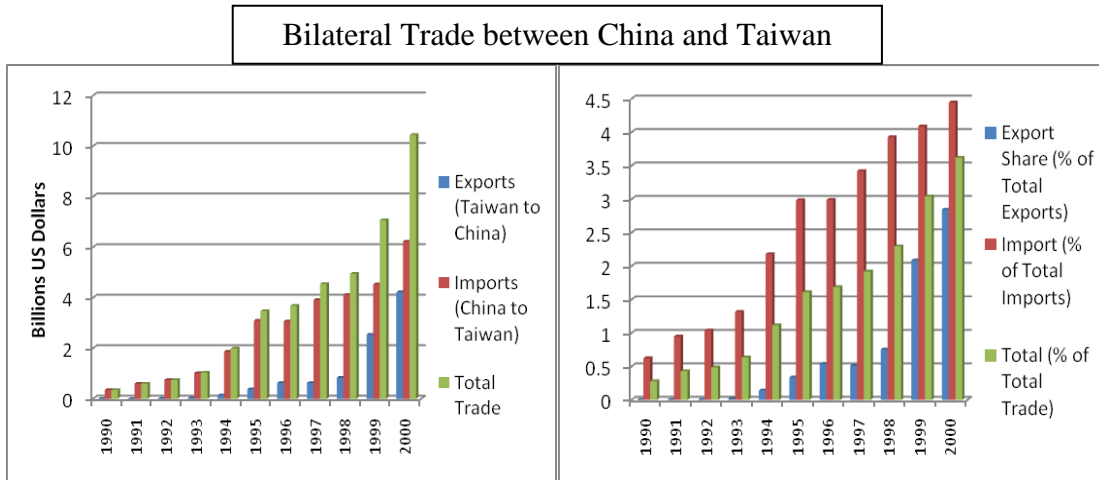


Figure 1

Figure 2

What is not captured in these first two figures is indirect trade. Figure 3 shows the indirect trade growth that paints a similar picture to the bilateral trade numbers. What is seen in all three of these figures is a steady upward trend throughout the data period. There is arguable evidence over the significance of this steady upward trend. Although the data shows an increased dependence between China and Taiwan the question that remains is whether this creates tension or it creates ties. The increased reliance can be translated as what would amount to a greater cost to both countries should there be a war and the less likely chance of war due to the catastrophic economic consequences it would cause. Alternatively, this increased dependence in the mid-nineties could have been a sign that it was time for Taiwan to seek to be independent. “Widespread sentiment clearly exists among Chinese officials and analysts that cross-Strait economic integration will, over time, make Taiwanese independence less feasible (and unification, perhaps, more likely). Not surprisingly, then, politicians in Taiwan who favor

independence (or at least lean in that direction) tend to be suspicious of cross-Strait economic ties.”⁴⁴ When pro-independence leaders in Taiwan began to see an increased dependence between the two nations from greater bilateral trade and travel, they came to realize that their opportunity for independence was closing. They thought they needed to pursue independence before the trade and cross strait travel reliance became so significant that the majority of the Taiwanese refused to pursue independence due to the catastrophic economic consequences a conflict with China would have. The industries they had worked so hard to build would be destroyed in a matter of days or weeks if there was a violent conflict between the two states. For this reason it is difficult to make a definitive judgment on this set of data and therefore it cannot disprove H2A (The domestic situation was the major factor).

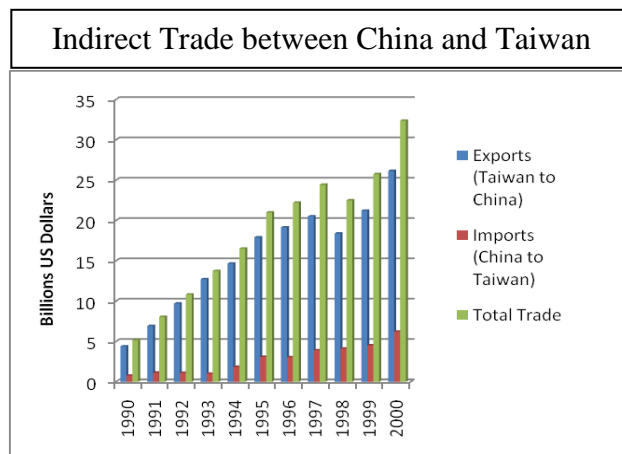


Figure 3

In addition to trade, cross strait travel was researched as an added factor to determine the domestic situations across the Taiwan Strait. A steady upward trend of cross strait travel was the result of increased business as well as personal travel and is presented in Figures 4 and 5 to again show the increased interaction and interdependence between Taiwan and China. This trend line,

⁴⁴ Kastner, S.L. “Rethinking the Political Consequences of Economic Integration in Mainland China-Taiwan Relations,” in *Reflections on the Triangular Relations of Beijing-Taipei-Washington since 1995*, ed. Shiping Hua. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 260.

similar to that of cross strait trade, again cannot disprove H2A since it can be argued both for and against its tendencies to lead to or prevent conflict.

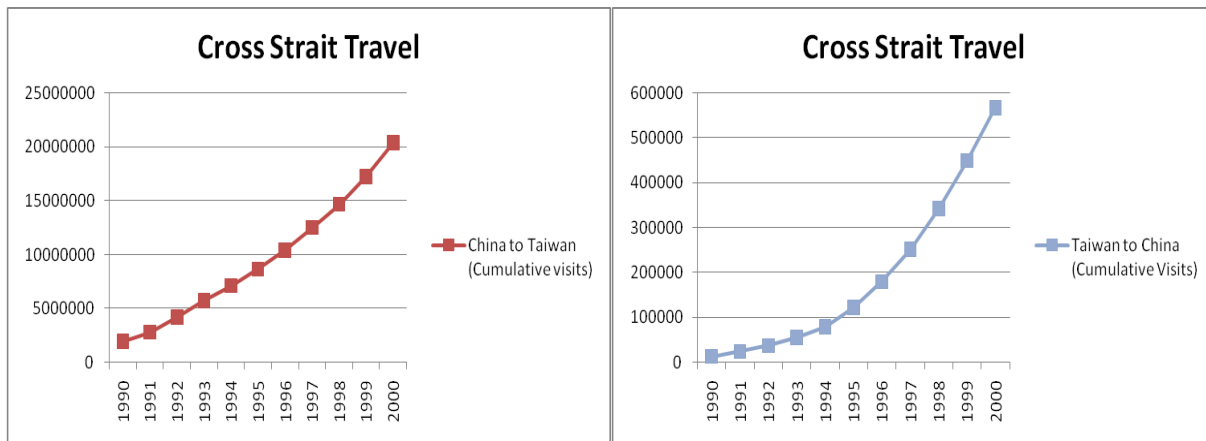


Figure 4

Figure 5

China’s domestic political condition is another factor explored in attempts to explain what prevented war during this crisis. A more difficult measure to quantify, China’s domestic political situation was measured using public opinion polls. As a developing Communist country, China might be considered to have less than valid public opinion and polling data. Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the efficacy of polling in China and conclusions show that results of polling should be taken for the most part as a valid portrayal of public sentiment.⁴⁵ “The third leadership needs to make the party credible to people.”⁴⁶ This comment was made in 1989 and gave the next generation of leaders a foreshadowing of the impact that the citizens of China should have on future national and international issues for China. It would no longer be sufficient enough to just be the ruler—the leadership must start to weigh the wishes of the citizens more when making decisions impacting the state. What was becoming very important to China was a consensus of both the elite and the majority, and any relationship on the international level might be considered secondary to this.

⁴⁵ Ren, L. “Surveying Public Opinion in Transitional China: An Examination of Survey Response” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh 2009), 12.

⁴⁶ Deng, Deng Xiaoping wenzuan Vol 3. 298-99. In Lampton p 299.

Using the World Values Survey data that was conducted in 1990, 1995 and 2001, I show the public opinion regarding government and conditions in China and how they changed over a period centered on the crisis.⁴⁷ This raw data and charts are presented in Appendix B. A drawback of this data is that there is less information available for the 1995 survey regarding public opinion of the government than the surveys in 1990 and 2001. However, I chose two survey questions that contain data from all three surveys that should shed some light on public opinion:

- How much freedom of choice and control do you have over your life?
- How important is politics in your life?

Polling data showed that there was a highly perceived freedom of choice and control across the survey period. What stands out is the highest level of freedom of choice was chosen by 24.4% of polled individuals in 2001 compared to 20.27% in 1995 and 14.9% in 1990. The importance of politics remained fairly steady at the rather important and very important levels and does not reveal any statistically significant impacts.

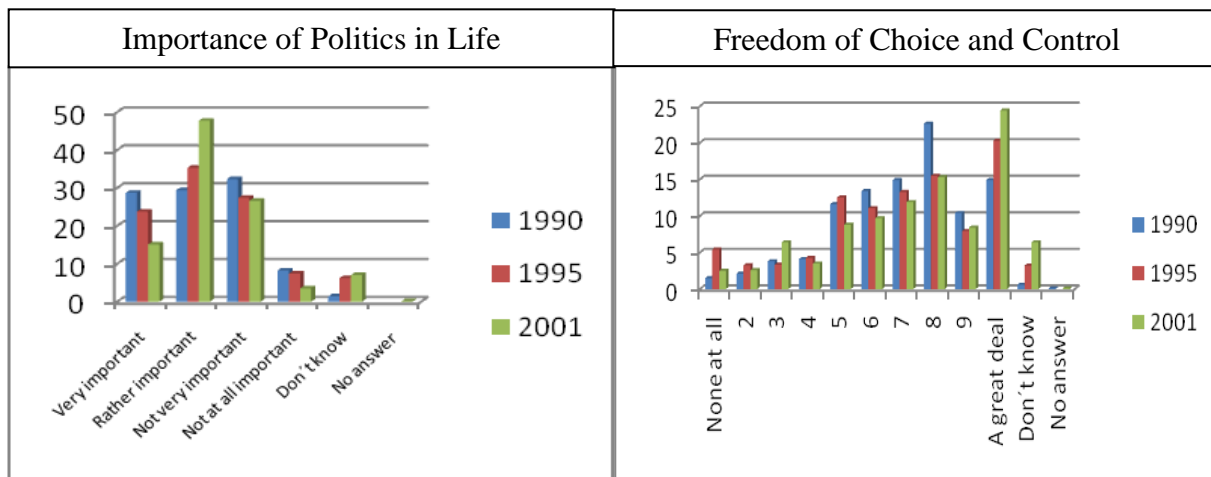


Figure 6

Figure 7

In addition the following questions were used and hold data from 1990 and 2001:

⁴⁷ World Values Survey, "Online Data Analysis," <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSAnalyzeStudy.jsp> accessed 12 October 2010.

- How much confidence do you have in Political parties?
- How much confidence do you have in Parliament?
- How much confidence do you have in the Armed Forces?
- Is China run for or by whom?
- How often do you discuss politics with friends?

There was found to be quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in political parties, parliament and the armed forces with a slight increase from 1990 to 2001. Without the mid-survey data from 1995 it is difficult to tell if this is played a factor in the crisis in 1995.

The most significant data found was that from the question regarding for or by whom is the country run. In 1990, 85.8% of respondents found the country to be run for all the people with this number decreasing to 67.8% in 2001. The number of respondents who felt the country was run for a few big interests rose from 7.4% in 1990 to 13.4% in 2001. Although there is a wide margin in these numbers and still a significant number of respondents who felt the country was run for all the people, it is a downward trend in political opinion of the government. Again, without the 1995 data it is difficult to make a decisive judgment.

Qualitatively analyzing China through the periods of leadership since Mao Zedong, one finds that there is a progressive decentralization of power, authority, and economic resources available to each successive leader.⁴⁸ Although the information age and 24 hour media cycle impacts in China have lagged those in the United States, popular support and approval still carried some weight on political decisions in 1995 although the public opinion polling data available from the World Values Survey does not clearly show this impact. Also, I found there was a marked consolidation of leadership and decision making:

“The problem in 1993-1997 was that Jiang’s power base was not well consolidated. Jiang was in charge of US and Taiwan policy, but the structure gave [Premier] Li Peng [as had of the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group] the right to speak his opinions.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸Lampton, D. M. Same bed, different dreams : Managing U.S.-China relations, 1989-2000. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 283.

⁴⁹ Lampton 293.

Until Deng Xiaoping died in February 1997, there was a supreme decision maker above the other national leaders. This altered the ability for policy makers to come to consensus decisions as there was not a supreme decision maker who would not be impacted by public opinion as much as decision makers who were not held in such high regard. Based on this information H2A (the domestic situation was the major factor) cannot be disproven.

H2B: China’s status in the international community was the major factor.

China’s status in the international community was measured by the number of international treaties and agreements to which China was a member. A weakness in using this as a measure of other factors preventing war is that it is difficult to measure as there can be numerous agreements made between nations that are not made public. This data includes any treaty or agreement of non-aggression, mutual defense, or consultation.⁵⁰ Table 3 contains this data and shows the disparity between the United States and China but also shows that China’s role in the international community grows throughout the data period.

Although the number of agreements China maintained was insignificant compared to the United States, the trend shows a continued growth in the international community. As indicated earlier, strategic ambiguity will work in circumstances where there are fewer alignment options available to the adversary.⁵¹ The alignment options available to the Chinese were mostly of non-aggression however and did not include mutual defense with the exception of a single treaty with North Korea. This lack of alignment options, as compared to the United States, presented China

Year	Number of Intl Agreements	
	China	United States
Prior to 1992	8	191
1992-1995	11	192
Post 1996	14	192

Table 3. Number of International Agreements in Place

⁵⁰ Leeds, B.A. “The Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP),” <http://www.atop.rice.edu> , last accessed 28 October 2010.

⁵¹ Crawford 2.

with a difficult situation if they went to war. They would be at war with not only a strong opponent in the United States, who had many strong allies, but they did not have a formidable ally they could depend on if they needed additional support. As detailed earlier when explaining that pivotal deterrence and strategic ambiguity are most successful in situations where the adversary had fewer alignment options, it is a greater factor in this situation against China who had very few formal allies. H2B, China's status in the international community was the major factor preventing war, is disproven, since their status, or lack thereof, in the international community was not a major factor because they had limited fallback options or allies, even though their options continued to expand throughout the years surrounding the crisis.

H2C: China's military capability vis-à-vis the US was the major factor.

Data culled from the Correlates of War database, specifically the Composite Index of National Capability, presents a quantitative measure on which to judge a country's industrial and military strength. Although it is not a perfect measure of a state's ability to wage war, it takes into account six factors (total population, urban population, military personnel, military expenditures, primary energy consumption, and iron and steel production) that have come to be accepted as key indicators across long time periods and through different social and economic situations.⁵² As much as this indicator can provide a constant measure, the name of the study shows its worth and any results dependent on this variable may only be correlation as opposed to causation.⁵³ This indicator, presented in Figure 6 along with qualitative observations of the military capabilities of the United States, China, and Taiwan shows China's potential ability to wage war in 1995-96.

⁵² Singer, J. David, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey. (1972). "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965." in Bruce Russett (ed) Peace, War, and Numbers, Beverly Hills: Sage, 19-48. V 4.0.

⁵³ Jervis 99.

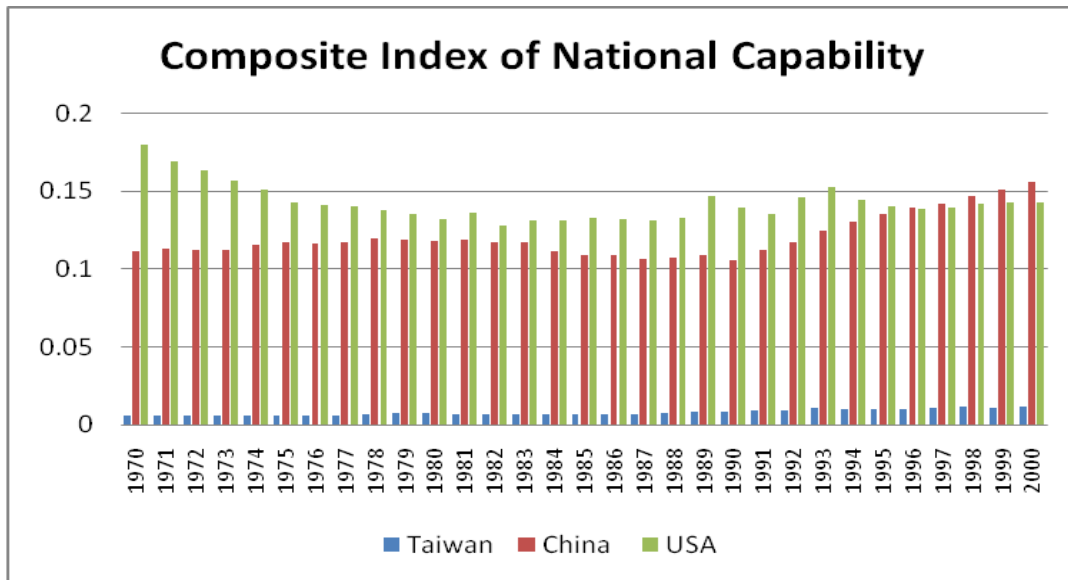


Figure 8

The China COW data shows in 1996 that China (0.139) actually becomes more capable than the US (0.138) and continues to increase after that with a greater difference in following years. However, qualitatively the US military capability combined with arms provided to Taiwan would equate to a more operationally capable force. This is a judgment made based on practice in recent wars, state of military equipment, and proficiency in operations. In a prepared statement made on 1 May 2001, after the period of time being observed by this data, Michael O’Hanlon presented the following military capability comparison between the US and China⁵⁴:

- US outspends China on defense at a ratio of 5:1 or more
- US owns about \$1 trillion of modern defense equipment, China owns \$100 billion
- China’s military force is twice the size of US that drains resources from modernization and training
- China’s large force is of little utility because US would not plausibly invade China
- China produces no top-notch fighter jets, submarines or ships (But purchases them from Russia)
- Value and quality of Taiwan’s arms imports (from France and US mainly) exceeded the

⁵⁴ United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs. (2001). Where are U.S.-China relations headed? : Hearing before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, May 1, 2001. Washington: U.S. G.P.O.

value of China's import ratio by 5:1.

-Amphibious assault on Taiwan by China is beyond China's means

Although China continues to grow its military and the COW data shows that China's national capability was greater than that of the United States beginning in 1996, military capability does not increase as quickly. Observing the COW data alone would disprove hypothesis H2C that China's military capability vis-à-vis the US was the major factor preventing war as the COW data shows China's capability was greater. But when balanced with the qualitative data, it is observed that China's military capability was actually inferior to the US, therefore this hypothesis cannot be disproven since there is contradicting data found in this analysis.

3.3 Implications

From the previous quantitative and qualitative analysis only one hypothesis is disproven, that China's role in the international community was the major factor. There is not enough data to disprove any further hypotheses although there is increased evidence that China was not willing or able to militarily defeat the United States. However, there are many cases throughout history where an actor with a less capable military has defeated a stronger one so therefore I cannot make the jump to say this capability difference did not prevent war. The domestic conditions also offer much insight into the development in China and how those conditions impacted foreign policy decisions even though the information did not disprove that these conditions were the major factor that prevented war. The research has shown that there were multiple factors that, when combined, prevented this crisis from ending in war, and I am not able to determine that one factor was greater than the others. What did stand out is that when clear actions were taken by the United States, although sometimes simultaneous to other factors, there was an escalation of tension.

4. Conclusion

The current direction of policy is to maintain the status quo between China and Taiwan and pursue peaceful unification. More precisely, the United States does not intend to prevent any escalation of conflict between China and Taiwan nor does it intend to play a part to move the balance between a one-state and two-state solution in the Taiwan Strait. This is a sound policy, but not agreed to by all policy makers in the United States. Although the ambiguous strategy of the United States over the last 50 years has correlated to a lack of war in the Taiwan Strait, it does not mean that it is the reason for the lack of war. “A strategy can succeed at one time or place and fail in another not because of any difference in the actor’s resources or skill, but because others are behaving differently.”⁵⁵ Policy makers must continue to weigh all of the options when making decisions or setting policy with China and Taiwan. Increasing policymakers’ awareness of the theory and practice of an ambiguous policy in this situation to ensure a continued peaceful relationship between China and Taiwan is the most beneficial finding of this research.

4.1 Why or Why Not Strategic Ambiguity

It is my recommendation to continue to follow policies that leave as many options available to policymakers as possible. An increased number of options usually mean an increased number of opportunities to prevent war. As soon as the range of options is decreased, a decision maker can begin to feel constrained which can then more easily lead to rash decisions resulting in worse conditions for all of the players involved. Although the policy of strategic ambiguity requires constant attention to the issues and actions of the involved players it increases the number of options available and allows for the proper decisions to be made based on the

⁵⁵ Jervis 78.

circumstances of the current times and not those of the past. In the end strategic ambiguity does not force the hand of the decision maker into agreements made by his predecessors but allows each leader to judge the current situation, the factors that are involved in that particular situation and make the best decision for the circumstances with which he finds himself.

The US Department of State should continue to engage both Taiwan and China and promote measures that continue to increase cross-strait ties. The State Department must maintain close diplomatic relationships with members from both Taiwan and China in order to constantly monitor for any signs of degradation of the status quo. Our strategy of ambiguity necessitates that we stay abreast of and ahead of any changes to the current situation in order to preempt any actions that are detrimental to a future peaceful resolution.

The Department of Defense must make budget decisions that continue to look out to the future when the Chinese military may gain the upper hand in both quantity and quality of military forces vis-à-vis the United States. The short term decisions being made recently, required to support the current budgetary and economic shortfalls, will have detrimental long term consequences should the United States find itself embroiled in a conflict with a large peer competitor. The expeditionary characteristic of the United States Navy allows the US military to project presence worldwide without any diplomatic or political limits, and as seen in the impact of the two CVBGs sent to South China Sea in 1996, is a key enabler of strategic ambiguity. Our aircraft carrier fleet, associated ships, aircraft, and supporting infrastructure must continue to be upgraded in order to maintain proficiency throughout the levels of warfare. Any decision today that does not take advantage of the latest technological advancements will put us a generation behind our competitors who are expeditiously upgrading their forces. The DoD acquisition and procurement process must be revised and shortened in order to support any rash, short-term

decisions being made today. With timelines of up to twenty years between conception of a new major weapon system and its initial operational capability, there is no time for a decade of stagnation to exist. The DoD must not accept that we maintain the most powerful military in the world today. They must make decisions to ensure we maintain the most powerful military in the world in the future.

4.2 Further Research

During this project I have found there to be lacking any theories that attempt to quantify the presence of strategic ambiguity. Where this study has aimed to identify the presence of strategic ambiguity and its impact on three party relationships, an ability to quantify the level of ambiguity and further show if its use causes or prevents wars would be a major advancement for this area of literature. However, studying ambiguity obviously entails working with many difficult to quantify issues.

While researching data, I found reference to the number of non-government organizations, lobbyists, and interest groups acting on behalf of certain states, actors, groups, etc.⁵⁶ The quantification of the impact that these groups have on the strategies of the states who use them is an area worthy of additional study also. If a state can be more ambiguous because it has the ability to impact others through sub-state groups or actors, it would allow that state more flexibility in its strategies and decision making.

I noted my last area of further study earlier in the paper. Taiwan's independence activity and rhetoric has significant impacts on increasing tensions and possibly leading to conflict. Although Taiwan is the weakest power in this three party relationship, they are still a player and have an impact. Enumerating the significance of their impact would help to bring attention to

⁵⁶ McBride, S. (1997). "Despite Scandal, Foreign Lobbying Isn't what it was," Wall Street Journal, July 18, 1997. A16.

not only their policy makers but those in the other two parties of the deterrence triangle who need to recognize the significance of Taiwan's pro-independence actions.

Appendix A: Significant Events

Military	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No Change)	Reaction	Explanation
Inspection of Chinese cargo ship to Iran	9/4/1993	NA	No Change	Press Reports, Chinese Foreign Ministry Statement	Suspected of carrying Chemical Weapons precursors but inspection in Saudi Arabia found none. Chinese reaction to bullying of US.
USS Kitty Hawk interaction with Chinese Sub	10/27/1994	NA	No Change	Minimal press reports, Chinese Foreign Ministry Statement	Normal interaction of forces but LA Times report of shoot to kill next time by Chinese.
USS Nimitz transits through Taiwan Strait	12/19/1995	NO	No Change	Not reported until 6 weeks after it happened.	Transit reported to occur because of severe weather but first transit of Taiwan Strait since normalization.
USS Nimitz and USS Independence ordered to area of operations near Taiwan	Mar-Apr 1996	YES	Decrease	Numerous press reports and official statements. China conducts exercises and missile tests but then tensions decrease. Le Peng speech warning US not to transit Taiwan Strait.	2 CVBGs in area is show of US willingness to counter China but only after signs of major threat to Taiwan. Clear sign of forces but ambiguous sign of tactics or use of forces. IAW Taiwan Relations Act.

Appendix A: Significant Events

Diplomatic Recognition	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No Change)	Reaction	Explanation
Most Favored Nation Status Extension	5/28/1993	NO	Increase	Insignificant	Set deadlines and threat of losing MFN status.
Initial request for overnight stay in Hawaii denied for President Lee	5/4/1994	YES	No Change	Insignificant	In accordance with Communiques.
Renewal of MFN	5/26/1994	YES	No Change	Insignificant	Counter to year prior MFN speech. Removed clear action requirements that were in place for China's MFN Status.
1994 Taiwan Policy Review	9/1/1994	NO	Increase	Increase tension. Jiang's Eight Points Speech in January 1995.	Upgraded relationship with Taiwan in most facets. China began to see the impact of Congress on US decision making.
Senate Foreign Relations Committee non-binding resolution that Taiwan should be given UN seat	3/1/1995	NO	Increase	Increase tension	Another US move made public perceived by China to be pro-Taiwan.

Appendix A: Significant Events

Diplomatic Recognition (contd)	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No Change)	Reaction	Explanation
Permission granted for President Lee's visa to attend Cornell event	5/1/1995	NO	Increase	PRC conducts Missile tests and Military exercises 21-26 July and 15-25 August and move forces to Fujian Province on coast. 7 articles in Chinese Press criticizing Lee (Late July/Early August 1995). Cancel 3 diplomatic visits, Recalled ambassador for consultation. PRC Foreign Minister speech on 7 point principles 6/22/1995. PRC Defense Minister "Never renounce the use of force." 7/31/1995	Counter to year prior decision to not allow Lee to stay overnight in Hawaii.
Clinton Jiang Agreement to deal with Taiwan Strait Issue IAW 3 communique	10/24/1995	YES	Decrease	Multiple press reports and official statements on agreement regarding Taiwan being a "part of China."	Attempt to get back to relationship before 1992.

Appendix A: Significant Events

Other Actions	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No Change)	Reaction	Explanation
150 F16s Sold to Taiwan	9/1/1992	NO	Increase	Increase tension. China transfers missile technology to Pakistan in August 1993. China published "The Taiwan Question and the Reunification of China" white paper August 1993	Contrary to 1982 Communique, but China informed prior to sale that domestic politics/election factored into decision.
Sanctions for Missile related transfers to Pakistan	8/1/1993	NO	Increase	Chinese Asst Foreign Minister threatens to pull out of Missile Technology Control Regime and says US actions "contrary to the basic norms governing international relations."	Increases tensions between nations with continuing missile proliferation issues throughout the conflict.
Nye (Asst SECDEF) Speech to Chinese Military Officers in Beijing	11/1/1995	YES	No change	Statement made one week after Clinton/Jiang agreement 10/24/1995 so reaction to both events is similar.	"Nobody knows" what the US will do in event of military clash in Taiwan Strait is what Nye said and it was consistent with prior ambiguous strategy.

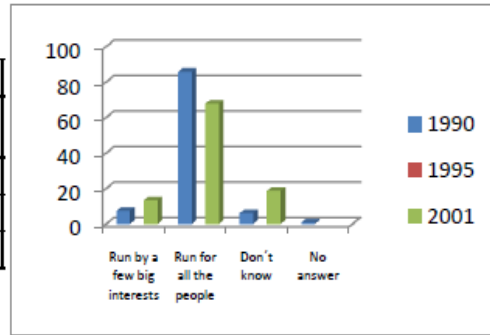
Appendix A: Significant Events

Other Actions (contd)	Date	Ambiguous (Yes or No)	Tension (Increase, Decrease, No Change)	Reaction	Explanation
Perry (SECDEF) answers question "Any response to Chinese aggression towards Taiwan would depend on circumstances"	3/9/1996	YES	No change	Multiple press reports and official statements as well as military force being displayed during this timeframe.	At the beginning of the major missile tests targeted near Taiwan as 2 CVBGs were amassing in area. Clear display of force but ambiguous in use of the force.
Christopher (SECSTATE) "One china as defined by communiques."	5/1/1996	YES	Decrease	Insignificant.	Return to status quo relationship.

Appendix B: Public Opinion Poll Results

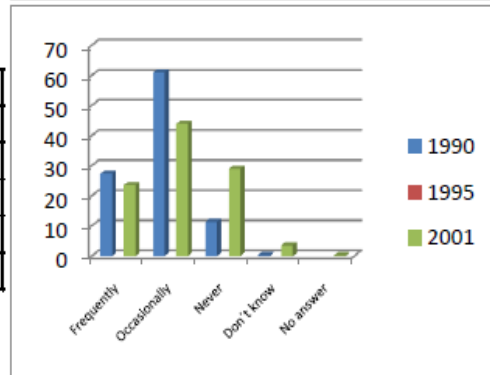
Country run for/by whom

	1990	1995	2001
Run by a few big interests	7.4		13.4
Run for all the people	85.8		67.8
Don't know	6		18.8
No answer	0.8		
	100		100



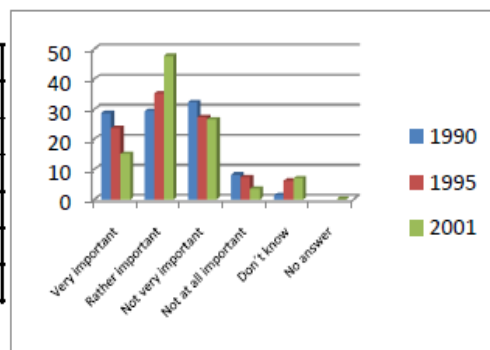
Discuss politics with Friends

	1990	1995	2001
Frequently	27.4		23.5
Occasionally	61		43.9
Never	11.3		28.9
Don't know	0.3		3.5
No answer			0.2
	100		100



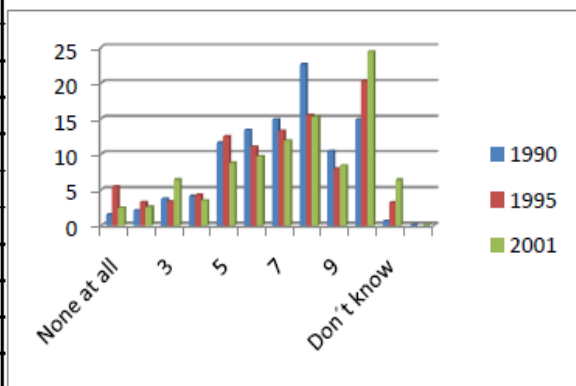
Importance of Politics in Life

	1990	1995	2001
Very important	28.7	23.73	15.1
Rather important	29.4	35.27	47.7
Not very important	32.3	27.4	26.6
Not at all important	8.2	7.4	3.5
Don't know	1.4	6.2	7
No answer			0.1
	100	100	100



Freedom of Choice and Control

	1990	1995	2001
None at all	1.5	5.41	2.5
2	2.1	3.25	2.6
3	3.8	3.35	6.4
4	4.1	4.26	3.5
5	11.6	12.53	8.8
6	13.4	11.06	9.7
7	14.9	13.27	11.9
8	22.6	15.47	15.3
9	10.4	7.93	8.4
A great deal	14.9	20.27	24.4
Don't know	0.6	3.2	6.4
No answer	0.1		0.1
	100	100	100



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