

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

**“The Military Dimensions of the Fourth Taiwan Strait
Crisis”**

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FEATURING

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Bonny Lin:

I'm Bonny Lin, director of the China Power Project and senior fellow for Asian security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thank you for joining us this morning to discuss what some of us call the fourth Taiwan Strait crisis.

As many of you know, U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan caused an escalated tension in and around the Taiwan Strait. The Chinese PLA conducted large-scale, unprecedented military actions around the island after her visit. Chinese missile tests splashed down around Taiwan's territorial waters and a significant number of Chinese naval ships and airplanes have repeatedly passed across the median line in the Taiwan Strait since then, and on a daily basis. So what this panel is trying to do is we've gathered together five leading experts on this issue to analyze the military dimensions of China's response to Speaker Pelosi's visit. Should we call the military events in August a Taiwan Strait crisis? And what does PLA behavior mean for the future of security in the Taiwan Strait?

So joining me today to shed light on these pressing military issues is our five leading scholars. And I'll introduce them by their – in alphabetical order.

So the first is Dr. Taylor Fravel. He's the Arthur and Ruth Sloan professor of political science and director of security studies program at MIT.

Next, we have Ms. Cristina Garafola. She's a policy researcher at the RAND Corporation.

We also have Ms. Kathrin Hille joining us from Taipei. She's the greater China correspondent at Financial Times.

We have Mr. Roderick Lee, who is the director of research at the China Aerospace Studies Institute, CASI, at Air University.

And last but not least, we also have Dr. Chris Twomey, associate professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School.

So I want to thank all of our panelists and leading experts for joining me today. And the way we'll structure the discussions is we hope to have three rounds of questions for each of the panelists, and then I'll weave in questions from the audience. For those of you listening in, please submit your questions via the link list on the CSIS event page.

So let me start this off with a first round of questions, looking at what actually happened militarily around the Taiwan Strait. So, Taylor, if I could turn to you first. Could you start us off by discussing what you saw were the

most significant mentions of the Chinese military activities and, from your perspective, why should we care? Taylor, I think you're muted.

M. Taylor Fravel: Story of our Zoom life. Anyway, thank you so much, Bonny, for convening this event. And it's great to be here with such distinguished colleagues.

Just by way of background, right, the exercises lasted for about seven days, from late in the evening on the 2nd of August through the 10th. And then the live-fire portion was from the 4th of August to the 7th. And I think it's important to note, right, that the exercises were all – were longer in duration than the live fire portion.

I think four elements are particularly noteworthy.

The first is location, right? And so the military exercises, especially the live-fire portion, occurred in areas where they had never occurred before, and at greater, sort of, numbers, I think, than ever before. There were six live-fire zones around the island, targeting it from the north, the south, the east and the west. In the north, targets included Taipei, notionally, as well as the main port in the north, and also a main port in the south. But previous exercises that really were targeting Taiwan generally actually occurred along the coasts of Fujian and Zhejiang, with the exception of some missile closure areas in 1995 and 1996. So the number of zones, the location of these zones – in some areas they were within 10 nautical miles from Taiwan – really are kind of, sort of, unprecedented. If you just look at a map you can see, in essence, how Taiwan was, in some senses, surrounded or encircled by these exercises.

The second element that was noteworthy were the activities themselves. I know we're going to hear much more from Rod and Chris and others on this dimension. But, in essence, I think it was a combination of firepower strikes either against maritime targets or land targets that could be used in a blockade or in an invasion scenario, as well as more in-depth drills that would relate to how China or the PLA might seek to blockade Taiwan in the future. We also had missiles overflying Taiwan. I think the precise number that flew over the island and the atmosphere is not quite certain to me. I've seen anywhere from one to four. But, regardless, missiles were fired from the mainland of China into three closure areas and one of those closure areas was on the east coast of Taiwan. I mean, that just psychologically has quite a powerful effect or could have quite a powerful effect I'm going to talk more about, but, nevertheless, was an unprecedented and noteworthy aspect of these exercises.

A third element to flag here would be what was really being exercised and, again, I think we'll get more into this, but these are probably or maybe one of the largest or more complex exercises that have taken place since the 2016

reforms were put in place for the PLA, which created these five theater commands which have responsibility for operations in different sort of strategic directions, and these exercises were overseen by the Eastern Theater Command from Taiwan in its main scenario or contingency, and that was an opportunity, really, to test the command and control capacities of this new organizational system as well as more generally the PLA's ability to conduct what they describe as integrated joint operations. You know, how integrated and how joint these exercises were, I think, remains a somewhat open question and, perhaps, one we don't necessarily have enough information to answer. But, clearly, all of the services were described as being involved as well as the strategic support force and, I believe, the joint logistics force. So the command element, I think, is very important to sort of separate from the specific activities themselves.

And then, finally, just to wrap up here, I think in the process of all of this, right, lots of different norms were broken or previous patterns of behavior kind of were shattered. The most noteworthy here, I think, is the crossing of the center line by air and naval assets by the PLA. This is the line that's, roughly, halfway between Taiwan and the mainland. It was sort of a crisis management mechanism to keep sort of military aircraft and vessels on sort of their respective sides of the Strait, and with the start of these exercises and continuing daily until today, I believe, Chinese aircraft have, certainly, crossed the median line at multiple points both in the south west of Taiwan, in the north of Taiwan, sometimes in the center, and that, I think, does create at least a new sort of normal of military activity in the area that could raise the possibility of escalation in the future.

We've also seen, I think, for the other norm is firing missiles over Taiwan. That was completely shattered. There was some sort of discussion very early on in 1996 when one missile may have over flown the tip of the island of Taiwan. But I believe that's not an accurate report. So this, really, would be the first time that we've seen that norm sort of being shattered as well.

And then, finally, I think having exercises so close to Taiwan and so many live fire zones so close to Taiwan means that's, clearly, another norm that has been shattered and I fully expect we're going to see more exercises like this in the future.

So I'll end here on those four points and really looking forward to the rest of the discussion. Thank you.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you very much.

Let me turn to Chris now to cover a bit more on the naval side of operations.

Christopher
Twomey:

Great. Thanks, Bonny, for organizing this and to CSIS for hosting.

Let me just offer a couple of my own personal thoughts, not speaking for the Navy school or the Navy itself. I think Taylor really laid down the foundation pretty well. Let me just emphasize a couple of different aspects.

One, my sense is that the naval midline violations are an attempt to kind of set a new normal practice for the PLA to allow future deployments across that midline to be routinized and expected as a way to increase Chinese political and diplomatic pressure, more so than their military operational relevance. One of the other precedents that was kind of overturned in the missile launches, just to flag, was the landing of several missiles in Japanese EEZs in a way that, you know, certainly, China would have been aware of and could well have been a signal to Japan.

In terms of the size of the navy operations, you know, they're somewhat larger but the PLA navy has, for an extended period of time now, had the ability to deploy surface action groups at great distance from Chinese shores, and so my sense is there isn't anything, you know, grossly different in this area. And as Taylor noted, although the eastern theater command took the lead, there was some activity from other fleets as well, although it seems fairly modest, and this gets back to I think the key question that Taylor raised which is, you know, how much joint and integrated operations across the different services, or even within the maritime service, how much interaction was there between maritime air assets and submarines and surface vessels? At least my sense has been, from the very limited reporting we have coming out of Chinese media, that that was fairly sparse in terms of that kind of cross-service integration. And that's been a real challenge for the PLA and it's what the 2015 reforms were kind of centered on was improving the basis for that, but I don't think we have major developments to report from the basis of this set of exercises. You know, and it's worth noting that the Pelosi visit kind of came in the middle of exercise season, and so to some extent, the PLA was able to make use of previously planned exercises – to some extent, I'm sure the missiles and the extensive cross-strait midline violations were not part of the pre-planned, but some of the other activities may well have been.

Two final points and then I'm going to turn it over to Rod for his thoughts. The set of exercises, you know, bears, I think, very little resemblance to the way the PLA would conduct either a blockade operation or an amphibious assault. You wouldn't use missiles dropping into large boxes to enforce a blockade. There were no visit, board, search, and seizure activities, VBSS, or, you know, careful air patrols that were integrated with naval follow-ups, at least not that were reported publicly, that would have been part of a blockade, right, surrounding the island on a sustained basis, checking ships

going in and out, seeing what they're carrying, seeing if they're bound for Japan or Chinese waters and stopping all those that would go through.

So I think the way to think about both the maritime, but also the broader set of exercises, is really as a political signal that certainly has some military utility in terms of large-scale operations and, you know, shaking the kinks out of the command-and-control capabilities that were developed in the wake of the 2015 reforms. But this is not kind of either a rehearsal or a prelude to outright invasion and was primarily a political signal of displeasure aimed at the Taiwanese and American authorities.

Why don't I stop there?

Dr. Lin: Thank you very much, Chris.

Rod, over to you. I think if you could focus on the air side, that would be greatly appreciated.

Roderick Lee: Sure, Bonny, and thanks again to you and CSIS for hosting this wonderful event. Hopefully we'll be able to unpack some interesting issues here.

So really looking at the air side, the activities we're seeing shouldn't come as a surprise or are certainly things we've seen before, right? We've seen an increase in the number of flights around the Taiwan area in terms of both fighters and bombers. Certainly, the midline crossings are sort of a new phenomenon. But in terms of scale, I believe the October 2021, there was sort of one day there where it spiked up above 50 aircraft. I think that was a high point still and nothing we've seen in the past couple of days has exceeded that. But certainly, the period of sustained flights has been greater. So on that side, I think the air – the air presence has been more sustained, but in scale it hasn't been that much greater than what we've seen in the past.

Certainly, some new things. CSIS, on your tracker you kind of pointed out that the UAV overflights of areas like Kinmen and Matsu. That's certainly new.

And so that really all brings us to the utility on the air side, or at least on the air force side. That's – getting to Chris and Taylor's point, this is – there's a large component of this – in fact, I would argue the vast – the major focus of these military activities are to message in what they would classify as military deterrence activities. And the really useful part about airpower is you can kind of dial your presence up and down, both in a quantitative and qualitative sense, in a pretty rapid fashion. So you can adjust the number of flights they're doing each day. You can adjust where they're flying, how they're flying, all these types of things with a fairly fine-tooth comb. So you

could say I'm going to put out 30 aircraft today and then 32 tomorrow, and maybe tomorrow I'll do more median-line crossings. And that shows a – that sort of relays a pretty clear message, especially if Taiwan is doing you the courtesy of capturing all of that information and publicizing it. So I think airpower is this really great option in the military deterrence realm, and we've seen them use it over the past two years around Taiwan. But it looks like in this most recent round of military deterrence activities they're really unlocking a lot more options: the midline crossing; the overflight, although with UAVs, of Taiwan territory. So I think we're starting to demonstrate them get a lot more confidence here.

I'll touch briefly on the missile stuff because we've sort of already addressed it already, but I would like to highlight really two factors.

One is, although we didn't see it, based on our understanding of missiles assigned to the Eastern Theater Command, they fall under a rocket force unit called Base 61. There's actually two DF-17 units down there and I'm fairly certain that at least some of the missiles we saw were probably DF-17s. Again, we didn't see them publicly. They didn't show video footage of it. But I think it's important to highlight that not everything is intended for public consumption. Some of it is for other militaries. And showcasing sort of a high-end weapon like the DF-17, I think, on the PLA's end is certainly intended to create some form of deterrent activity.

Another angle on the missile side that I think is worth highlighting is the participation – although it's not a missile per se – but we did see army long-range rocket artillery fires during the live-fire exercise out of the 72nd Group Army, one of those three group armies assigned to Eastern Theater with a Taiwan mission focus. And so I think this also demonstrates trying to get that joint approach. It appears that those fires were coordinated, so we're talking about maybe some indications of joint – improvements to jointness after the reforms. If those army and rocket force fires were that coordinated, that would suggest some level of joint command and control at the theater level.

So I do want to highlight – and Chris already mentioned this – that the activities I think we're seeing are very much intended for messaging and deterrence purposes. And although they are at scale, we do see relatively large-scale exercises in other areas. So the air force conducts annual – for example, an annual exercise called Red Sword. The number of aircraft involved in that is probably greater than what we're seeing right now. And their ability to involve surface-to-air missiles and instrumentation, all of this really leads them towards a better exercise environment. So do they get operational benefits out of operating around Taiwan? Sure. There's always that benefit. But their annual large-scale summer exercises, I think, get them a lot more bang for their buck on training. So I want to really hammer home that what we're seeing right there both on the air and I think in other

domains is very much focused with the messaging. The training bit is just nice to have.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you very much, Rod.

So, on that note, let me turn to Cristina. So from your perspective as you look at the Chinese military activities – and as Rod has highlighted, maybe they haven't quite been that significant, at least on the air side, how do you differentiate these current activities from typical Chinese gray-zone activities? Are what we're seeing more than typical gray zone? Or, given your research, how would you characterize that?

Christina Garafola: Sure, Bonny. I'm happy to speak to that. And then if you'd like me to cover, you know, U.S. responses as well, I can do that after.

So, I mean, at some level what we're seeing is broadly consistent with China's gray-zone approaches. So in the sense of combining military and nonmilitary activities in the region against its neighbors. So we see China's gray-zone approach. We see analysts writing about this leveraging all national resources available to advance political objectives. So that can include diplomatic, economic, financial, and informational or cyber forms of coercion. So this is kind of part of China's gray zone playbook. We've seen this against Japan, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, many other actors in the region, as well as Taiwan.

So, again, you know, during these exercises we also saw diplomatic statements by China, going after any allied partner who raised concerns, condemning U.S. behavior; you know, the drones that Rod and others mentioned, probing various locations like Kinmen; trade measures, so curtailing imports and banning some exports to Taiwan; disinformation campaigns; and cyberattacks. Second, we've seen China increasing its use of gray-zone tactics over time against Taiwan and in conjunction with building up these lower-level military activities, you know, each summer.

So in July and August 2019 there was exercises at both ends of the Taiwan Strait – in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. In August 2020, we saw simultaneous military drills in major maritime regions north and south of Taiwan. And of course, we've seen this major ramp up over the past year in sorties by aircraft across the median line, and so on. We've also seen this growth in cyber and informational capabilities, trying to manipulate the information environment and attack Taiwanese government and other websites.

But on the other hand, this level of activity, to Taylor's point, is not typical. The amount of live fire, the multiple missiles potentially flying over Taiwan, and the number of exercises close to Taiwan. So I think what this conveys,

based on some research we've recently published at RAND – that you were also part of, of course – was China's taking the highest-level, most escalatory tactics against Taiwan in the region, and combining this with geopolitical and economic pressure. And we're likely to see that continue going forward, as well as these kind of grassroots pressure efforts to effect and shape, you know, the opinion in Taiwan society.

Dr. Lin: And, Cristina, if you could really quickly touch on what we're – what you saw as the initial U.S. response. And then we can follow up a little bit more on this in round two.

Ms. Garafola: Yeah, absolutely. So, I'll highlight three areas. One is U.S. messaging is focused on plans for air and maritime transits to the Taiwan Strait over subsequent weeks. However, we haven't yet seen one of those announced. And they typically tend to be announced after they've occurred. So the last one publicized was July 19th, which was, of course, before all the PLA exercises began in early August. So we could see this potentially coming up soon.

Second, we saw Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin direct the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group to remain in the area east to Taiwan in the Philippine Sea, along with the U.S. Tripoli was also operating in waters east to Taiwan. So we've now seen the Ronald Reagan depart for Yokosuka for some long-term maintenance. But messaging that U.S. ships and carrier strike groups are in the region. And then, third, we also saw Washington take some pains to postpone a pre-planned intercontinental ballistic missile test. And the messaging there was, you know, to avoid potential miscalculation. This is the behavior of a responsible nuclear power, to make sure there's, you know, no risk of that misperception.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you very much, Cristina.

Let me turn to Kathrin, to ask for your thoughts on how did you see Taiwan's responses? What did you see as the main Taiwan military, or nonmilitary, response?

Kathrin Hille: Sure. Thank you very much, Bonny. And thank you for having me in this round of experts.

So Taiwan's response was heavy on the nonmilitary side, I would say. And I think that actually underlines what both Chris and Rod pointed out, that this – the Taiwan government also saw this or sees this as a deterrence operation and as an operation that has political aims from the Chinese side. So the Taiwanese military did, with regard to the Chinese air and naval movements, what they normally do when those happen, scrambling fighters and, with

regard to the naval movements, they did some things they haven't done before, which is sending Taiwanese naval vessels close to the Chinese ones.

And especially on the median line, trying to – well, playing a little bit of cat and mouse – and trying to prevent the Chinese from crossing the line. And then on the other side of the island, in the east, also staying close and making sure that the Chinese vessels wouldn't cross into the contiguous zone, or even territorial waters. And as far as I understand, this back and forth between the PLA vessels and the Taiwanese navy vessels is still going on close to the median line. So this is something that didn't end with the exercises.

Now, on the nonmilitary side, there was a lot of messaging from the Taiwanese military, and also from the Taiwanese government, and they had two goals I think they were pursuing, or still are pursuing. One is, of course, a domestic audience. There's a very strong focus on ensuring that no panic would occur, and that the public morale wouldn't take a blow. So both the president and also the defense minister and the armed forces themselves came out frequently and kept repeating that the Taiwanese military has everything under control, the situation is being monitored, they are strong, they're prepared.

They do not shy away from fighting, but they certainly are not itching for a fight. They kept repeating this every day, maybe twice a day often, to reassure the public. And that clearly worked. On the other hand, of course, there was messaging to the international community in the form of – or, in the person of the foreign minister, who painted the events in quite a dramatic way and described them as an attempt to change the status quo and appealed to the international community to stand with Taiwan.

Now, as far as I know what's going on now, the Taiwanese government hasn't really made a very clear cut – or, drawn a very clear-cut line after the PLA said that the exercises were completed. They basically adopted a wait-and-see attitude and said: Well, we'll just judge them by their actions. And as far as I know, the administration is conducting a review of both the declared exercises and the PLA's movements since then, and what I've heard about the main things that they consider noteworthy and necessary to follow up and maybe draw some conclusions are, for one, the drone movements over the outlying islands. So there are doubts as to how to respond if this happens again, what is an adequate response. And they want to discuss this with the U.S.

And then there's also – another focus area is how to quickly create or build up resilient communication systems, because they have become more aware or more conscious of the risks of electronic warfare and cyber operations

blinding command and control. Maybe I'll stop there and wait till the next round. Thank you.

Dr. Lin: Thank you very much, Kathrin. That was a very comprehensive assessment of how Taiwan has responded. And we really appreciate you bringing out the nonmilitary responses too because I think, as you highlighted, that was a critical component.

Let me now turn this into a second round of questions, where I really want to get at is this a crisis and why should we care? Particularly as we've been seeing both in the United States and, in some cases, in Taiwan that the level of attention paid to what China has done, or continues to execute, in the Taiwan Strait has decreased. So let me start off by turning to Chris. And I know, Chris, you have a piece just published this morning on War on the Rocks on this is just the beginning of the fourth Taiwan Strait crisis. So why don't you start us off. And I believe you were one of the first people who called it the fourth Taiwan Strait crisis. So over to you as to why this is a crisis and how you see this moving forward.

Dr. Twomey: Thanks, Bonny. And look, I really hope I'm wrong, right? I hope that a piece – the title of that piece is shown to be false, going forward. But I suspect that's not the case.

You know, this is likely the early stages of a crisis that's going to continue to percolate for months. If you look at the historic precedents in 1954 and again in 1995-96, those two Taiwan Straits crises went on for about eight months and 1958 was over a period of three months as it developed.

So I think that's likely to continue and I think, you know, some of the reasons are just highlighted. Cristina noted that the U.S. is talking about transits of the Taiwan Strait, about sailing and flying wherever international law allows, right. It's going to be important for us to send signals to our allies as well as to China that we aren't being deterred by these exercises from freedom of navigation and the rights that that accords the U.S. Navy, and that response is going to be provocative to the Chinese and they're going to need to show their own population that they have a response to the U.S.' response to their exercises.

I think one source of continuing pressure is going to be those transits and, more broadly, kind of the surging of forces that the U.S. engaged in to beef up the 7th Fleet in terms of its overall numbers, putting out to sea a Marine flat deck during the earlier stages of the crisis.

But there are other sources too, right. There are additional congressional delegations that have passed through and will continue to. The Japanese Diet is going to send a delegation to Taiwan, and all of these occur in normal

times, but I think the heightened salience of the Pelosi visit is going to mean that all of those sorts of visits get a lot more attention, going forward.

And then I think, most fundamentally, we shouldn't look at this crisis solely as a response to Speaker Pelosi's visit but, more broadly, from the Chinese perspective, there has been a series of salami-slicing tactics made against the traditional U.S. "One China" policy that treats the Taiwan situation as somewhat anomalous, provides Taiwan with a different sort of political and diplomatic status than countries that are – that have normal – complete diplomatic normalization.

And so I think China's perspective is they need to put – draw a line in the sand, draw some clear, bright red line to communicate to the United States and to Taiwan and to others that further erosion of our "One China" policy is not going to be acceptable to the Chinese.

And so I think that is likely to put additional pressure on China to kind of communicate continuing displeasure and to try to ensure that further erosion of the way Taiwan is treated as, essentially, a second-class citizen in the international community doesn't occur.

So I think, you know, those broader causes as well as some of the narrower operational elements that I started out talking about are all reasons why I suspect this crisis is going to continue to percolate and develop over a period of months.

Why don't I stop there?

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Chris.

Cristina, over to you. So, from your perspective as you look at this, do you agree with Chris that this is a crisis? And, perhaps, from also the perspective of U.S. allies and partners, which Chris also referenced, do they – have they viewed this as a crisis and how have they responded?

Ms. Garafola: Great. Thanks, Bonny.

Yeah. So I think going back to the gray zone operations, I do think this transcends, you know, China's day-to-day pressure that it puts on Taiwan and other countries in the region. I also agree with Chris, you know, this is the first couple weeks of something where we could see more potential flashpoints. So, again, third Taiwan Straits crisis was over eight months and there were multiple decision points by Beijing, Taipei, and Washington during that time. So I think we'll see how China is reacting and how Washington is framing this, going forward.

Thus far, we've seen a number of activities by allies and partners – of course, the statements, you know, others have flagged with the G-7 and the U.N. High Representative, and China responded very negatively to that saying, you know, the G-7+1 is the new Eight-Power Allied Forces, so harkening back to China's century of humiliation.

There was also a trilateral statement between the U.S., Australia, and Japan condemning firing missiles into Japanese economic exclusive zones and, you know, focus on China raising tensions in the region. We also saw, you know, Australia, U.K., France call, sharing concern about China's actions. A lot of it's been when countries are making public statements focusing on the live-fire ballistic missile launches. Additionally, Japan and then kind of more muted statements from South Korea, EU, and the NATO chief.

But we've also seen some messaging by the U.S. involving military operations with the U.S. and other countries. So these are exercises that are already planned and very large scale. For example, Garuda Shield 2022 – this is an Indonesia-led exercise with the U.S. Army but there's a dozen other allies and partners involved – over 4,000 personnel – and that took place from August 3rd to 14.

So there was some subtle messaging there by the U.S. that, you know, interoperability and our unity as a group of nations focused on a free and open Indo-Pacific and maintaining a rules-based order.

We also saw a missile defense exercise with Australia, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, and U.S. forces wrapping up in Hawaii around this same time, and then, you know, the U.S. also messaged an air drill with Japan Self-Defense Force August 9th. So that's when the exercises were still taking place, probably near Okinawa.

So we do see some efforts by the U.S. to sort of message resolve, unity with allies, in areas that are operationally relevant to field these activities.

Dr. Lin: It seems, Cristina, what you're saying is, perhaps to quote Ambassador Burns, the U.S. views this as a manufactured crisis and our allies and partners are also viewing this, to some extent, even if they're not using the word "manufactured" crisis as a crisis in terms of the strength of their response.

Ms. Garafola: Yeah. You know, many of these were preplanned exercises, like the large-scale ones. So whether or not the U.S. and others undertake more direct exercises or operations that are messaging this, you know, we'll have to see, as time moves forward.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you.

So, Rod, over to you. We also have a question that, hopefully, you can weave in. So as we look at how China is framing what they're doing, I believe they're calling it a crisis. What do they gain by calling it a crisis, particularly if most of our assessments is everything that the Chinese have done on their end was preplanned? What are your thoughts on this?

Mr. Lee:

Yes. So I, first, want to highlight where they are calling it a crisis or what environments – information environments they're calling it a crisis in. And if you look at – if you look at where they're talking about it, it's mostly coming out – calling this a Taiwan Strait crisis, is mostly coming out of PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlets, so through their spokesperson in press conferences or through individual press releases or events being held by various PRC embassies. So that's one avenue.

The other avenue where they're really hammering home that it's a crisis is in the English media outlets that various Taiwan state-run outlets control, so Xinhua or Global Times. All of these, you know, state-run media outlets that have an English-facing, obviously, intended for external Western consumption component they're really hammering home that this is a crisis and, more specifically, that this is a political crisis created by the United States to contain China.

Now, getting to the question of what do they have to gain, I think there's two ways to look at this, an internal component and externally. So, looking internally, I think we, first, have to address the question of do they believe internally that this is even a political crisis and my intuitive answer is probably yes. They probably believe internally that this is a political crisis.

Now, I'm sure someone in the audience is asking, you guys keep punting around the question is this a crisis, is this not a crisis – how are you guys defining crisis. I'm going to take the cheap way out in saying if you look at the way PRC, both military and state publications, talk about crisis, they don't have a standardized definition.

So I think it's one of those things where you know it if you see it, and my intuition is that, internally, they see a crisis politically. And to Chris' point, right, this isn't just about the Pelosi visit. This is a series of U.S. events around Taiwan – congressional visits, generally stronger political rhetoric, and then you have the Pelosi visit. Oh, there's lots of military activity in the background as well, so this is a – I think they view this as a culminating event of U.S. efforts to contain China through this Taiwan problem set. So there's this historical record where they're looking at the U.S. doing this in the past year or more. They also generally see the United States having a history or a tendency to manufacture crises for their own gain.

There's a really great article – I think it's in a 2020 edition of the PLA Academy of Military Science. There's an article looking at the U.S.'s historical use of crises and they talk about how often the United States uses crises to its own advantage, either taking advantage of it or manufacturing. So it's very much baked into their mindset that the U.S. would create such an incident to advance national security objectives. How does this all help them, though? I think it really gets to probably a psychological component and partially an internal or a procedural component as well. Psychologically, the Chinese Communist Party I think tends to operate better under this idea of struggle, right? Communist revolutions are perpetual struggles and if you look at the way that they talked about the CCP's response to COVID back in early 2020, they try to tie – they called it a crisis and they started using this jargon that is really associated with wartime or wartime struggle. They started calling these, like, wartime party or temporary party committees. And so I think there is this mental shift that occurs internally that galvanizes CCP efforts in a way that normal day-to-day operations, if you will, won't. And so calling it a crisis helps on that side of – internally within the CCP. I'm sure there's also a procedural component as well, where there are things done differently when it's a crisis, as opposed to routine day-to-day operations, but that's harder to gauge. So that's on the internal side.

On the external side, I think this really helps China build – or they think it helps them build – the initiative on the information front, by portraying the United States as this destabilizing element of world peace – very, very overused, in my view, but very standard line that the PRC uses, and this helps them point back to this long-standing issue they have pointed out with the U.S. The U.S. is this hegemonic power that's been destabilizing global security and stability and here's another example of them doing it. And we see a lot of – I shouldn't say a lot, we see some PRC embassies driving towards this narrative by hosting these local events where the ambassador, the PRC ambassador, will make a speech about how the U.S. is creating this manufactured crisis in order to contain China, and then they'll invite local academics or local sort of speakers that will reiterate that narrative about how the U.S. is in fact manufacturing this crisis and how the U.S. always does these types of things, and this is all the U.S.'s fault. So this is very much driving towards the information front of setting that initiative of the U.S. started it, but now I, as the PRC, need to regain the initiative; one great way is to start talking about how the U.S. is destabilizing the world order. So there's both utility internally and externally. Internally is to galvanize CCP efforts; externally you're setting conditions for gaining the initiative and establishing that dominant narrative.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Rod.

So Kathrin, what is the view from Taiwan? My understanding is that Taipei has been a little bit more reluctant to call this a crisis. But maybe – as you

describe, maybe there – like what Rod was suggesting too – maybe there are multiple channels in which they're communicating this and they're using different terms, depending on who they're trying to communicate to. So Kathrin, over to you.

Ms. Hille: Yes. Indeed, government officials here have been very reluctant to use the word crisis, especially when they're talking to their own people, and that's not surprising because you have a population that is, in general, used to this threat of military force from China hanging in the background, and as far as I understand, the administration of President Tsai Ing-wen is worried that too much talk about crisis and war will undermine any kind of fighting spirit the population has, there also remain certain doubts, especially in this government, over the parts of the population that either have more recent mainland roots, so basically the 20-something percent of the population who are first but mostly second generation immigrants from China, and who might, on balance, be a little bit more open to the idea of identifying as Chinese or even thinking of some kind of future as one country, although those numbers are very low now. And then there's also something very personal about calling this a crisis, which relates to the president herself because Tsai Ing-wen's approach to trying to secure Taiwan puts a very heavy emphasis on making Taiwan more significant or more important to the world. And that – clearly, so the goal is engaging more, getting more visitors, or visiting other democracies more often. So this is at the heart of her agenda and how she's trying to strengthen the backing Taiwan has among other democracies. So if they were to talk about a crisis that grew out of one of these visits, that would be her personal failure. I think that's one of the reasons, also.

But then, of course, you've got other politicians that, although the Kuomintang – the KMT, the main opposition party – has been a bit careful during the hot phase of the exercises not to appear too critical or not to appear putting the blame on the Tsai administration too much, but still people who identify as KMT tend to be more critical and tend to be more willing to call this a crisis. And then coupled with the argument: Why don't you let us help you communicate with the mainland and let some adults try to do the job? And remarkably, a KMT deputy chairman is in China right now and he actually left on a visit to China that was planned earlier, but when the military activity was still ongoing. So there's quite a marked split there.

Dr. Lin: And so, Kathrin, can I ask, even though Taipei's not calling this a crisis, is there a recognition or any consensus that this is going to change significantly how things move forward in Taiwan Strait? Or is this – or do they view this as a one-off?

Ms. Hille: No, I don't think so. But I think that the government here views this as a further stepping up in what they've already identified as a quite dangerous

increase in the use of military pressure means by China. So, to them, I mean, as to all I know, this didn't come as a surprise. I mean, very much echoing U.S. government language on this, I've been hearing from several senior government officials here that they think that China planned this ever since April when, basically, the first information about this planned visit came out. And they had also been picking up Chinese warnings of some kind of military reaction months ago, so before the resurrection of the visit and the planned date became public again. And therefore, they put this in the context, and they see this as basically one phase in a development that has been gradual escalation of tensions over the last several years, but particularly since 2020.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you.

So, Taylor, over to you. From your perspective, do you view this as a crisis? And maybe adding on to that, even if you don't define it as a crisis – and I don't really know how you're going to define it – is this still an inflection point of which afterwards we might see something very different from the Chinese moving forward?

Dr. Fravel: Sure. Thanks, Bonny.

I think I agree with Chris that it is the start, most likely, of a crisis that could go on for a very long period of time. Thinking about definitions, I mean, I think the colloquial definition of a crisis is kind of a period of high danger or high instability or high tensions. And I would note, right, there's only – like, two people don't have to recognize that they're in a crisis for there to be one; like, it's enough for one person to believe that they're in a crisis or one country. But I think that the colloquial sense we are.

Now, if I'm putting on my political science professor hat, right, that sort of an IR theory definition of a crisis is an event with a high probability of escalation to either the military use of force or to war, and in that sense, we may be in the political phase of a crisis. That is, as Chris noted, creating conditions for greater military escalation down the road but still very much in sort of the initial political phase, especially in light of the approach by the Biden administration to basically make the point or the talking point, right, it's a manufactured crisis, it's not a real crisis, the visit was totally normal and precedented, nothing to see here, let's move on and just get back sort of to the way things were.

And so I guess want to make two more points here because I do, generally, I think, see the situation the same way that Chris does.

So, first, I think this talking point, right, that it's a manufactured crisis and China's overreacting, might make a military – the military phase more likely if China believes its method is not being heard, right, or that the stakes are

even greater when the U.S. does take some kind of military action, whether it's a straits transit or an exercise near Taiwan, what have you, given the increased, you know, much more frequent presence of PLA forces in these waters.

And secondly, you know, I think as Chris mentioned, right – or the second point I would make here, so far we – I think Cristina mentioned it – we haven't seen much of a military response yet. There's sort of an announcement that there may be some transits. Who knows? But the longer that sort of this goes on, I think sort of the greater incentives China might feel to do something in response once it actually happens. And so there's sort of this irony or there's this tension here between the administration's view that China's overreacting and there is no crisis, that maybe they don't need to do much in response, versus I think the need to do something in response to the way that the PLA is creating a new normal.

So, to paraphrase Zhou Enlai and his comment on the French Revolution – in reference to the '68 revolution, not the earlier one – I think it is too soon to tell. And I hope I'm wrong, but I think we are in a period where China's come to the conclusion that it needs to re-communicate its resolve to the U.S. over one China. This has been very clear since Biden's second gaffe last October, when Wang Yi began talking about the fake one China policy, which then led to PRC talking points about the hollowing out, et cetera. But I think there – I think those do reflect genuine concerns, and China's going to try to find ways of addressing them.

And by the way, you know, we're leading into a sort of tense moment in various political calendars in the United States, in China, and even to some extent with upcoming local elections in Taiwan, where there may be greater incentives down the road not too long from now to sort of show toughness and resolve, and to resolve to demonstrations of others' toughness and resolve. And so that could take us to a point where we are in a much more conventional kind of IR theory definition of a crisis than maybe where we are on what they say August 22nd, right? Like, we're in the middle of, I think, something that is changing, and it can be hard to necessarily know where that will lead when you're in the middle of it.

But I do, to get actually to your question, I do believe we are in an inflection point. And I hope that it does not escalate significantly, but I think that the potential has increased or the probability for it to do so has increased. Thanks.

Dr. Lin:

Let me just follow up with two really quick questions. The first is you mentioned that you thought, if I'm portraying you correctly, that the current Biden administration portrayal of China's response as a manufactured crisis, your worry is that is not giving enough attention to the fact that China may

respond quite significantly moving forward. But then you also couple that with a point by saying that maybe we should be moving more or doing more now in the Taiwan Strait. I just wanted to unpack that a little bit because I thought I was getting two different messages from your end.

Dr. Fravel:

Well, no. I think that there's an interesting tension, right? So on the one hand China's undertaken a pretty significant kind of display of force, broken lots of norms that we've talked about or done things that are unprecedented. And we haven't really seen a corresponding U.S. military response yet. Although I think we will see something down the road. But it does sort of – it does raise – or, that's somewhat, I think, in tension with the fact that China will still want to get – I mean, if you believe China's signaling in trying to get U.S. attention, right?

When the U.S. does respond, which I think that they will do, then China might feel a slightly – a greater incentive, especially given the fact that, you know, China – the U.S. talking point is trying to basically portray China as a petulant child who shouldn't be doing this, there's no reason for it, and so on and so forth. Excuse the barking dog. And so I think there is a lot of cross-cutting dynamics going on at the moment. But I think that in itself should be a cause of some concern, that we're not necessarily in a stable situation, defined as a situation where we don't really expect further escalation down the road.

Dr. Lin:

Great. Thank you, Taylor.

Let me move to a third round of questions, where I want to go around to everyone to ask basically how do you move forward from here? What are you most concerned of in terms of what either China might do next, or if you want to if you're concerned that the U.S. or Taiwan may take other actions. And also, how should the United States and Taiwan prepare moving forward? Let me turn to Kathrin first, and then to Taylor.

Ms. Hille:

OK. Sorry. Yeah, what happens next? What I am most concerned about right now is – actually links to what Taylor just wrapped up with, that we haven't seen a U.S. response and I'm concerned about the potential reasons behind that. I'm concerned that there might be a lack of understanding or a lack of options as to how deterrence can work with China. So as Taylor pointed out, China has broken norms. China may be establishing a new normal.

And so what, do they end up with no reaction at all or not being deterred from taking the next step? That is certainly a concern or a fear that is present in Taipei right now. So what I see on the U.S. is concerns over escalation, and rightly so. But if that is the only concern, and if basically the question about, OK, how do you achieve or how do you make sure that China doesn't move further in that direction they've started going now, if that remains an open question then we've got a problem. So that is my foremost concern.

Then what other options are there? Of course, there's a lot of other concerns about Taiwan as well, because Taiwan is clearly not where it should be with regard to strengthening its own defenses. And even in the current situation, I don't see the kind of determination and pace and change in pace that would be necessary to maybe turn this thing around. So what I'm picking up at the moment is a further deepening of the disconnect between Taiwan and the U.S. over how they view this situation, maybe how they view the threat.

So the Taiwanese military and the ministry of national defense here have for a long time already said that they think they need the full range of capabilities. And they think that the main threat comes from PLA gray-zone operations. And they are reluctant to focus only and prioritize only the fight tonight kind of capabilities. But the U.S. government has, increasingly so, in the course of this year, tried to push Taiwan in that direction. So this recent episode has strengthened the belief in Taiwan now, I think even in the presidential office, which was previously being swayed towards the U.S. view of things now that that – indeed, something really needs to be done about gray-zone operations.

So there is – in this situation of heightened tension, escalation risks, and lack of options about deterrence, we have a disagreement between Taiwan and the U.S. That really worries me quite a bit. And about your third question, what might China do next, I don't know. But I think it would be natural for the PLA over the course of time, maybe not tomorrow but over weeks and months, to continue doing what they've been doing. So expand the range of where their aircraft and their naval vessels go, as increasing frequency and growing numbers.

And then let's not forget that there's a whole range of forces they haven't even started using yet. What about the coast guard? What about the maritime militia? I mean, the tools they've been using in other gray-zone operations in the South China Sea around the Senkakus. So if we see them starting to use those, I think we should be really worried.

Dr. Lin:

Thank you, Kathrin. I did want to follow up with one question, because you mentioned – and other panelists also mentioned – that at least from the public perspective it seems like the U.S. has not done enough. But I think also the flipside of it is we haven't seen too much action on the Taiwan side to really push back against the Chinese. Is there a discussion now in Taiwan, moving forward, of how much Taiwan should be more willing to escalate? Because in some respects, even though the escalation dynamics might be quite risky – if Taiwan were to escalate – they are the main target of China's military pressure.

Ms. Hille: Yes. Well, during the week of the exercises, people were making – sometimes making fun of the Taiwanese military and the ministry of national defense because they basically kept repeating the same phrases that: Don't worry, as long as we're here you're safe. But that opinion is clearly not shared by the public. I mean, if you look at polls that have been conducted repeatedly, I think only a minority believes that the Taiwan military is up to the task if China were to invade. So I think that there might be – or, at some point might have been some public pressure for the military to at least put on a better show of being more credible. But I think people know that there's not many options.

So I don't see either the government or the military itching to escalate. I mean, the only clear step we've seen in terms of a more muscular response from the Taiwanese side is really the naval component that they're now having some of their ships out there and trying to hinder the PLA navy in getting across the median line.

Dr. Lin: Thank you. So, Taylor, over to you. How do we basically look at this very difficult dynamic in which the United States is concerned, to some extent, about escalation? Taiwan seems to be also very concerned. China may be trying to normalize a new set of operations – or, not – rather, not new, but a more regular set of operations against Taiwan. How do we move forward from here? What do you recommend?

Dr. Fravel: Well, I think it's a very, you know, delicate situation. My assessment is, right, that we've seen a step change in sort of the PLA presence. And so unfortunately – and one in which they're not likely to move back from, which is why this phrase "new normal" is sometimes used.

Now, the level of intensity of that presence can vary over time. And I suspect we'll see variation in that. But I don't think, in other words, that the genie can be put back in the bottle, so to speak. The question is: Do these activities – you know, in a relatively peaceful or peacetime setting, do they disrupt commercial traffic? Do they disrupt air traffic? You know, is there an imperative to ensure that sort of access to the seas remains unimpeded, and so on and so forth? And then, I think, you know, getting to the more military, which could include transits by the United States or by other countries – I suspect only the U.S. would – at this point would probably transit the Taiwan Strait. I'd be surprised if an ally or a partner country did, but maybe Cristina has a different view on this. But I still think it's a pretty – in that sense, it's a pretty delicate situation.

I guess what I worry about a bit more is what happens when the next incident happens, that China feels like has crossed its red line yet again, right? The talking point is nothing has changed in U.S. policy, but I suspect there will be continued changes in the implementation of the policy and then

there's just the wildcard of what the president might say at the next public town hall, and if there is one scheduled in the next few months, and then what China – sort of how China interprets that in light of sort of the new attention it has drawn to its concerns. And then, what does the United States do if China sort of repeats something like what it did in August in response to an event like that? I mean, it's very hard to sort of think of these hypothetical events, but I believe another shoe will drop one way or the other because we are in a political crisis, even if we're not yet in a high-end military phase of one. And I think something is likely to happen, and then there's the question of if you – that the U.S. might feel greater pressure to respond to that, either for political reasons or because of the fact that they were unable, in essence, to kind of deter China from doing it again by calling it a manufactured crisis before and so on and so forth.

And so I guess I'm just – I'm repeating myself, based on the previous question, which I just think we are in a pretty, you know, unstable and tense moment and it's hard to look out and see exactly what will happen, but it is unstable.

Now, I think, on the one hand, what the U.S. could do, and other experts have mentioned this, right, the – a very senior member of the administration could give a speech or more detailed remarks on what the U.S. One China policy is and is not, what it does include, what it doesn't include, what it means. I mean, at the moment we've got the three sentences that have, you know, appeared in Blinken's speech and foreword, which I think are all positive. But clearly, since this seems to be the element of – I think one element that's driving concern – more clarity on that might be helpful; it might both reassure China, on the one hand, and also underscore, on the other hand, the steps that the United States will undertake to help support and defend Taiwan, if it comes to that, and the One China policy historically has served that role, both reassuring China to some degree and also aiding Taiwan to another degree. And so there's an important element of communication that needs to happen. Maybe it's happening in private channels. I don't know. There does not seem to be much in public channels.

And in part, again, I worry a little bit about this talking point of being a manufactured crisis and an overreaction because that means there's nothing to talk about, right? And I do think there's probably something to talk about. And so that's very important. And then more generally, I think this underscores in a much broader sense the importance of Taiwan doing more to defend itself, right? I mean, Taiwan is a country facing an existential threat. Yeah, it doesn't behave in terms of its defense policy like many other countries who face existential threats – Finland; South Korea, to some extent; Israel, right? And so I think Taiwan has to think really hard about what a more sort of committed set of policies for its own defense, separate from what the United States might do – and I think the United States will

probably help a lot, but Taiwan has to – and so, you know, and part hearing Kathrin talk about the Taiwan reactions – like, on the one hand, I guess it's positive that there wasn't a lot more domestic political instability. But on the other hand, I do think, right, there is a real danger, and I do wonder and worry if Taiwan is really going to be in a position to defend itself robustly when it will need to do so.

And so I'll stop there. Thanks.

Dr. Lin: Thank you, Taylor.

Chris, let me bring you in here, and maybe just to follow onto a point that Taylor raised. So Taylor mentioned that the shoe – another shoe will likely drop in the future in terms of what China perceives as U.S. or Taiwan provocations. So, as we move forward, do you think China will respond more strongly moving forward because of what it has demonstrated in the last month? And if it does – so we're likely not going to see Speaker Pelosi go back to Taiwan anytime soon, but if it was something close to that, would China respond much more forcefully than what we saw in August? What should we expect moving forward?

Dr. Twomey: Yeah. I mean the way I think about that is there's something of a ratchet effect here. Taylor talked about a step function, but different ways of kind of coming at the same idea. The next time there's a provocation that China views as needing some response, the baseline, to some extent, is going to be what they did over the last couple of weeks. And if you need to signal even more resolution to deter the next provocation, then you're going to have to do more. And so I think that's pretty worrisome – you know, more missiles over Taiwan; more missiles coming closer to Taiwan.

You know, I think – and another way to think about this potential for escalation, you know, is the creation of a new status quo with ships and aircraft routinely violating the midline. So when there's another provocation, you know, do you get closer? Do you violate territorial waters of the main island of Formosa, right? So I think to some extent what you're going to see is a competition in kind of displays of resolve by the two sides.

And as was talked about earlier, the U.S. is going to need to show some response to this over time, right? And whether those are just transits or other new planned exercises that are flagging that sort of commitment, you know, is hard to predict. But I just feel very confident that the Navy is going to want to show that it is not being deterred, and that's to Taylor's point of then China's going to need to respond because they're trying to send the signal that this is not acceptable, right?

And you're right, it's not the next Pelosi visit. But if you're China looking out at the U.S. One China policy, over the last several years, you've seen public discussion of U.S. military forces on the ground in Taiwan, three statements from Biden eroding strategic ambiguity, changing language on the State Department website with regard to Taiwan's status, an assistant secretary of defense talking about Taiwan as a strategic asset. Any one of those, if it reoccurs in the future, might be grounds for China to want to send another signal. And again, there's this challenge of the baseline of today being something that you need to escalate from. And so, that's what I worry about.

And when we talk about, I had two other quick points before I hand over the mic. You know, when we talk about what Taiwan can do, as things continue to percolate or if they re-escalate, I think there's a lot of different steps that Taiwan can take – radar illuminations; buzzing Chinese ships with aircraft or helicopters – none of which should lead to outright war, one hopes, but all of which further militarize and reify the security element in the competition that over time I think we'll just find as kind of worrisome.

And then the last point I would note, you know, the crisis that we've had so far was one that China saw coming for a long time, right, as a couple of co-panelists here have noted. It's been pretty clear since April that some Pelosi-like visit was going to occur, and so China I think created a pretty impressive, for them, whole-of-government set of responses, from the release of the new white paper, diplomatic demarches, economic sanctions, all done pretty quickly in response.

But now we're in a more fluid phase of the crisis, right? And so the precise nature of the U.S. response, of a Japanese response, I actually will expect additional transits not just from the United States, maybe not immediately but over time from allies and partners. And China's going to have to respond to those a bit more on the fly than they've been able to thus far. And all of those, to me, kind of create a worrisome dynamic to be aware of.

Thanks.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you, Chris.

Cristina, do you want to weigh in here on either what China might do next or how U.S., Taiwan, or even our allies and partners might respond or could act in the near future?

Ms. Garafola: Sure. I wanted to highlight maybe two concerns.

So one is, you know, there are some parallels to the third Taiwan Strait crisis we didn't get to delve into too much. But one I think that's interesting is at that time, as the PLA began its initial reactions in the summer of 1995,

Washington actually had a bit of leverage over Beijing that I don't think we see in this current situation, and that's that China was seeking to hold a presidential-level summit between Jiang Zemin and President Clinton. So even as some of these initial exercises and the initial ballistic missile test launches were happening, both sides actually were entering into negotiations. And you know, potentially Washington felt this was a point of leverage to not alter its stance because China really wanted to have this high-level engagement/discussion.

If anything, we've seen the reverse at this point. You know, China's been cutting off communication and cooperation in various areas –things like climate change initiatives – and maybe it's trying to put more leverage onto the U.S.: Washington's behaving in a way that we fundamentally disapprove of and we're seeking to convey that through multiple channels.

And I think, you know, building on Taylor's and other points as well, it seems like Beijing felt that Washington did not hear its message going into the latter half of 1995. So in early 1996, as we're approaching the March 1996 elections – this is the first time that a president is going to be democratically elected in Taiwan – then China began larger-scale exercises. So some of those were greater than what we've seen to date – over 40 naval vessels, over 250 aircraft at one time, and over 100,000 troops mobilized. So the question to me sort of is, you know, does China feel the need to – to everyone else's points –convey a larger scale of activities even closer to China's shores? You know, in 1996 that was 20 to 30 miles off the coast, but that was still much closer than in 1995. So do they again up the ante?

And then my sort of second level of concerns, or second area, is: Does the PLA grow more confident from these sort of surges or a possible new normal? You know, does it feel increasingly capable of undertaking a high-end campaign? You know, to others' points, planning for maybe four months for this specific series of activities in a week or so in August is really different than wartime capabilities. So do we start to see this kind of cycle, that they feel they're seizing the information and other initiative, they demonstrate the strength, and then they may feel more victorious, and these limited objectives are successful? How does that differ/compare to the really expansive requirements for a joint campaign to seize Taiwan? And do they start to feel potentially confident or overconfident?

So I think I'll stop there.

Dr. Lin:

Thank you, Cristina. I think you raise a really excellent question, but I do want to leave maybe a couple of minutes for other folks to answer in addition to Rod, who I'll posit this question to. But how do we, basically, get out of here, right? How do we get out of this crisis? Because it seems like what all five of you are highlighting so far is we are in more or less an

escalation spiral, but not one in which things will happen immediately one after another, but maybe one that's much more prolonged over an extended period of time. And I think, Cristina, what you were highlighting is you don't necessarily see how we would actually get out of it. But maybe, Taylor, what you suggested earlier is the U.S. has to clarify our One China policy, but I'm not sure that would necessarily get us out of this spiral.

But let me turn this difficult question to you, Rod, and whatever else you wanted to add before opening it up back to other folks on the panel.

Mr. Lee:

Yeah. So I don't want to comment too much about U.S. policy, but I think China right now is kind of leaving it to the United States to see if the U.S. wants to actually go on that spiral. I don't think we really touched on it yet, but at the end of the day, the military response to Pelosi's visit was still constrained. As Taylor pointed out, this was mostly managed by eastern theater command. Chris highlighted that, yes, there were some naval assets that came from out-theater, but most of them were still eastern theater. So the number of flights has decreased and the number of naval vessels around Taiwan has decreased. They stopped the live fire.

So I think – and actually, if you look at the way the PLA is publicly putting out what it's doing right now, this is the PRC resuming back to normal. In fact, business appeared to be normal in most of the PLA outside of eastern theater during or in the week immediately after Pelosi's visit. So I think in this case, it's really leaving it to the United States about whether the U.S. feels like it needs to respond militarily or not. And I don't know the answer to that. And so perhaps I am less convinced than the rest of my fellow panelists that we are in an inevitable spiral. I think it's more up to the United States on whether it wants to respond or not.

My concerns probably get more towards longer term what happens after this series of connected – whether it's weeks or this extends for months – this Taiwan Strait crisis, if you will. What happens next time? And my concern on that front is if the PLA decides that it wants to maintain a larger naval presence, if the PLA decides that it wants to engage in more midnight crossings, overfly the offshore islands with unmanned or manned aircraft, more frequently, then this all essentially sets the bar higher in terms of military deterrence activities.

And assuming they – the PLA is not able to carve out more space, if you will, in terms of escalatory options – and I'm not saying that that won't happen, because historically the PLA has been able to carve out more options on the escalation ladder, if you will, on the military deterrence side. But if it does not do that, or if the rate at which it unlocks options, if you will, is slower than the rate at which it burns escalation options, then there are fewer and

fewer military options that the CCP has at its disposal that don't look even more escalatory.

If you look at textbook options for military deterrence activities, really you're looking at large-scale at this point, or some really provocative activities, like shifting certain parts of the country into wartime – or, partially wartime posture, or no-kidding demonstrated strikes against targets in Taiwan, or possibly even targets in the United States. And I think that's sort of what we're driving towards if China doesn't feel like it has additional options.

And what I think the focus on the U.S. and Taiwan side should be is: What happens – and I think we sort of touched on this – is what happens when the PLA embarks next time around on even more provocative activities? What happens when there's a manned overflight? What happens if China begins to orient some of these military deterrence activities towards the United States? Because all of these are very Taiwan-focused. What happens when we start seeing missile impacts, closure areas near Alaska? Or if we see bomber flights near Alaska, or a naval presence near Alaska, Hawaii, or Guam?

These are all sort of entering the bin of available options for the CCP. And I don't know how much we're thinking about how we do or don't respond to those types of activities, alongside some more provocative activities vis-à-vis Taiwan. Let's say more escalatory network attacks that aren't just taking down certain websites, but what is targeting civilian infrastructure or power grids. So thinking about what happens if China has fewer military options and begins exercising those options in the coming decades – what is the response there?

The last thing I kind of want to highlight is we really need to watch long-term how the PRC, how the PLA diagnoses this current crisis. I don't think we'll see a real diagnosis internally until at least months, if not years, down the line. But I think that determines whether they think what they did now, or in the past couple weeks, was useful. Because I think they look back to '95-'96 and, from my reading of the literature, it looks like they thought that went pretty well for them. And that leads them towards saying, well, if that went well, maybe I should do that again.

If their diagnosis of everything went well this time around in August of 2022, we feel like we deterred the United States, we feel like we deterred Taiwan, then maybe that leads them further down towards the escalatory path of saying, well, I just need to ratchet up what I've been doing, because clearly it works. So that diagnosis is what I'm interested in. And seeing how they internally perceive if what they did worked or not. So I'll wrap it up there.

Dr. Lin: One quick question, Rod. From your perspective, we had been talking also about how Taiwan might think about a firmer response against China moving forward. do you think the PLA would respond? Would they be as restrained against Taiwan? Or would a firmer Taiwan response lead to a significant escalation on China's end that would be less manageable?

Mr. Lee: You know, that's a good question. I suspect- I think we're in somewhat unexplored territory right now, because historically even during third Taiwan Strait crisis, Taiwan - the delta between military capabilities on the strait between the mainland and Taiwan was not as yawning of a chasm as it is now. So an aggressive Taiwan response might, in some ways, because the PRC has the luxury of sort of restraining itself - because at the end of the day it can still demonstrate its capabilities in some other way. So I think there are mechanisms that would allow for greater PRC restraint.

I think another possible angle that the PRC might attempt to go for is a lot of the jargon that we're seeing this time around is that this is not necessarily Taiwan's fault. If you look at the way they coded the first, second and third Taiwan Strait crises - although they largely attribute them to the U.S. as a major player and might have been somewhat responsible - they still bin them as third-party actors who then intervened and decided to take advantage of this situation.

If, though, they begin to code this particular Taiwan Strait crisis as the U.S. instigating it, I think it then becomes very easy for the response to Taiwan - anything Taiwan does to be much more restrained. Because the PRC and the PLA can kind of reach out or publicly voice that, at the end of the day their concern is not Taiwan - or, is not the Taiwan people. Their big issue really is the U.S. using Taiwan as one of many different leverage points against containing China. And that's why - getting to my previous point - that's why I'm a little bit concerned about military deterrence activities oriented towards the U.S. Because that is much more what the narrative is shifting towards nowadays, not just about issues on Taiwan proper. I know that's not a super-satisfying answer, but.

Dr. Lin: No, that's great. Thank you.

We have just a couple minutes. I want to leave time for any folks who wanted to jump in, to either weigh in on one any of the points that were made recently, or if you have any additional points that you wanted to bring into the conversation.

Dr. Twomey: Let me just make one comment, kind of building on Rod's. I thought great list of possible escalatory steps that the Chinese might take, right? I think there is a lot of room for - whether you call them gray zone or military steps that are well below the threshold of provoking war but, nevertheless, are going to

be highly escalatory and are going to demand some U.S. response to show that we aren't being deterred by an announced closure zone near Guam, for instance, or Chinese missile test – you know, even if it's 200 miles off.

So I think those sorts of provocations – there's just a lot of different options. And it's that sort of escalatory spiral that still stops well short of war but nevertheless intensifies the military aspects of competition that I find more worrisome. I'll just stop there. Thanks just for the opportunity.

Dr. Lin: Great. Thank you very much, Chris. Any final thoughts on your end, Cristina? If not, I think we'll wrap up.

OK, well, thank you, everyone, for joining us. This was a fascinating one and a half hours. And I really wanted to thank our five excellent panelists, joining from different time zones, including from Taipei. I believe this should be available on YouTube shortly afterwards, so please tune in for this if you missed any section. And reach out to us if you have any questions. Thank you, again.