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The Strategy of Denial

The Binding Strategy

WHAT IF THE UNITED STATES AND its allies and partners cannot mount an effective denial defense or cannot do so within their desired bounds? As discussed, denial defense within tolerable boundaries is clearly the preferred course for the United States and its allies and partners. Its success relies, however, on defeating a Chinese attempt at a *fait accompli* and doing so within boundaries the United States and its allies and partners are prepared to countenance. What if this is not feasible?

Why a Denial Defense Might Fail

A denial defense might fail for two primary reasons, each having unique implications. First, the United States and its allies and partners might have the strength to mount an effective denial defense but be unable to implement it without substantially escalating the war in ways that put the burden of escalation on themselves rather than on China. This problem could arise because a relatively narrow, focused denial defense might not be sufficient. Chinese forces might be too strong, broadly dispersed, or arrayed or equipped in ways that would cause such a constrained defense to fail. In such conditions, the United States and possibly critical allies and partners might need to attack many more Chinese targets, a wider set of them, across a much wider expanse, or using more ferocious levels of violence in order to successfully defend Taiwan or another target. In such circumstances, a denial defense would fail if the United States or critical allies or partners were not prepared to initiate such daunting

escalation. In essence, there might be a mismatch between the steps needed for effective denial and the resolve available. Critically, though, the United States and its allies and partners can recognize this deficit in advance and seek to correct for it so as to make the broader denial defense workable.

Second, it might simply be unworkable to conduct a denial defense to deny the *fait accompli*. It might simply become impossible to deny an extraordinarily powerful China that will enjoy the advantages of proximity to Taiwan the ability to seize and hold the island. Of note, it may be unworkable to defeat the *fait accompli* because the costs required to do so are prohibitive. That is, there might come a point at which a local defense could become so difficult and costly that it jeopardizes the anti-hegemonic coalition's ability to win a systemic regional war against China. This would happen if Beijing could, within the bounds of a localized war, inflict damage on the United States and its allies and partners at a significantly higher rate than vice versa; at some point, continuing to defend Taiwan could diminish the coalition's overall war-making capability enough to compromise its advantage in that larger war. Since victory in a systemic regional war is the ultimate determinant of whether an aspiring hegemon like China can establish its predominance, the coalition cannot allow this. Such a situation would be tantamount to a denial defense not being workable.

The difference between the first and second variants of infeasibility might be illuminated by historical analogies. The first is akin to the questions that NATO planners faced toward the end of the Cold War in Europe, when the United States and its allies hoped to develop and field a theater defense capable of defending Western Europe from a Soviet Bloc invasion. Had NATO achieved such a standard, the question then would have been whether the Allies would have, in the event of war to blunt a Communist assault into Western Europe, possessed the resolve needed to employ that power fully and broadly enough against the Soviet Bloc, given the enormous risks of escalation. The second variant resembles more the situation of the United States in the Western Pacific in the years before the Second World War. American military leaders in that period knew, given the constraints under which the US military was operating, that the United States simply would not be able to deny an effective Japanese assault on the Philippines. It was not a matter of whether the Americans had the resolve to fight; effective defense was simply impossible, given the assets and other resources available to the US military at the time.¹

The failure of a focused denial defense might, moreover, extend beyond Taiwan. Although Taiwan is the most vulnerable plausible coalition member to Chinese military strength, China might simply grow powerful enough to punch through any attempt by the United States and others to defend the Philippines, South Korea, and even Japan.

This is not just doomsday prophesying. Taiwan and other potential coalition states *can* be effectively defended, but doing so demands strict focus on developing and preparing an effective defense posture. Developing such a posture is feasible but difficult; it requires that the United States, Taiwan, and potentially other states such as Japan and Australia promptly and resolutely adapt their strategies and forces to meet the requirements of the denial strategy.² But it is possible that some or all will fail to prepare sufficiently. This could result from a failure to appreciate the severity of the threat China poses, confusion about how to respond to it, fear of Beijing's wrath, distraction, or simple inertia.

Adapting to the Failure of a Denial Defense

The need for a serious, credible defense strategy would be all the more urgent if a focused denial defense was unworkable, since the absence of a fallback strategy would leave Beijing a clear path to regional hegemony. How, then, would the United States and the anti-hegemonic coalition adapt? This is a crucial issue not merely in theory but for defense planning today. The United States and other members of the coalition, even though they should seek to make a focused denial defense work, must also have a sense of what they would do if this approach proves inadequate.

At one level, such planning is simple prudence; preparing a fallback is always a good idea, especially in a domain like the development of military forces and posture, in which decisions can take decades to play out. The more specific reason, though, is that the United States, its allies, and other coalition members need to understand how preparations for a denial defense might contribute to or detract from a fallback defense and vice versa. This is important because they should favor actions that strengthen denial defense while at least not detracting from their ability to develop whatever fallback defense they would pursue if a focused denial defense no longer proved tenable. Conversely, they should be hesitant to take steps that would strengthen a focused denial defense but might compromise their ability to mount a fallback defense.

What, then, would a fallback to a focused denial defense look like? The optimal response to each contingency—denial being workable but requiring significant escalation, and denial being simply unworkable—is different.

In the case of the first contingency, the problem facing the United States and other defenders would be the need to escalate the war in order to deny China's ability to seize and hold allied territory. The recourse is to do precisely this—the United States and its allies and partners would need to shoulder that burden of escalation. The question is what would render them willing to do so.

The second contingency would require a more fundamental reassessment of US and coalition strategy. The attempt to deny China's ability to seize a US ally within the coalition would have failed, whether outright or because continuing to try to do so would lead to the compromise of the coalition's edge in a systemic regional war. In these circumstances, the United States and the coalition would need to fall back from defending the imperiled ally to recapturing their lost territory, an option that not only could work but would also satisfy the core political logic of the anti-hegemonic coalition and the critical role US alliances play within it.

A Recapture Approach

To repeat, the United States needs to ensure the *effective defense* of a targeted ally. US alliances—the states to which Washington has made security commitments—form the steel skeleton of the anti-hegemonic coalition; by placing its differentiated credibility on the line to these allies, Washington reassures them sufficiently that they are willing to participate in the coalition. So strengthened, the coalition is powerful enough to outweigh China. Upholding this commitment means ensuring the conditions the ally needs to continue contributing to the alliance. At the end of the day, this means that the ally's key territory must be free—or freed—from subordination to Beijing.

Denying Beijing a *fait accompli* is, once again, preferable. But it is not strictly necessary to meet this criterion. The key point is to ensure that, at the end of the war, the ally is free of the attacker's domination. If the United States and other states cannot block China from taking their allies in the first place, then they can later liberate the conquered allies—including at the peace table. To do this, the United States and its confederates can resort to a strategy that expels China from the targeted ally's territory.

Such a recapture approach differs from the second denial option, in which the defenders allow the attacker to seize part of the target state's territory before counterattacking without ever letting the invaders consolidate their hold on the seized territory. Recapture assumes that the invader has been able to consolidate its gains and establish its defenses. Because of this, it would almost invariably require drawing on a much larger fraction of the United States' strength as well as that of its allies and partners. If these states had already committed the full weight of their militaries to trying to defeat China's invasion of an ally and had been defeated, then their ability to liberate that ally would likely be negligible.

In reality, however, that is unlikely. In raw terms, the United States and its plausible allies and partners are collectively considerably more powerful than China and almost certainly will remain so for the foreseeable future. Yet for the reasons described earlier, including most fundamentally the asymmetries of interests between Beijing and the states considering coming to the aid of China's victim, it is unlikely that any of the states involved, besides the victim itself, would contribute the full measure of its strength to stopping an initial invasion attempt. Thus, even if China defeated the United States and its allies and partners in its bid to conquer a US ally, these states would still be able to draw on their untapped reservoirs of strength to try to liberate the victim state. The question is whether they would be *willing* to do so.³

History suggests that they might be willing to do so, since it offers abundant examples of successful recapture campaigns. The Crusaders seized Jerusalem and parts of the Holy Land, but over succeeding generations, these lands were eventually recaptured by Islamic powers. Conversely, the Spanish and Portuguese progressively recaptured the Iberian Peninsula from Islamic rule. In the Second World War, the Allies freed occupied Europe, and the United States and its Pacific allies liberated many of Japan's occupied territories in Asia. And allies or territory can also be regained at the peace table. The Allies never forcibly retook Malaya or the Dutch East Indies; Tokyo relinquished them at the end of the Pacific War.

In a recapture approach, the United States and any potentially participating confederates would face a choice analogous to Beijing's in its initial conquest: they could employ a punishment strategy to seek to make China give up the captured ally, or they could rely primarily on brute force to seize it back. A sufficient recapture approach does not necessarily require freeing every piece of

seized territory; rather, it means liberating the captured state's key territory to ensure that the ally can be restored as an independent state contributing to the coalition. In the context of Taiwan, this would very likely require freeing the main island—but not, for instance, the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. In the case of the Philippines, meanwhile, it would mean freeing the main islands such as Luzon, but not necessarily Scarborough Shoal or other features that Manila claims in opposition to Beijing in the South China Sea.

*The Demerits of Relying on Horizontal or
Vertical Escalation for Recapture*

Although the punishment and conquest approaches would differ in critical respects, both would almost certainly require the United States and its confederates to expand the war.

A punishment approach would mean a larger and more violent war because the engaged allies and partners would have to impose sufficient costs on China to induce it to give up the subordinated state. Given that Beijing would have manifold reasons to resist disgorging such a prized gain, and with so much riding on the resolution of the conflict, these costs would have to be very high even to prompt Beijing to consider giving up the held state.

Such a punishment approach would be very unlikely to work, however, for the same reasons that it would very likely not work to deny China's acquisition of the target in the first place. As in that instance, horizontal escalation alone would be unlikely to be effective because China is unlikely to possess anything beyond its borders that the coalition could threaten that is as important to it as prevailing in a war critical to its establishment of hegemony in Asia. Beijing would, for instance, almost certainly trade its bases in the South China Sea—let alone Indian Ocean or other outposts—for this goal, both on its own terms but also confident that it could rectify the threats to its more distant interests later if it could subordinate, for instance, Taiwan or the Philippines and thereby weaken the anti-hegemonic coalition.

Alternatively, the United States and its allies and partners could in theory seize other parts of Chinese territory and seek to trade them for the targeted ally. If for instance Taiwan were difficult to seize back, however, mainland territory would almost certainly be even harder, especially since China has no distant separated territories, as Hawaii is for the United States or Polynesia is for France. Moreover, such seizure could well provoke Chinese nuclear employ-

ment in defense of its territory, which in turn might seem legitimate both to its own people and to important third parties. Horizontal escalation in these circumstances is therefore likely to result in a Chinese victory.

Conversely, relying on vertical escalation alone to reverse defeat would generate these downsides perhaps even more acutely. Crossing the nuclear threshold would turn a recapture attempt of a Chinese-occupied ally into a nuclear brinkmanship contest while catalyzing China's flashing vengeance, hardening its people's resolve, and leading either to Chinese victory or to mutual devastation.

The United States and its allies and partners could also pursue a punishment strategy that mixed horizontal and vertical escalation. They could try, for instance, to expand the cost imposition campaign to include much or all of mainland China while also increasing the intensity of the attacks. Even were this possible—and there is abundant reason to doubt that they could mount such a campaign against a China strong enough to seize and hold Taiwan or the Philippines—this approach would rest on the highly dubious proposition that China would relent and disgorge its gains before the United States gave up. It would thus voluntarily turn the conflict into a contest of societal pain tolerance without a clear end point, hardly an attractive or promising recourse given the limits on Americans' interests in Asia discussed earlier.

Consequently, in the event of the failure of a denial defense, the United States and other involved states would very likely need to seize back the conquered territory directly. This would require an invasion of the seized state, and because of the location of US allies in Asia, this would almost certainly involve an amphibious assault. As previously laid out, a successful amphibious invasion in these circumstances requires air and maritime dominance or something approaching it. Obtaining this dominance—if feasible at all—would very likely require a much larger, riskier, and costlier war effort than the more localized and constrained war envisioned for a focused denial defense.

Recapturing Taiwan

Let us take the case of Taiwan. If Taiwan had been lost to China and Beijing had been able to consolidate its defenses over the island, recapture would almost certainly be a highly costly, risky, and arduous venture for the United States and any engaged allies and partners. Instead of benefiting from the advantages of defending their position on the island, the United States and any engaged confederates would be the inherently exposed attackers facing a prepared defender.

To enable an invasion to recapture Taiwan, the United States and its engaged allies and partners would probably first have to weaken the island's defenses. This would likely mean isolating Taiwan and the PLA forces on it from mainland China, which, in turn, would likely mean denying China the use of the maritime area and airspace in and around the Taiwan Strait. Because of the PLA's size and sophistication, this would almost certainly require a very large number of attacks against assets and facilities across a much greater expanse of territory. The United States and other engaged states would almost surely need to heavily degrade the PLA Navy and Air Force, both to isolate Chinese forces on Taiwan and ultimately to protect any invasion force from PLA interdiction.

If these efforts to sunder—or at least substantially degrade—the links between the mainland and PLA elements on Taiwan were successful, China's forces on Taiwan would still likely be powerful, not least because China would probably anticipate such a response. Over time, however, lacking reinforcements, relief, or critical military supplies that likely could not be replaced from the island such as replacement munitions, spare parts, and oil and gas, PLA forces on Taiwan would grow weaker and more vulnerable.

Assuming that China did not surrender the island—a very reasonable assumption given the tremendous stakes—this situation could last some time, largely because the military requirements for a counterassault would be very high. Given that Taiwan is well within range of forces on the Chinese mainland, obtaining the necessary aerial and maritime dominance would require an enormous effort against a military power that had exhibited the strength and skill to take the island in the first place.⁴ Moreover, the range of modern munitions and platforms means that achieving this dominance would implicate a territorial expanse well beyond Taiwan. US and allied and partner forces would have to destroy or degrade not only the transport shipping and aircraft resupplying PLA forces on Taiwan but also China's fighter, attack, and bomber aircraft, warships, and land-based strike systems that could threaten US and other friendly forces off Taiwan and ultimately on it.⁵ This would almost certainly constitute a much more far-reaching and violent campaign than either of the denial options would require, and it would impose a heavy burden of escalation on the United States and its allies and partners.

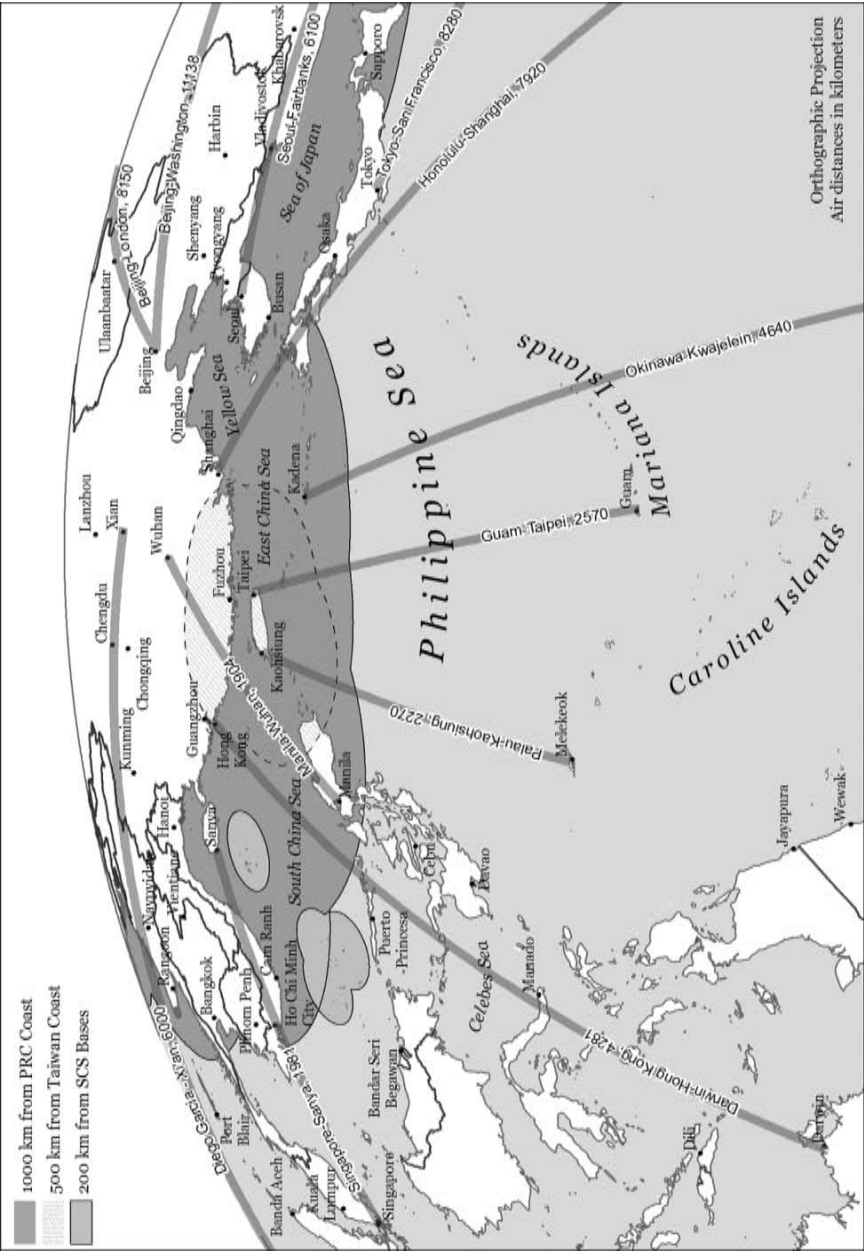
To make such an effort feasible, the United States and any other engaged states would need to redirect their economies to develop and sustain the forces needed for such a conflict, which would likely involve high rates of attrition.

This, too, would almost certainly take a long time. The largest Western Allied counteroffensives in the Second World War did not take place until 1944, almost three years after the United States entered the conflict—and even longer after the United States, then the world's largest industrial power, began to ramp up military production as the Arsenal of Democracy.⁶ And modern military weaponry can take considerably longer to field than that of the Second World War. Producing individual missiles under current circumstances can take years; production could be accelerated, but it is not clear by how much, especially since the demand would vastly outstrip current production capacity.⁷ Moreover, unlike in the Second World War, the United States would not enjoy a decisive advantage in industrial capacity; it is no longer unquestionably the world's premier industrial state—indeed, that moniker may go to China.⁸

If the United States and other engaged allies and partners were able, even despite these difficulties, to secure such dominance over and around Taiwan, they could launch an amphibious and air assault to retake the island from the weakened PLA forces still on the island. Given how the isolated and weakened Japanese forces during the Second World War were able to defend Iwo Jima and Okinawa, however, it could well be an extraordinarily ugly fight.

Alternatively, the United States and the other engaged allies and partners could take a less conventional approach. Once they had established some substantial degree of air and maritime superiority, rather than launching a massive invasion reminiscent of Normandy or Okinawa, they could seek to insert smaller, nimbler force packages onto Taiwan. For instance, special forces could be used to degrade Chinese forces on the island and build up internal resistance. These efforts could be designed to undermine the efficacy of PLA forces on Taiwan, preparing the way for a decisive conventional assault. These special forces could be delivered, albeit at some level of attrition, without the full degree of dominance a full-scale regular assault would require.⁹ These insertions of forces could take place in contested zones where neither side has dominance, as US Marines were put ashore on Guadalcanal in 1942.¹⁰

This approach would stand essentially no chance of success if the PLA were reasonably supplied and reinforced on the island and in decent air and maritime communications with the mainland. But if the Chinese forces on Taiwan were effectively cut off, and if reasonably significant Taiwan resistance forces were operating on the island, this approach might work, especially if it culminated in a larger assault or series of assaults once conditions were favorable.



Approaches to Taiwan. Original map by Andrew Rhodes.

The Recapture Approach beyond Taiwan

Although Taiwan would present the most stressing case for a US recapture attempt, similar factors would apply to any effort to recapture another of Washington's Asian allies, especially if Taiwan had previously been subordinated. For instance, while the Philippines is farther from mainland China, and the shadow of China's military power currently falls more faintly on it, the subordination of Taiwan would allow China to focus its force development and posture on the Philippines, even as it faced a weakened anti-hegemonic coalition and a less credible Washington.

A PLA that could successfully invade and occupy the Philippines might be almost as difficult to eject from the archipelago as it would be to expel the PLA from Taiwan. This is for all the reasons explored earlier but also because, if China were able to subordinate the Philippines, the United States would lose its major potential base of operations in Southeast Asia. US and allied and partner forces might still be able to operate from Japan, Australia, and Pacific Islands bases, but these are far from the Philippines, and that distance would impose a significant tax on their military efficacy.

Washington might seek to replace its lost operating locations in the Philippines by looking to other Southeast Asian states, such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand. This strategy would face at least two problems, though. First, a China dominant over Taiwan, the Philippines, and the South China Sea could seriously hinder any such effort or even block it entirely, making it very difficult for the United States to access Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia. Second, Beijing could seek to persuade those states that the prudent course was to align with it or at least neutralize them, given its more imposing new position and the United States' failure to defend the Philippines and Taiwan. In such circumstances, those states might be considerably less willing to work with the United States, let alone ally with it. As a consequence of these diplomatic as well as operational challenges, an attempt by the United States and others to retake the Philippines would almost certainly require a much more expansive, violent, costly, and risky war compared to denying a successful Chinese invasion of the archipelago in the first place.

In summary, then, in either of the contingencies described earlier—either that the US and allied and partner effort to conduct a denial defense would fail without initiating burdensome escalation or that a denial defense would fail or had failed and thus that a recapture approach had become necessary—the

United States and its allies and partners would need to expand and intensify the war if they hoped to prevail, uphold the alliance in question and thus America's (and possibly others') differentiated credibility, and therefore maintain the cohesion of the anti-hegemonic coalition. They would have to assume a heavy burden of escalation in doing so.

China's burden for counterescalating, meanwhile, would be lightened. Although it would have immense incentives to avoid a general nuclear war even in the midst of a larger and more violent conflict, the broader and harsher campaign that the United States and its engaged allies and partners would have to wage would require attacking more Chinese targets and doing more damage to China and its interests. However the United States and its confederates might try to signal otherwise, this might be hard to distinguish from a military campaign with unlimited ends.¹¹ Even more, China would have a strong interest in not admitting that it did so distinguish. Rather, it would very likely seek to present such a campaign as an unreasonable, dangerous, and unjustified escalation and accordingly might well exploit this rationale to attempt to counterescalate itself—a move that might appear defensible, thereby increasing China's coercive leverage over its adversaries. Without some fundamental change in circumstance, this might well give China a commanding advantage over the United States and its engaged allies and partners in the critical combination of power and resolve.

This development would raise in the most pointed fashion the central quandary facing the United States in seeking to deny China hegemony over Asia: Americans' interests in a war in Asia are significant but not necessarily of the highest order. Yet mounting either a more expansive denial defense campaign or a recapture attempt would essentially demand that the United States risk great loss, certainly of large numbers of military personnel, platforms, and resources, but ultimately even devastation to the homeland, if the war escalated to the level of serious attacks on the two sides' home territories—all to defend or liberate a distant ally on behalf of an anti-hegemonic coalition.

On what basis would Americans—and others—see this as worth doing?

Generating the Resolve

Either an expanded denial defense or recapture would be feasible only if the United States and its allies and partners possessed both the strength and the resolve needed to make it a success. To repeat, an anti-hegemonic coalition

stronger than China is unlikely in the foreseeable future to become a single, cohesive alliance. Alliances are likely to exist and new ones may form within the coalition, but it is unlikely that all states within the coalition will bind themselves to fight to defend the other members. In this context, it will fall to the United States, as the external cornerstone balancer, to play a central role as the hub of such a coalition, especially its military dimensions.

This does not mean, however, that only the United States can or would defend or recapture Taiwan, the Philippines, or other vulnerable states. Other coalition members, and even other states that are not members of the coalition, might help defend or retake these countries. States do not need to be formal allies in order to end up fighting alongside or for one another, just as the United States came to Britain's aid in two world wars even though the two had not been allied beforehand.

Strength and Determination

The success of an effort to defend a targeted ally from China, through either an escalated war or a recapture attempt, would come down to two factors: whether the engaged states were strong enough and whether they were sufficiently determined. As discussed before, the two are interrelated. Broadly speaking, the more states are involved, the less resolute each one needs to be since there would be more power available; the fewer involved, the more resolute those who are would need to be. Similarly, the more power they are willing to allocate, the less they would have to rely on resolve, and the more resolute they were, the less they would need to rely on overwhelming power.

In defending against Chinese ambitions, the United States would be the strongest state, but powerful states such as Japan, India, Vietnam, and Australia could make a material difference. More distant states such as Germany and other European countries, as well as the Gulf states, could affect the contest more indirectly, for instance, through economic assistance or pressure.

Resolve—the degree to which the states are prepared to dedicate their strength to the favorable outcome of the struggle—is critical because even an engaged state can assume a range of postures in a conflict, from fully committed to passive supporter. It thus matters greatly not only which states are engaged but also how much these states, especially the stronger and better positioned ones, are willing to allocate and risk for the venture's success. Naturally, the resolve of the United States would be crucial; but the willingness of

other potential combatants and supporters to dedicate military effort, allow access, or apply economic pressure could be highly significant.

The key question would then be: How could enough states be enlisted, and the requisite degree of resolve generated among them, to successfully apply either of the much harder, costlier, and riskier approaches?

Choosing to Fight

Generally, a willingness to enter a war and the resolve to prevail in it proceed from a state's leaders and the populations they lead judging the benefits of doing so as worth the costs and risks. Any strategy guiding the defending coalition would thus need to appear to these audiences to link the costs and risks that it demanded they incur with the benefits that it would seek to gain or protect for them. A strategy that does not seem sufficiently reasonable and appropriate when it is seriously tested is unlikely to be followed and will thus likely be seen as a bluff. And a state like China, with the power and incentives to challenge such a strategy, is likely to call such a bluff.

Such strategies are not just impractical, however: they also do not deserve Americans' support. Asking citizens of the United States to suffer costs well out of proportion to the issues at stake violates the very heart of the proposition of the nation, which is to put the citizenry's interest first, consistent with a rational purpose. Strategies that demand too much sacrifice for what they promise are thus irrational in this most important sense. Even in war, as Clausewitz observed, the "noblest pride" is to behave "rationally at all times."¹² A similar logic would no doubt apply to citizens of other republics.

An effective expanded denial or recapture strategy would thus need to catalyze the resolve of enough powerful and well-positioned states that they would do what was required to prevail. In other words, if a focused denial defense failed or was expected to fail, the United States and its confederates would need to find ways that justified and impelled fighting a more expansive and intensive war than the one China preferred. But given that China would have tried to frame the war as limited in scope and consequence—for instance, as narrowly confined to Taiwan and its environs—why would the United States and other states see the situation as justifying such a costly and risky effort? If they allowed China to define the war's scope, they might well not.

Critically, then, the United States and other coalition states should not allow Beijing to be the one to determine the bounds of the war—they must set these

bounds themselves. For although they would likely not be willing to fight the kind of war needed to prevail if the struggle seemed only narrowly to concern Taiwan or the Philippines, they might well be prepared to risk that larger war if it seemed necessary to stop China from dominating Asia.

The crucial presupposition for making this work is that the potentially participating states, above all the United States, would need to judge that China was indeed highly aggressive and dangerous and thus that letting it secure so much power would place their vital interests in too much peril. In other words, Americans and other relevant populations would have to find unpersuasive tempting rationalizations for not acting. In practice, this means that China would need to seem not merely a potential danger but an evident and manifest threat. Given the costs and risks entailed in defeating such a powerful foe, arguments for doing so would need to rest on more than speculation about how such a power *might* become more menacing once it gained more strength; they would need to point to clear, compelling evidence of how menacingly Beijing was already behaving and how unacceptably dangerous it would be to allow such a state to prevail in the conflict at hand and grow more powerful as a result.

China would of course have strong incentives to avoid arousing this much alarm. Accordingly, an effective strategy in these circumstances would require that China's *own* application of its focused and sequential limited war strategy would lead to a corresponding change in the potential participants' valuation of the stakes at hand.¹³ That is, China's very use of its limited war strategy should lead members of the potential coalition to see how dangerous and aggressive Beijing is. This perception should lead more states to determine to deny Beijing the success of its strategy—even if that requires a very costly and risky effort.

At heart, this is a simple idea. If the costs and risks of fighting increase, then so, too, must the benefits if a combatant is rationally to keep going. In a limited war, the side will benefit that is more willing to invest a greater share of its total material power in the effort and that is able to make its opponent less willing to do so. Because the anti-hegemonic coalition must by definition be stronger than China, if enough members can be enlisted and sufficiently motivated to dedicate enough power, it should prevail, even if doing so requires a much costlier and riskier war. But for this to happen, enough coalition members must see some great and driving justification to enter or stay in the fight, fight harder, and commit more of their resources rather than back down.

The Inherent Subjectivity of Security

The crucial question, then, is: What would make states decide to fight and do so with the necessary vigor?

This gets at a deeper question of why states and people fight and why they decide to fight harder and more resolutely in the face of adversity rather than concede. From a rationalistic perspective, states fight primarily for their survival and their security interests—from “fear and interest.”¹⁴ The more a state perceives its security to be at risk, the more likely it is to fight and the harder it will fight.

But security is not a material thing that can be touched and precisely measured. It is an assessment inherently subject to judgment: the sense one has of whether one is threatened and to what degree. It therefore depends on factors that are not purely material, such as what one wants to defend and one’s tolerance for risk. It also depends on judgments about others’ future behavior that are inherently speculative, such as assessments of how likely others are to harm the interests one holds dear and how they might do so. The first two of these factors are preferences rather than tangible facts, while the third and fourth are about judgments of another’s future behavior. None is amenable to precise measurement.

One person’s definition of security can thus differ greatly from another’s: one person may be willing to bear the risk of living in a dangerous neighborhood if it is lively or chic, while another might want a much lower crime rate; one person might tolerate living in a neighborhood of pickpockets and gangs, while another might want to live where the doors can be left unlocked. Similarly, one state might be content living within its existing boundaries, while another might insist on a buffer zone. One might be content to live under another’s hegemony so long as its citizens’ lives are protected; another might insist on freedom and independence, even at risk to its citizens’ lives.

Yet, of course, security is not entirely constructed or subjective. The cardinal reality at the root of the idea of security is that humans are embodied beings who can be killed. But because subjectivity is present—because perceptions of security are not fixed and thus depend in considerable part on one’s own judgments of what one needs and how threatening others are—people’s and nations’ judgments about security can be deliberately and strategically managed.¹⁵

Thus states, like individuals, do not determine whether and how hard to fight based only on strict considerations of the balance of power, as important as

these are. They also try to assess other states' intentions and resolve. In other words, decisions to fight and how far to go are predicated not only on how powerful the other side is but also on how likely it is to use that power against one's self and what the consequences of that use would be.¹⁶ The Germany-Japan Axis was very powerful, but it was not only their power that led to such a strong and resolute countercoalition. It was the *way* the Axis fought and behaved, and what that indicated about the consequences of an Axis victory, that spurred states to fight so hard to defeat it.¹⁷

This helps explain why states and individuals fight for reasons that do not appear purely rational—and why they sometimes fight harder than they might otherwise be expected to. For instance, states and individuals often fight and fight harder when they believe honor or justice is at stake. This of course has a *thumotic* component; human beings are thinking creatures, but they are also motivated and impelled by sensations such as pride, joy, sadness, anger, grief, revenge, and fear.¹⁸ When strong passions are triggered and sustained, human behavior often changes with them. States are less passionate than individuals, but they are not immune to emotion and passion, since state action is a product of human decision.

But the influence of *thumos* also has a rational aspect. A state, like an individual, that is too unfailingly reasonable risks becoming a safe target because its reactions will incline toward the measured. A person, for instance, who always tries to calm an argument with business associates by trying to be reasonable and accommodating may well get run roughshod over by them. Thus the archaic-sounding honor of states stands as something of a proxy for how much they are respected and feared. States that allow themselves to be dishonored are states that can be bullied. This is of course an instrumental rather than a primary interest, and its overemphasis can lead to poor and even disastrous decisions, but it is far from irrational or unimportant.

When perceptions of injustice relate to how dangerous another state is and provide motivation to move against it before a too detached instrumental rationality might suggest doing so, then these perceptions can contribute to a rational conception of security. A state that is brutal and that disregards established moral norms is reasonably dreaded, just as a cruel and untrustworthy person is also reasonably to be feared. Dealing with such a state before it has accumulated enough power to become truly menacing may be wise. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to surmise that certain thumotic reactions became so strong among human beings for evolutionary reasons—because they help us survive.¹⁹

This all means that the fundamental way to ensure that more states intervene and invest more of their power is to make sure that their perception of threat and other sources of resolve are activated. This means that the war must unfold in a way that triggers this result.

The Binding Strategy

This is so important both because states may enter and leave a war at varying points and because how much they are willing to invest and risk in the contest may vary. Because these factors are at least partly subjective, they can be influenced and shaped. They therefore interact with strategy.

The way a war starts and is fought affects the perception of the stakes at issue—and thus it affects both who elects to intervene as well as the resolve of the combatants to prevail—including in ways that are much different from what appeared to be the stakes of and reasons for the war at its outset. The First World War was precipitated by a dispute over Austria's treatment of Serbia, but as the war ground on and expanded, it became about whether Germany would dominate Europe, freedom of the seas for the United States, and ultimately the survival of great empires. As it expanded, the war enlisted far more effort and sacrifice than the combatants had anticipated and drew in states that had planned to sit it out.²⁰

But perception of a change in stakes can also happen more specifically because of the behavior of the enemy. Indeed, actions an opponent takes can trigger thumotic reactions on the other side that go beyond purely instrumental calculations. And this is not a phenomenon to which states must be passively subject. Indeed, generating this kind of thumotic effect has long been a core part of waging war—the history of warfare is full of actions designed to strike at an enemy's morale.²¹ Bloodcurdling stories of what the Mongols or Tamerlane's armies had done undermined the confidence and thus the fighting strength of the victims these conquerors had yet to face.

By the same token, states can deliberately induce or even compel opponents or potential opponents to act in ways that change how they and others perceive those opponents and their goals. In 1861, Abraham Lincoln adroitly maneuvered the rebellious states into firing the first hostile shot at Fort Sumter, leading to a groundswell of support from the population of the loyal states and tens of thousands of volunteers—something it was by no means clear would have happened if the federal government had appeared to take the first hostile step.²²

Likewise, lore has it that British troops fired first at Lexington Green on the civilian militia, leading to an outcry against the British and a groundswell of support for the Patriot cause. But some speculate that the first shot may have been deliberately fired by a Son of Liberty to goad the Redcoats into firing en masse. Whatever actually happened, what is clear is that the perception that the British had fired first helped turn the New England countryside into a beehive of Patriot activity and contributed to the appeal of the Patriot cause throughout the American colonies and beyond.²³

This can also work at the state level. In the nineteenth century, Great Britain insisted that the European powers observe the neutrality of Belgium, located between the British Isles and French (and ultimately German) power. Belgium was so situated that an attacker had to violate the neutrality of an innocent third state in order to dominate the wealthy Low Countries, which also provided a natural jumping-off point for an invasion of the British Isles.²⁴ Berlin scoffed in 1914 that the 1839 Treaty of London, which guaranteed Belgian neutrality, was a “mere scrap of paper,” but Germany’s massive attack into Belgium in 1914 cost it dearly because it helped catalyze British and ultimately American resolve to stand with Belgium and France.²⁵ Similarly, during the Second Italian War of Independence, Cavour ensured that Austria attacked first, rightly judging that this would induce vital intervention by France on Sardinia’s behalf.²⁶

Japan’s actions in the Second World War, especially its attack on Pearl Harbor and rampage through Asia in December 1941 and January 1942, serve as a textbook demonstration of how military actions can change the perception of threat by a state’s opponents and heighten their resolve. Japan’s basic need in late 1941 was to break out of the straitjacket imposed by the American oil embargo and free its hand to close out its war in China.²⁷ These objectives could arguably have been served by Tokyo’s focusing its attacks on the European colonial possessions in Asia and specifically avoiding attacking the United States or its territories. With Britain occupied with the war in Europe and North Africa and France and the Netherlands under German control, the United States was the only power that could have taken Japan on over these European holdings. Seizing only the British territories in Malaya, Borneo, and Hong Kong as well as the Dutch East Indies—in addition to French Indochina, which Japan had occupied in 1940, on top of Tokyo’s long-standing control of Formosa and Korea—would have given Japan something approaching ascendancy over the region and might have averted American intervention entirely.

Indeed, in late 1941, most Americans opposed entry into either theater of the war, and the cause of defending European colonial possessions in Asia would have provided about as limp a rallying cry as could be conceived. The United States might still have intervened against Japan for purely strategic reasons. Yet it is far from clear that the American people would have supported the enormous and ferocious war effort that proved necessary to defeat Japan in the Pacific, an effort that led not only to imperial Japan's defeat but to its near-total destruction and capitulation. Facing a more focused and restrained effort by Japan, the American people might have balked at going to these lengths and settled for something far short of total victory, leaving imperial Japan holding on to much more than it ultimately did.

Instead, Japan demonstrated beginning in December 1941 that it was far more directly dangerous to the United States than Americans had thought and, in so doing, catalyzed their "righteous anger," both through the perceived perfidy of its surprise attacks and by its conduct.²⁸ Reports of Japanese barbarities against US and Allied forces and civilians in the Philippines and elsewhere deepened and hardened the resolve of Americans to support and sacrifice for total victory.

In circumstances where a focused denial defense would too likely fail, then, the United States' strategic purpose should be to *force* China to have to do what Japan did voluntarily: to try to achieve its ambitions, China would have to behave in a way that will spur and harden the resolve of the peoples in the broader coalition to intervene and for those engaged to intensify and widen the war to a level at which they would win it. The question is how.

*Making China Fight in a Way That Changes the Coalition's
Threat Perception*

The key is that Beijing itself must alter the potential coalition's perception of the stakes. China must not be allowed to precipitate and fight a war over Taiwan or the Philippines in a manner that makes it seem insufficiently threatening to other regional nations' vital interests. Instead it must be made to reveal the full extent and nature of the threat that it poses to their vital interests.

Since China's interest is precisely in avoiding being placed in this situation, however, ensuring Beijing would have to act in this way to try to attain its ambitions very likely needs to be the product of deliberate action. The United States in particular as well as its allies and partners must therefore prepare, posture, and act to compel China to have to conduct its campaign in ways that



Japan's alternative strategy for 1941. Original map by Andrew Rhodes.

indicate it is a greater and more malign threat not only to the state it has targeted but to the security and dignity of the other states that might come to its defense.

We might call this approach *the binding strategy*. Successfully applied, it should lead even the more reluctant among the important members of the anti-hegemonic coalition to see the value of counteracting China presently rather than waiting and in confronting it through a larger and riskier war than the more confined one Beijing prefers to fight.

For the binding strategy to work, China's behavior is crucial because it is the factor that generates these changed perceptions. Although the coalition can take some positive steps, for instance, by revealing or amplifying previously hidden or underappreciated information about China's military investments or actions, ultimately this approach is about Beijing's behavior and what it signifies or reveals about the threat it poses.

Vitaly, this means that China's actions must not be seen as defensive or reasonable responses to the coalition's provocation. The whole point of the binding strategy is to show that the attacker's true intent is not narrow and constrained but broader and more dangerous than had previously been supposed. The war must therefore not unfold in such a way that China's way of fighting appears to key audiences to be defensive, justified, or reasonable.

This is an instrumentally rational strategic point; behavior viewed as defensive will inherently seem more self-limiting and thus less threatening. But it is also a moral point that touches on intuitions and sensibilities that influence so much of human behavior. This is crucial because the moral sensibility is elemental for generating resolve—hence Napoleon's point that the moral is to the physical in war as three to one.²⁹ Defensive actions are likely to be seen as more reasonable and less threatening than offensive ones. Human beings and states alike tend to have a markedly different reaction to something being taken from them than to being inhibited from taking something they do not already have. Their resolve is generally greater to defend what they have than to seize what they do not.

This returns us to the crucial role of the burden of escalation. If a state has ways of fighting that are not only effective but also appear defensive and justified, then its burden of escalation will be lighter; if, by contrast, its ways of fighting appear offensive and unreasonable, then its burden will be that much heavier. The crucial task for the United States and the coalition is to present Beijing with a dilemma: to prevail in the focused war it seeks, Beijing must have

to act in ways that will motivate coalition states to fight and fight hard and others to support them.

The Sources of Higher Resolve

The core idea of the binding strategy is to *deliberately* make China have to strengthen the coalition's resolve if it tries to attain its ambitions. Because states tend toward self-interest, especially in the painful crucible of war, the most important part of making the binding strategy work is to ensure that China clearly demonstrates the actual threat that it poses to the coalition states' security. But Beijing can also be induced to behave in ways that engage the thumotic aspects of coalition states' decision-making. Although these may be less reliable than pure self-interest, they may contribute to decisions both to fight and to fight harder.

An attacker like China may trigger other states' resolve by revealing or being made to reveal its aggressiveness, ambition, cruelty, unreliability, power, or disrespect for the honor of such states.

Aggressiveness

A China perceived as more aggressive will appear more likely to start wars, otherwise use violence, or threaten to use force to advance its interests. This is important because states might think that an aspiring hegemon like China will not use its massive military power to coerce them, even once it had subordinated Taiwan or the Philippines. If their perception of China's threshold for using violence changes, though, they might determine that checking Beijing earlier is the more prudent course, whether that means entering the war or expanding or intensifying it once engaged.

Perhaps the clearest and sometimes the most important way of making sure China is seen this way is simply by ensuring that it is the one to strike first. Few human moral intuitions are more deeply rooted than that the one who started it is the aggressor and accordingly the one who presumptively owns a greater share of moral responsibility. There is thus an enormous political-strategic benefit to being seen as defending or responding to an adversary's first move; a state or its allies reacting to such an attack may consider steps in response that they would not otherwise have contemplated. This is even more the case when such an attack is seen as perfidious or dastardly. For instance, after a century and a half of insisting on the rights of nonbelligerent shipping and having actually

gone to war with Germany in 1917 in part to uphold neutral shipping rights, the United States declared unrestricted submarine warfare on Japan on December 8, 1941—but only *after* the attack on Pearl Harbor.³⁰

In addition to striking first, another way that China could be perceived as dangerously aggressive is if it attacked more states. A country willing to do this gives other states great reason to fear, and to counter it promptly. Nazi Germany's willingness to attack so many states, even ones Berlin had left untouched in the First World War, such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, indicated a degree of aggressiveness that impelled its opponents to fight and fight hard enough to eventually overpower it.³¹

Based on this logic, the United States and its allies and partners could seek to ensure that China is not able to seize Taiwan or the Philippines without striking well beyond the vicinity of those states, for instance, at the forces, assets, or territory of the United States as well as other states both in the region and more distant. For this strategy to work, Beijing would need to see the military value of these attacks as too compelling to be ignored—for instance, because neglecting them would allow these other forces to do too much damage to any invasion force or blockade enforcers—just as Japan felt it necessary to attack US and British forces first and without warning in 1941. China should face a dilemma between striking at these important targets but in so doing catalyzing other states' resolve or withholding the strikes but compromising its military efficacy. Beijing could be made to face this dilemma not only at the outset but during a conflict, as Germany confronted such a dilemma about whether to expand submarine operations against a neutral United States in the two world wars.

The United States and its allies and partners could put this aspect of a binding strategy into effect in a number of ways. One is by enmeshing their military posture. Greater military integration would tempt China to attack a much broader set of states. If China needed only to attack Taiwan and its forces as well as perhaps those local US forces engaged in the island's defense in order to subordinate the island, such a campaign is unlikely to seem so aggressive. But if, to ensure that its attack on Taiwan succeeded, it also had to attack US forces, territory, and assets farther afield as well as those of Japan, the Philippines, Australia, South Korea, and perhaps others, that would clearly show Beijing to be far more aggressive than it would want potential opponents to believe.

In military terms, the most natural way to put an opponent in this position is by posturing and readying forces so that, if a state hopes to conduct a success-

ful invasion or other coercive campaign, it must attack on a much grander scale, against more targets in more countries, than it might have preferred. During the later Cold War, for example, NATO's force posture meant that even if Moscow hoped only to subdue West Germany in an invasion, the Soviet Bloc would also have had to attack and likely invade a wide range of other NATO countries to prevail in such a contest.

Today, coalition states could posture or ready themselves to achieve this effect in a variety of ways, bearing in mind that not all participants need to pull the same weight or assume the same degree of exposure. Perfection is not the threshold for success, since even partial effects can have a significant impact on states' resolve. For instance, while the United States might prepare for direct, active combat against a focused Chinese assault on Taiwan or the Philippines, other states involved in the binding strategy might only host US and other states' forces. If China struck at these hosting states, that could provide the impetus for them to intervene more directly. Moreover, the more resilient, dispersed, and survivable these hosted forces and their facilities are, and the harder it is for China to ascertain how those forces and facilities would operate, the more targets it would need to attack and the more forcefully it would need to do so, making any such attack seem more aggressive.

To take one example, Japan hosts multiple US military bases, but it also has its own bases as well as commercial airfields and ports that US and Japanese forces could use.³² China would face substantial risks by leaving those bases and facilities alone, but striking them would likely catalyze Japanese resolve. The same would apply to other states, including those not allied to the United States but which might provide support or access to US forces in a conflict.

As noted previously, a defensive or status quo set of political goals can be entirely consistent with an active, forward-leaning, even aggressive military or operational approach so long as it is kept within appropriate bounds. Likewise, the political goal of ensuring that the other side actually starts the war does not require making one's military posture passive or fragile. A military prepared for the opponent to strike first can be ready, resilient, and postured to launch quick counterattacks, as the US Navy undertook in the Central Pacific in the early months of 1942.

If China knew, then, that US and other engaged forces could operate from a large number of locations across the Asia-Pacific region, it would be tempted to strike at these targets to diminish those forces' efficacy. Moreover, it might be

tempted to strike early and by surprise if it knew that those forces could, if allowed to escape, disperse and present an even more painful dilemma. Furthermore, if China were unable to disable these airfields through strike operations, it might feel impelled to try even more aggressive and direct measures, such as assaulting them with ground forces. The concrete result would be to make China choose between allowing the United States and other engaged states to operate uncontested from these locations or striking widely at countries that might otherwise remain on the sidelines.

If China were compelled to act aggressively on this quandary, then even if Beijing were strong enough to compel the coalition to fight a larger war to defend or recapture Taiwan, it would still have likely prompted the formation of a broader, more resolute coalition of states prepared to wage that costlier and riskier conflict. Of course, Beijing would prefer to avoid this outcome. But its preference would not be what mattered—it would be its revealed willingness to attack so broadly and with such violence.

This perception of the threat Beijing posed would be heightened further if the states engaged went beyond basing to interconnect their defense postures, making their defenses essentially interdependent. Although a truly interconnected approach would be politically difficult to arrange, it would be the most thorough and effective way of binding states together. If countries within the coalition simply could not defend themselves without relying on others, then their fates would truly be bound together.³³ For example, during the late Cold War, Japan's Self-Defense Forces planned in the event of war to hunt Soviet submarines and protect US airbases, providing safe passage to US naval assets and freeing up and enabling US strike operations against the Soviet Far East.³⁴ The effect was to bind together US and Japanese forces in the event of war around Japan—neither could accomplish the missions envisioned without the other's active participation.

Ambition

An opponent can also be made to seem more ambitious than was previously believed. If aggressiveness is how likely a state is to use violence to achieve its aims, ambition is the expansiveness of its goals. While aggressiveness tells on how likely potential states are to be attacked, ambition tells on how likely they are to have vital interests violated, be subordinated, or be consumed altogether. This of course touches directly on other states' most fundamental concerns:

how likely they are to become the object of another's acquisitiveness. Thus the more ambitious a powerful state like China appears to be, the more others have reason to fear that sooner or later they will become its prey.

A state's behavior makes a crucial difference in such assessments. In 1936, Western leaders might have credited Hitler's protestations that Berlin's goals were limited to returning Germany to equal status among the European states after the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles; but German behavior toward Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939 and Berlin's attack on Poland in 1939 made it definitively clear that the Nazis hungered for far more and that the Western powers had better fight Germany even in a large war rather than be subjected to further salami-slicing.³⁵ European states thought that they could cut deals with Napoleon at first, but his many wars and the dramatically transformational settlements Paris imposed after them ultimately led them to conclude that he could not be dealt with.³⁶

Moreover, how ambitious others believe a combatant to be can change during a war, since war aims are not fixed during a conflict. The federal government's demands from the Southern states dramatically rose over the course of the Civil War. The Triple Entente's demands from the Central Powers rose substantially during the First World War. Nor are a state's war aims always subject to cool deliberation. Bismarck was reluctant to annex Alsace-Lorraine but acceded to doing so in the face of a triumphant Prussian leadership that wanted more. The original war aims for United Nations forces in Korea in 1950 were the restoration of the status quo—two Koreas divided north and south—but victory at Incheon, momentum, and the personal influence of such individuals as Douglas MacArthur combined to widen those goals, at least for a time, to include unification of North with South Korea.³⁷

Inducing China to behave in ways that make it appear more ambitious is not, however, as direct a matter as making it appear more aggressive; unlike aggressiveness, which turns on the means that a state will employ to attain its goals, ambition is about the goals themselves. For an attacker, leaving hostile military forces in otherwise uninvolved or minimally involved states presents a very pointed military problem; leaving them untouched could frustrate its achievement of its goals outright. The attacker does not strictly need to change its political goals to deal with this problem. That is because what matters in this context is not whether an attacker like China admits or even itself conceives that its aims have become more ambitious. It simply needs to *seem* more ambitious to other

states—or even just likely to become more ambitious, given that others must make provision for a future in which such a formidable state might become so.

An aspiring hegemon like China therefore has a significant incentive to make its ambitions seem constrained and its war aims as modest and finite as possible. In the event of conflict with elements of the anti-hegemonic coalition over, for example, Taiwan, Beijing would likely want other states to believe that once it had fulfilled its desire to unify with Taiwan, it would be satisfied. But if enough states concluded that taking Taiwan was in fact only the first step toward grander ambitions on Beijing's part, they would have an incentive to try to frustrate those ambitions sooner rather than later, even at the price of a larger and more costly war.

Perhaps the clearest way to make an attacker like China seem more ambitious or likely to become so is to ensure that it cannot achieve an easy, clean victory. If Beijing had to face a frustrating and costly war to achieve even as focused a goal as Taiwan, it would be tempted or pressed to expand its aims to match the costs it incurred, just as the combatants' aims in the First World War grew with the suffering they endured. This requirement is likely to put a premium on the resilience of the military posture of the United States and its allies and partners. The more resilient US and other relevant forces are, the more they can hold out and inflict damage on Chinese forces, extending the conflict and raising the costs to China.

Another way to force Beijing to appear more ambitious is similar to the tactic of making it choose between aggressiveness and failure. The United States and other engaged states can force Beijing to choose between allowing hostile forces to take sanctuary in states that otherwise might be only minimally involved and striking at those forces. If Beijing strikes at forces in otherwise minimally involved states, that action is likely to trigger fears that Beijing's appetite might grow with the eating, especially if Beijing were facing a tough and protracted war. In such circumstances, regional states might fear that China will feel compelled to go so far as to seize some of their own territory to disable or deny US and other defenders' operations from their territory—and then insist on retaining any territories it seized to make the costs of such a war appear justified.

Beijing might, for instance, lash out at or seize territory from the Philippines to deny it to US forces—and then insist on holding that territory or extracting some other equity if it prevailed in the war. It is worth remembering that

Washington had no claims on most of the Pacific Islands before December 1941 but concluded the war in possession of or watching over the great bulk of them after having suffered mightily to extract them from Japanese control. Likewise, the United States made no claim on the Philippines at the beginning of the Spanish-American War, which was caused far more by matters in the Caribbean, but ended up with it at the war's conclusion.³⁸

To take another example of how this approach can be implemented in practice, a Soviet assault on NATO designed primarily to subjugate West Germany would, because of the laydown and operating patterns of NATO forces, have almost certainly required an attack on much of Western Europe. Such an attack might not have proved Moscow's aspiration to subordinate all of Western Europe beyond the Federal Republic, but other Western NATO states would have had abundant reason to fear that it had that intention, especially in light of its semi-imperial control over Eastern Europe. In effect, NATO's military posture made it more likely that Western states would fear that any Soviet attack on the West would not lead to localized, incremental political demands by Moscow but to a Soviet effort to dominate all of Europe.³⁹

Cruelty

States must also take account of how another state, especially an aspiring regional hegemon, would behave if it achieved its goals. If China appeared cruel in waging the war, states might fear that it would behave this way—or worse—once it had accumulated even more power. This concern could increase their willingness to prevent Beijing from amassing the power to subject other states to such treatment.

Such reactions are common in military history. Reports of the rapacity and oppressiveness of French rule powered popular support for the campaigns against Napoleon's armies. Asian populations that might otherwise have supported Japan's efforts to unseat widely resented European colonial supremacy were alienated by Japan's treatment of its occupied territories. Reports of the USSR's staggering cruelties drove fears of what Soviet domination would mean and undergirded the Allied defense posture in the Cold War, which ultimately rested on the threat to effectively obliterate the Soviet Union in what would have been the most destructive act in military history.⁴⁰

The United States and its allies and partners could increase the likelihood that China would be perceived in this light by inducing Beijing to choose between,

on the one hand, striking at military targets and risking also hitting nonmilitary targets and, on the other hand, forbearing from striking at those military targets in the first place. The defenders could do this by making their military fortifications and operations more resilient and difficult to precisely and efficiently attack. This simple counsel of military necessity could induce China to attack more cruelly than it would prefer. An unscrupulous defender might force this choice by deliberately commingling military facilities and assets with facilities sure to provoke anger if struck, such as places of worship, hospitals, and schools. But this would violate even the most basic conception of the laws of war and would likely vitiate any advantage in resolve that the coalition might obtain from such strikes.⁴¹

Fortunately, there are other ways to pursue this part of a binding strategy. The laws of war do not call for bankrupting or ensuring one's own defeat by completely divorcing anything military from anything civilian.⁴² A combatant can only have so many ports, airfields, rail yards, ships, transport aircraft, and other facilities available to it, and these can reasonably be segregated from nonmilitary assets only to a certain extent. Consequently, any war effort against an opponent as powerful as China would have to use things that are dual use, close to civilian infrastructure, or hard to distinguish. San Diego, Honolulu, Yokohama-Yokosuka, and Busan are critical naval ports but also cities with commercial harbors. Commercial airports may not serve primarily as military airfields, but they might need to be called into such service, especially if primary airbases are destroyed. There are few dedicated military roads or railways outside of military bases, especially in the United States and its plausible fellow coalition members, so military convoys are likely to need to use civilian roads, railways, fuel depots, and marshaling yards.

If China could collect very good and current information and use it to strike precisely and promptly, it would not face much of a dilemma. But the United States and its allies and partners would have every reason to interfere, by every practical means, with China's ability to do this. China would thus likely face situations in which it would not know where opposing military forces were and would have only imperfect control over its ability to strike at them.

At a minimum, then, such an approach would tempt China to compensate for these challenges by launching larger and broader assaults. Yet these offensives would surely result in destruction well beyond purely military targets, including highly sensitive things. A barrage assault on a port that was supporting mil-

itary operations could hit a cruise ship or ignite an oil tanker, and the fire could spread to adjoining neighborhoods. An attack on an airfield could destroy a passenger airliner instead of a transport aircraft or a terminal instead of a military hangar. The infamous Italo-German attack on Guernica during the Spanish Civil War was meant to hit military targets, but the civilian damage caused worldwide revulsion and contributed to anti-Fascist sentiment.⁴³

Largely for this reason, it would be unwise for the United States and its allies and partners to allocate scarce resources such as air and missile defenses to defending purely civilian facilities. China has no right under the laws of war to strike at such facilities, and attacks on them are far more likely to generate anger and fear that would result in a strong response. Purely peaceful assets are guarded by outrage; attacks on them catalyze the senses of vengeance and justice. Meanwhile, military assets and those directly supporting the military would be fair game—and thus need defense.

This assumes that China would not deliberately attack civilian targets. But a sufficiently resilient defense could tempt Beijing to use terror tactics, which would deepen fears of what Chinese dominance might look like. The Germans initially tried to suppress the Royal Air Force to enable invasion of the United Kingdom, but when that failed, they turned to the terror tactics of the Blitz, which only hardened Britons' resolve to keep fighting and increased international sympathy for the British cause. Beijing, if it attacked Taiwan, might have expected a quick, decisive war; frustration that it was meeting stiff resistance and that a larger, longer, possibly indecisive or unfavorable war was in the offing might cause it to lash out for similar reasons. It might be tempted to try to gain victory by incorporating terror tactics, as the Germans did at Rotterdam in 1940.⁴⁴ Such a fearsome display would demonstrate how cruel China could be.

China might also act cruelly or rapaciously in its behavior in the parts of the coalition members' territory that it was able to occupy. Much of an occupying state's behavior is largely, when not entirely, within its control; it holds the area, after all. That said, an occupier may also respond to what those under its occupation or its remaining opponents do.

For instance, the defenders could promote peaceful political resistance movements that would operate within Chinese-occupied territory. Such movements could conduct workers' strikes and create blockages, detracting from the occupier's ability to consolidate its control and to use the new territory for military or other purposes important to its hegemonic ambitions. During the Second

World War, Germany relied heavily on industrial production from its occupied European territories; had the Nazis been more sensitive to views about their cruelty and therefore less willing to use exceptionally harsh methods to enforce compliance, as China likely would be, peaceful stoppages or citizen protests could have significantly hampered the German war effort. Such movements would stress the occupier's administration of the allied territory; it could either accept the decline in its ability to leverage the territory's wealth and services or crack down in the hope of compelling compliance. Cracking down, of course, would demonstrate exactly the kind of oppressiveness that would make other states fear falling under the attacker's sway.

More aggressively yet, the coalition could help willing resisters on Taiwan and elsewhere to prepare and back insurgencies, in the tradition of the independence and partisan movements of the Second World War. These would do more than merely withhold goods and services from the occupier. Such efforts attack the occupier's forces; if successful, they not only directly destroy or damage at least some of these forces and their supplies but also cause virtual attrition by compelling the occupier to reroute, provide greater protection, or otherwise adapt to such attacks. French forces in Napoleon's war with Spain, and US forces in South Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, had to expend great effort and resources to protect their supply lines, not knowing where the guerrillas might strike. The United States and others could deliberately seek to catalyze such movements, as the Allies did in the Second World War through the Office of Strategic Services and Special Operations Executive.⁴⁵

Large-scale political movements and insurgencies may provoke cruelties, even by normally humane states. Even a restrained approach to dealing with this kind of problem demands that the occupier take a firmer hand. If military necessity requires that a road be cleared or oil be extracted, it must be done, and this requires coercion if people are resisting it. This alone would make the occupying power appear more oppressive, belying claims of its liberality.

And things could always get worse. Occupying forces that have to deal with a ghostly enemy that appears without warning and disappears into an apparently sympathetic population may become frustrated and lash out, if they do not deliberately perpetrate atrocities. Britain may have had a better record than other colonial occupiers, but its forces still perpetrated the massacre at Amritsar in India and Bloody Sunday in Ireland.⁴⁶ Likewise, it has consistently been US law and policy to deter and penalize war crimes by its own forces. Yet such

atrocities became major news sensations during Vietnam, in part because US troops in the field were so frustrated in their efforts to root out the Vietcong insurgency. Even though they were relatively isolated examples, these reports undercut the American war effort. Moreover, states may try a more lenient approach but shift policy if they believe that it is not working. France tried a lighter touch in its attempt to hold on to Algeria before shifting to a much tougher approach, which brought down much opprobrium on France's head.⁴⁷

Further, such efforts might make a practical military difference. In the event that China is able to seize Taiwan, any counterattack to free the island is likely to benefit from or even need irregular forces. The stronger and more effective such an insurgency is—for instance, operating out of Taiwan's mountains and its large cities to tie down and erode PLA forces on the island as the coalition struck at them and cut them off from the mainland—the more it is likely to prompt cruelties from China.

The idea of this approach is to compel China to choose between costs to its military effectiveness and costs to its reputation. If it appears cruel or oppressive, this would stiffen the resolve of those states already engaged and deepen the involvement of those on the sidelines. Needless to say, such an approach can impose significant suffering on occupied civilian populations and is not to be undertaken lightly. The United States should thus be loath to fabricate an insurrection where there is no support for one; it should seek only to help those who want to resist. But given the opposition of people throughout the region to falling under Chinese control and the risks and costs the United States and others would incur to liberate them, the former would be justified in aiding and abetting such efforts where they have real roots.

Unreliability

The way China wages the war could also show Beijing to be less trustworthy and more perfidious than it might have seemed. This matters because an aspirant's bid for hegemony relies substantially on other states believing its pledges as to how it will behave as it grows stronger. Because an aspirant like China cannot take on everyone at once, it must persuade the less immediately threatened members of the anti-hegemonic coalition that, once it is ascendant, it will be respectful of their interests and autonomy. But if it fails to keep its promises early on, this will undermine its assurances of future restraint and good behavior.

This, in turn, will make those states more likely to resist it, even before it poses a clear and immediate threat to their own vital interests.

This can be thought of as an aspiring hegemon's version of the credibility problem. China's own differentiated credibility is crucial if its focused and sequential strategy is to work. Beijing must be seen as willing to honor its pledges regarding the autonomy, political integrity, and security of other regional states. Bending or breaking such promises would make these states more afraid of how Beijing would behave in the future, increasing their incentives to deal with China earlier and more resolutely, rather than risk allowing it to agglomerate so much power that it can no longer be held to account.

Thus, just as Beijing has an incentive to undermine the United States' differentiated credibility, so, too, the reverse. If China can be induced to undermine its differentiated credibility with respect to its future restraint and good behavior, this should catalyze the resolve of the anti-hegemonic coalition and generate sympathy for its cause. For instance, if China has pledged to respect the autonomy of or political rights in a conquered territory but then cracks down and imposes an oppressive administration, that will undermine its assurances. Contemporary China's erosion of the guarantees it made for Hong Kong's autonomy has already had a significant impact on perceptions in Taiwan of what a one-country, two-systems approach would mean, further undermining support in Taiwan for unification with the mainland.⁴⁸

Moreover, to try to quiet balancing concerns, Beijing would very likely need to make other assurances of its restraint, for instance, by promising that it would not attack noncombatant states. The US and allied defense posture could therefore be adapted to make China choose between violating these pledges and suffering militarily by sticking with them. The United States and others could, for example, develop operating locations across many states in the region. They might not need to use all of these locations—but if China feared that they might, it would face an incentive to attack them. Just as Germany judged the military advantages of plowing through Belgium in 1914 greater than the enormous opprobrium Berlin suffered by violating Belgian neutrality, a China that, for instance, wanted to subordinate a well-defended Vietnam might find it tempting to violate Laotian neutrality in order to flank Vietnam. Violating such a pledge would directly undercut the credibility of comparable assurances. Ultimately, this approach would seek to force China either to accept military disadvantage or to betray its pledges.

Power

How an aspirant like China fights can change more than judgments about its intent; it can also reveal insights about its power in ways that affect other states' calculus of whether and how much to risk and suffer to contest it. In particular, Beijing's conduct of the war could show it to be stronger than it had let on or presented itself. This would be particularly significant if China's case for inaction by the anti-hegemonic coalition and nonaligned fence-sitters rested on the idea that it was not in fact so powerful and thus its protestations that its ambitions were finite were credible.

Others are more likely to believe a weaker state that insists that its ambitions are limited; by definition, it cannot extend its influence very far in the face of resistance. Few think that South Korea's claims against Japan over *Dak To* or Ecuador's against Chile and Bolivia are a prelude to a bid for regional dominance. But when such claims are issued by a much stronger power, they are more likely to be seen as just that. The Bourbons' assertion of a hereditary right to Spain triggered balancing reactions by the other European powers because, whatever the dynastic merits of the Bourbons' claims, France was too strong to be allowed to grow so powerful.⁴⁹

Beijing has played the modesty card heavily in recent decades. The strategy of "hide our capabilities and bide our time," made famous by Deng Xiaoping, counseled China's leaders to stay under the radar of the major powers while building China's "composite national power" in order to allow a more assertive policy at a more advantageous time. But China's increasingly assertive and self-confident approach over the past decade has put the lie to China's claims of modest capability.⁵⁰ Although Beijing has been able to secure other nations' cooperation with—or acquiescence to—its own international designs, such as with the One Belt, One Road initiative, its behavior has simultaneously strengthened balancing forces, as states increasingly recognize the danger China poses.

In the event of war, therefore, the United States and other engaged states could seek to expose divergences between China's claimed and real power. For instance, they could seek to make or induce Beijing to reveal military programs, technologies, or forces that it had concealed or downplayed, as well as sources of economic strength and resilience that had not to that point been appreciated or known. If China turned out to have considerably more sophisticated aircraft, missiles, or space capabilities, this might indicate that it was considerably

stronger than others had understood. Even in peacetime, this can have a significant impact; the extent of Chinese control over medical supply chains revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic awakened serious concerns.⁵¹

At the most basic level, doing this in war simply requires the United States and other engaged allies and partners to fight more effectively and force China to draw on its greater reservoirs of power. But this dilemma can also be deliberately imposed; missions and even larger-scale operations can be formed and dispatched with a primary goal of inducing an opponent to reveal such capabilities. During the Second World War, Great Britain specifically framed operations to tease out the German Enigma code capability (though London then hid its mastery of it).⁵²

Ultimately, this approach seeks to induce an opponent to show that it is stronger—and thus more capable of attaining regional predominance—than other states might have appreciated. An aspiring hegemon like China has potent incentives to play down its growing strength. Forcing it to show how powerful it truly is can change other states' calculus of how dangerous it is, strengthening their incentives to fight, fight harder, and deepen their collaboration with those fighting.

Revenge and Honor

The categories laid out thus far touch on instrumental reasons that China's way of waging a war could trigger a greater opposing effort by increasing states' perception of the threat it poses. China might also do things, however, that trigger a strong desire for revenge or for vindication of national or other forms of honor, as Hector's killing of Patroclus triggered Achilles's rage in ways that seriously hurt the Trojans. Thumotic impulses can be powerful drivers of state behavior.

This is partially because, as noted earlier, instrumental reasons and thumotic impulses often overlap. The attack on Pearl Harbor showed Americans how dangerous and dastardly Japan was and also awakened their righteous might. Germany's violation of Belgium's neutrality in 1914 demonstrated that its assurances could not be fully credited and threatened to place German military power just across the English Channel, but it also insulted many Britons' senses of justice and honor. But even when they do not overlap with instrumental reasons, thumotic impulses like revenge could impel states to counter China's efforts.

Willing members of the anti-hegemonic coalition could make efforts to increase the likelihood that Chinese action would stir feelings of offended honor and vengefulness. Although trip wires and purely symbolic measures are generally not well suited as primary strategies for the anti-hegemonic coalition, such measures may sometimes have a place as part of the preferred denial approach.

At the political level, the United States and other coalition states could give (even if subtle) indications of their commitment to exposed members of the anti-hegemonic coalition such as Taiwan. This would increase Taiwan's symbolic value and stake any committing states' honor on it.

At the military level, planning could place especially symbolic or valued assets in harm's way. In the past, for instance, when unit battle flags were highly valued symbols, commanders would sometimes place them in areas of the field where they wanted special effort made. In the case of Taiwan, at least some portion of US forces could operate nearby, be ready to deploy there on short notice, or even be located on Taiwan, compelling China to have to attack them at the outset of a conflict. This approach might be especially useful with states that are not immediately threatened by China, including some that might not even be members of the anti-hegemonic coalition or only rather anemic ones. For instance, including European contributions to an anti-hegemonic coalition's defense, even if modest, could be useful if attacks on those forces generated outrage among Europeans and a desire to support the coalition's efforts.

Winning the War

How, then, should the United States and its allies and partners seek to leverage these strategies to achieve their aims?

The Binding Strategy and Denial Defense

Principally they should do so by integrating the distinct but compatible approaches of a binding strategy and a denial defense. A denial defense is the use of American and other power to stop China from seizing and holding allied territory; the binding strategy is a deliberate effort to compel China to have to behave in ways that catalyze US, allied, and partner resolve if it pursues its hegemonic ambitions. These approaches can be either fully or partially integrated.

Fully integrating the strategies among all participating states would make an attack on one member of the US alliance architecture (and potentially the

coalition as a whole) an attack on all. In this posture, China could not attack Taiwan or the Philippines without very likely precipitating a larger war with the rest of the US-led alliance system. The downside of this approach is that it is politically very demanding to establish; given the divergent threat perceptions among US allies and partners, such an effort might fail if an important participating state balked at following through in the event of crisis or war. It might also be so politically stressing as to cause fissures in the coalition.

Alternatively, the strategies could be partially integrated. One way to do so would be for the United States and others to partially integrate their forces and efforts for all the scenarios they believe they would face, including the most stressing, such as an invasion of Taiwan or the Philippines. This approach would limit the degree to which a single member's balking would cause systemic failure. One partner's balking might hamper, for example, the antisubmarine campaign or the menu of potential operating locations but not necessarily lead to failure.

The United States and any participating allies and partners could also partially integrate by binding their preparations for certain contingencies but not others. In this model, willing states could prepare to defend especially vulnerable allies like Taiwan without intertwining their postures, but they (and possibly others uninvolved in preparing for a defense of Taiwan) could prepare to defend the rest of the allies through a more fully integrated approach. In other words, during a war over Taiwan, though the United States might still seek to induce China to act in ways that clarified the threat it posed to other states, it would not seek to leverage those converging threat perceptions for military-operational effects in Taiwan's defense; rather, it would seek to deny a Chinese *fait accompli* through the focused efforts of American, Taiwan, and perhaps a few additional nations' forces. But other prospective victims of Chinese attack would be defended through more fully integrated denial and binding strategies. This approach would have the advantage of being less politically demanding and of optimizing defenses for all members of the coalition save Taiwan. It would, however, reduce the potency of the defense of Taiwan.

Some form of an integrated approach is likely to be the most advantageous for the anti-hegemonic coalition. Given the divergent threat perceptions and political sensitivities among coalition members, a fully integrated binding strategy may well be unfeasible. That said, excluding the most vulnerable allies from the binding strategy could leave them open to China's focused and

sequential strategy if a narrowly focused denial defense for them proves unworkable.

The optimal strategy is likely to be one in which the United States and its allies and, likely to a lesser degree, its partners in the Western Pacific intertwine their posture and activities significantly but not fully. The degree of binding may differ according to the scenario: coalition members might, for instance, bind their efforts more fully in order to defend Australia than they would to defend Taiwan. The practical output of this is likely to be the development of operating locations across a wide range of participating states and a higher degree of integration among their military postures and activities. At the same time, the United States and its allies will have to prepare for the possibility that some participating states will balk and make sure that they can still execute effective operational plans even in such circumstances. Together, such a posture would be most likely to ensure that a Chinese attempt to apply the focused and sequential strategy would catalyze the resolve needed to mount the expanded denial defense or recapture approach.

Putting and Keeping the Burden of Escalation on China

If the binding strategy is applied effectively, China's behavior would catalyze the resolve needed either to escalate sufficiently to conduct an effective denial defense or to retake a lost ally. This would give the coalition an escalation advantage: at every plausible level, Beijing would be met by an effective strategy and coalition members resolved enough to implement it.⁵³ This means that the anti-hegemonic coalition would be able to fulfill its core purposes in the face of China's strategy: however China chose to escalate, the coalition would have the will and a way to effectively defend or relieve vulnerable member states while retaining the ability to prevail in a systemic regional war.

Successfully implemented, in other words, this strategy would keep the burden of escalation on China. It would be Beijing, not the United States and any participating confederates, that would have to escalate the conflict to avoid defeat. Yet taking this initiative would make China appear more offensive, aggressive, unreasonable, and menacing—catalyzing the resolve of those already fighting and encouraging unengaged nations to intervene. In so escalating, Beijing would find itself unable to confine the conflict within its preferred bounds. Meanwhile, in the larger conflict it would have to fight, it would face the choice between either settling or escalating in ways that would further catalyze the

resolve of the engaged coalition while leading yet more states to oppose it. Its opponents would thus be able to prevail at whatever higher level of war China chose to take the conflict. This is the boa constrictor effect: the more Beijing sought to escalate its way out of its quandary, the more it would both widen its circle of opponents and strengthen these opponents' will to frustrate its aims.

Facing the prospect of a tightening boa constrictor and with much to lose, Beijing would have the most powerful incentives not to escalate but instead to settle the conflict—or, better, avoid it entirely in the first place. Escalating the war would only bring more damage and risk, without opening a path to gains that would justify them. Continuing the struggle would lead, at best, to protracted war with no reasonable prospect of success and, at worst, not only to frustration of its aims but to great loss at the hands of its opponents. In such circumstances, Beijing would face enormous incentives to terminate the conflict before it became too damaging.

China might want its adversaries to think that it is willing to escalate to mutual suicide to escape such a predicament, but this is unlikely to work. For reasons discussed before, China's opponents are likely to see a threat that would involve destroying itself as a bluff. China would be far more likely to resort to protraction or agree to settle a conflict over Taiwan in the hope of regenerating its power and trying again.

At the same time, the United States and any allies and partners participating in the conflict would have an interest in ensuring that their war aims were tolerable enough to satisfy China's threshold for settlement. Beijing would be less open to settlement if the terms were too onerous or humiliating, but the opposing coalition could set its demands relatively low. It would have no need to insist on a total or even a very satisfying victory over China. Upholding America's differentiated credibility at the heart of the anti-hegemonic coalition requires only that China's effort to subordinate a vulnerable US ally fail. This would be the *sine qua non* of the US and coalition position for war termination.

Logically nothing beyond this would be required. Thus nothing would *need* to be taken from what China possessed at the outset of hostilities. In fact, the United States and its confederates might sweeten the deal by offering to return things to Beijing; for instance, they might have judged it useful to seize Chinese equities such as financial holdings or overseas bases during the war in order to generate leverage at the peace table. These could be returned, as a triumphant Britain returned some of the territories it had seized from France during the Seven Years' War at the end of the conflict.⁵⁴

Yet they might have reason to demand more. For instance, if something happened during the war to lastingly diminish the anti-hegemonic coalition's power or elevate China's, the United States and its confederates in the conflict might need to redress or compensate for this change as part of their terms for ending the war. This is important because they would need to ensure a sustainably favorable regional balance of power between the anti-hegemonic coalition on the one side and China and its pro-hegemonic coalition on the other following the conflict. If China had somehow jeopardized this even though the engaged part of the coalition had effectively defended or liberated a member state, they might well need to address this in the terms ending the war.

For instance, China might have added to its power by subordinating or seizing a state that is not a member of the anti-hegemonic coalition. China might have failed in its effort to take Taiwan but might have enlisted or coerced the support of Laos or Thailand. Relieving states that are not beneficiaries of an alliance guarantee from the United States is not necessary to uphold Washington's differentiated credibility, but Beijing's addition of such states to the pro-hegemony camp could alter the regional balance of power, which is relevant to the anti-hegemonic coalition's core goals. Their disposition, or compensation for such a shift, might therefore need to be addressed in the peace terms.

The Binding Strategy in Cold War Europe

This kind of binding strategy is not merely a theoretical conceit. Rather, it is similar to what NATO did in Europe during the latter part of the Cold War. Early in that long struggle, the United States relied first on its nuclear monopoly and then on its overwhelming nuclear superiority to deter a Soviet invasion of the Western Alliance. Until the mid-1960s, Washington could have launched a nuclear attack that would have not only devastated the Soviet Union but also largely blunted if not entirely denied its ability to strike back at the United States. Washington and NATO relied on this strategic dominance to dissuade the USSR from using its massive advantages in conventional forces within the European Theater.

As it became clear over the 1960s and 1970s that the Soviet Union would first develop a significant strategic nuclear retaliatory force and then approach, if not exceed, strategic parity with the United States, it also became increasingly clear that the strategic approach of threatening a massive nuclear response

to a regional war in Europe was no longer tenable. If the United States launched a large-scale nuclear first strike, the Soviet Union would be able to do the gravest damage to the United States in retort. Courting such a response was no longer credible, let alone sensible, as US interests in Western Europe, while important, could not match the importance of avoiding devastation of the American homeland. The burden of escalation had grown too great for such a dramatically disproportionate strategy to make sense.

The United States and NATO therefore needed to find a way to deter the Soviet Union from using its theater military advantages in Europe to coerce Allied member states there despite the two sides' great mutual vulnerability—in the vernacular of the time, mutual assured destruction, or MAD.⁵⁵ In principle, the cleanest solution to this problem was for NATO to develop conventional forces capable of defeating a Warsaw Pact attack, making its traditional reliance on the threat to escalate first to the nuclear level unnecessary. In practice, this was an elusive goal, given lagging European efforts on conventional defense, American engagement in Indochina, and Moscow's heavy investments in its own forces. In the 1970s the question thus became urgent: In light of the Warsaw Pact's theater advantages, how could NATO effectively deter and, if possible, defeat an attack, thereby undermining the Soviets' ability to use those advantages for coercion?

The response in the 1970s and 1980s was essentially a defense posture designed to compel the Warsaw Pact to have to attack in such a way that it would have generated the resolve needed on the part of the United States and its NATO allies to resort to using nuclear weapons. NATO conventional forces postured and prepared to fight in such a way that the Warsaw Pact would have had to mount a massive, brazen, and manifestly aggressive attack that would have catalyzed the West's resolve to go nuclear. US nuclear forces, meanwhile, were increasingly pushed toward greater discrimination, providing options for a limited response that would have contributed to blunting a Soviet Bloc attack while also communicating restraint in order to persuade Moscow to halt the offensive.⁵⁶ Ultimately, the threat of total nuclear war hovered at the end of such a scenario, but that otherwise incredible threat became more credible as it would have followed a massive Soviet attack, an enormous conventional war, and several stages of nuclear escalation.

The basic strategic problem in later Cold War Europe is strikingly similar to what the United States faces with China today. NATO was fundamentally an anti-hegemonic coalition (albeit fully formalized as a multilateral alliance,

which appears unlikely in Asia for the foreseeable future) designed to prevent the Soviet Union from securing hegemony first over Europe and then beyond.⁵⁷ The United States was the external cornerstone balancer of that coalition. Indeed, in key respects the military problem in the Cold War was worse than that facing an anti-hegemonic coalition in Asia today. NATO considered its conventional forces inferior to the Warsaw Pact's with respect to the strategically significant scenarios on which it had to focus, above all Central Europe and especially the Federal Republic of Germany. Few officials and experts believed that a denial defense for Continental NATO would really work (although there were hopes that the alliance was moving toward being able to mount one if the Cold War continued).⁵⁸ NATO therefore had to figure out how to make credible deliberate vertical escalation that would have profoundly risked the most grievous damage to itself—a harder problem than what the anti-hegemonic coalition in Asia should face, if it prepares well for a denial defense strategy.

And yet deterrence held in the Cold War. If nothing else, this suggests that it is possible to make deterrence work against a state as powerful as the Soviet Union even in situations of local conventional inferiority, if one has the right overall strategy and enough resolve. This suggests that an anti-hegemonic coalition in Asia could use a denial and binding strategy to blunt any Chinese aspirations for regional hegemony. China's true incentive in the face of such an effective strategy would be to avoid starting a war in the first place, which is also the highest goal for the anti-hegemonic coalition. Just as the Soviet Union never saw enough of an advantage to precipitating a war in Europe during the Cold War, true success would be for China to see how things would likely unfold and never risk war in the first place.

The crucial premise of the binding strategy is that military and other material power can be consciously employed to create political, perceptual effects that matter in the war. The key for this to work is to have the war unfold in such a way that key decision-makers in the coalition and in important fence-sitter countries increase their valuation of the stakes at hand. This means that strict military efficacy cannot always be the preeminent criterion for force planning. Military strategy must be designed to create or avoid specific, concrete political effects, which themselves shape the war.

Thus, to be truly effective in a limited war with China, US and other engaged states' military planning needs to serve political purposes, not only in an abstract

sense of seeking to attain vague ends like regional stability or freedom of the seas, but in a much more immediate, instrumental sense. Planning must deliberately shape the war and how it is fought in order to influence the combatants' resolve. This simply follows Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics by other means—but not only that war is a continuation of politics in some general sense or solely in its purposes but rather that “the political view is the object, war is the means, *and the means must always include the object in [their] conception.*”⁵⁹ Within these bounds, military necessity should naturally reign—since failing to give military requirements due primacy in appropriate bounds is to invite defeat—but defense planners must always be conscious of the political effect and circumstance of military operations.

This attention to political effect is not only for purely political goods. Properly done, orienting military ways and means to political objectives and within appropriate political bounds has concrete military-operational benefits. Greater resolve will result in more resources being allocated to a fight and fewer strictures on their employment. In the ideal, then, military and political actions should form a positive feedback loop, each strengthening the other.