

Mainland China on a Tightrope: Lessons for Its Taiwan Reunification Strategies in the Context of the Latest Russian Attack on Ukraine

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Abstract

This study looks into the reunification strategies of mainland China towards Taiwan, which it considers a renegade province, in the context of the latest Russian attack on Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022. Mainland China attaches great importance to reuniting with Taiwan, and it is ready to use force to realize this objective, if necessary. Its reunification strategies are anchored on irredentist narratives and nationalist underpinnings but are tamed by international considerations. Therefore, China's international relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region are given focus, regardless of the state of relations of these countries with Taiwan. This is because China's relations with these countries also serve as a barometer that influences its behavior, vis-à-vis its reunification strategies towards Taiwan. Inspired by conspiracy theory which fuels the popular belief that China will be more aggressive in dealing with Taiwan on reunification, brought to the fore by Russia's latest attack on Ukraine, this study found out the opposite. Such latest

attack gave China compelling reasons to be more circumspect in dealing with Taiwan on matters of reunification.

Keywords: *reunification strategies, mainland China, Taiwan, renegade province, Russia's attack on Ukraine*

1. Introduction

The latest attack of Russia on Ukraine which started on February 24, 2022 gave hint to China scholars, leading them to opine that China, sometime in the not-so-distant future will do the same, that it will attack Taiwan in order to pursue its reunification plans with the self-governing island-state. These scholars are drawing parallels between the Russia-Ukraine and the China-Taiwan issues in accordance with the Realist Theory in International Relations, that it is but natural to use force on entities that endanger national sovereignty, honor and survival, in order to attain power and dominance. Because of the anarchic structure of the international system, great powers are forced to seek security at another's expense, dooming even peaceful nations to an unrelenting struggle for power and dominance (Glaser, 2010). Morgenthau (1978) particularly stressed that international politics are shaped by a state's interests especially in terms of power. Man's insatiable lust for power is the main cause of conflict (Morgenthau, 1978, as cited by Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). Departing from these arguments, these scholars argue that Russia has reasons to attack Ukraine, as the latter is trying to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and is cozying up to the European Union (EU) – organizations that Russia perceives as threats to its national interests and survival. This is referred to as Individual Self-defense, from the point of view of international law. Part of the reason why Russia's attack is justified, according to this view, is that Ukraine is

bringing to the doorstep of Russia a powerful entity, personified by NATO, that will police its every action, thereby limiting the political and military legroom of the latter. These observer-scholars find reinforcement in their assertions, because at one point, this has been in fact one of the narratives advanced by Russia, claiming that Ukraine's membership in NATO is a hostile act that will endanger its existence. The country's strong displeasure at Ukraine's plans of joining NATO is reflected for instance in President Vladimir Putin's statement that, "No Russian leader could stand idly by in the face of steps toward NATO membership for Ukraine. That would be a hostile act toward Russia" (Masters, 2022). No wonder then that Russia has to thwart any action of Ukraine that tilt towards NATO membership. So, the military attack happened! But then, although such attack is justified by such theoretical postulation, this could be problematic in the real world, because brute force when used against defenseless people immediately gains support especially from a restive public. And so, Russia and its leaders as will be highlighted later, have re-calibrated their approach in justifying the attack, but still along the self-defense argument, in order to gain favor from the international community.

It is common knowledge that Russia and Ukraine were members of the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). As is known, the USSR came into being by virtue of the Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and was approved on December 20, 1922, in which Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (Russia) and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukraine), together with Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, came together as the founding republics that saw the creation of the Union. Although the USSR's membership grew to 15 republics during its heyday before its disintegration in 1991, the four founding republics or federation of

republics mentioned above, were the ones that stirred the Union into an important and powerful political entity. On the other hand, the other republics considered their membership in the Union as something imposed and therefore, they immediately left the grouping after the disintegration of the USSR, which many believed Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) drove the final nail that sealed the USSR's coffin. Consequently, the member-republics signed the Belavezha Accord on December 8, 1991 signaling the death of the Soviet Union. It did not take long therefore for the member-republics to declare independence, as many in fact considered their membership in the defunct Union as forceful annexation. Georgia for instance did not join the Soviet Union voluntarily and the entire period during which it was forced to join the Soviet Union was marked by bloody terror and repression (Departments of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia, 1991). Also, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were annexed by the Kremlin in June of 1940 (Vardys, 1966) and these states regard their incorporation into the USSR as illegal and was not recognized by the Western countries (Daudze, 2022).

Before the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, Russia and Ukraine, the two important republics of the Union had been strange bedfellows. But to their credit, the duo can be said as the backbone of the Union in which the bulk of the resources that sustained its politico-military existence as a global superpower then, came from the two republics. Russia for instance, possessed the greatest number of nuclear warheads among the former member-republics of the Union, and it has carried that reputation to this day, being the country that has the largest stockpile of nuclear warheads in the world (FAS, 2022). Meanwhile, Ukraine, although it has agreed to denuclearize itself by virtue of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, signed in Budapest, Hungary on December 5, 1994, three years after the disintegration of the USSR, had

the largest nuclear power station in Europe and fifth largest in the world – the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, with an installed capacity of 5,700MW (*Power Technology*, 26th June 2019). The country also featured though infamously, when on April 26, 1986 the Chernobyl nuclear power plant found within its border, near the city of Kiev, ruptured, sending out radioactive substances into the air that reached as far as Belarus, and other parts of Europe. Still, after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Ukraine was believed to possess the third largest stockpile of nuclear weapons worldwide (*The Hindu*, 28th February 2022), thanks to the legacy and protection of the quondam Soviet Union.

The historical narratives of Russia and Ukraine as nations differ in many respects. What brought them together under the USSR as a political umbrella, was a common ideological bond as member-republics of a quondam superpower, representing the Communist block on the other side of the Iron Curtain, during the protracted Cold War against its protagonist, the United States of America. Now, the rest is history.

Meanwhile, the China and Taiwan problem, which came to the limelight when Russia attacked Ukraine is a totally different story. Unlike the Russia-Ukraine case wherein the two consider themselves as equal entities, brought together by a common desire to become party to a grand design in the past, to dominate the world, the China and Taiwan case is of an irredentist nature. They may be poles apart on so many issues but the two agree on one important statement with nationalist underpinning – that they both belong to the Chinese nation and therefore parts of China. Their disagreement hinges on the issue of who or which group represents China. The former is claiming that it has the right to demand for the latter to return to the fold of the motherland that is China, as it is but a wayward and a renegade province. However, the latter is singing a different tune, saying that it is the legal government representing China in the community of nations, and the Communist

government in Beijing, which emerged victorious after the Chinese Civil War in 1949, was the main reason why the Republic of China (ROC) government retreated to Taiwan, where it established its seat of power in the capital, Taipei. The ROC government, now based in Taiwan, is saying further that although the Communist government in the mainland has not yet occupied the ROC government's central power base in Taipei, even just for a single day, it is now claiming to represent the whole of China, including Taiwan, in the international community. For the ROC government in Taiwan, this is unacceptable. It further reinforces its claim as the true legal representative of the Chinese government in the community of nations, saying that constituencies in the Chinese mainland were represented in the first National Assembly which resumed its meeting in Taipei in 1954, five years after the ROC government retreated to Taiwan. Although such representatives did not submit for re-election since then, and served office for 59 years until it was dissolved in 2005, is nonetheless a relevant political argument, that the ROC government on Taiwan is advancing to reinforce its claim that it is the legal government representing China. Under the 1947 ROC Constitution, representatives of the first National Assembly, must serve for a term of six years only. But since 1949 when the Chinese Communists effectively controlled mainland China, the prospect of conducting subsequent elections for representatives in the National Assembly became impossible. Because of this development, the Judicial Yuan decided that the members of the first National Assembly representing Communist-controlled constituencies in the mainland, must serve in a hold-over capacity until new elections could be held. However, on August 23, 2004, the Legislative Yuan proposed a series of constitutional amendments that included the dissolution of the first National Assembly. The following year, the National Assembly was dissolved.

To add complexity to the China-Taiwan political tussle, the community of nations is divided on the issue of Chinese representation on the world stage. The ROC on Taiwan's claim that it is the real representative of China in the international community is reinforced by the unequivocal support of its allies that can mostly be found in Latin America and the Caribbean, and are all members of the United Nations. These sovereign states recognize the ROC on Taiwan as the legal government representing China. On the other hand, mainland China is well recognized as the true representative of China by the majority of states in the international community. The country wields power in the United Nations (UN) system, it being a permanent member of its Security Council with veto power. This status quo makes the China-Taiwan case a unique international problem which the Members of the United Nations and the international community find cumbersome to deal with.

Up to this day, China and Taiwan are still reeling towards a scenario of a tilted political balance, with reunification at the center of contention.

2. China-Taiwan and Russia-Ukraine Cases: Parallels and Disconnects

The latest Russian attack on Ukraine heightened the interest of China scholars and observers. They made postulations by comparing this particular case to the China-Taiwan case, to the point of suggesting that the likelihood of China attacking Taiwan is greater now and it is just a matter of time before such a scenario may unfold. This is rather a dangerous observation because it took the China-Taiwan case at face value by comparing it to the Russia-Ukraine case, failing at the first instance to investigate and to pore into the details of each case, which merit careful consideration before arriving at such a conclusion.

Admittedly, there are similarities between the two cases, which tempted us to conclude that what happened to the latter will happen to the former. It is important to also look at the differences of the two cases, as these could serve as guideposts that may restrain us in making nuanced postulations. This part will discuss the similarities and differences of the Russia-Ukraine case and the China-Taiwan case with the end in view of guiding us in crafting objective arguments.

On February 24, 2022, a fine late winter day in most parts of Europe, the world was shocked when Russia attacked Ukraine. The initial reaction of countries, especially the immediate neighbors of Ukraine was one of empathy, after groups of startled Ukrainians started trekking and entered their borders. Immediately, barely a day after the attack, Poland and Hungary which share common borders with Ukraine have been swarmed with Ukrainians, who desperately left their homeland to safer grounds, although many were still left behind, “cowering in cold cellars as occupying soldiers drove tanks into their lands and dug trenches in their vegetable yards” (BBC, 23rd May 2022), hoping later on, that the attack will be abated. The sight of Ukrainians young and old alike, aimlessly seeking safe and hospitable havens elsewhere, was a reminder of very similar events in the past, when wars ravaged swatches of unfortunate lands, in many parts of the world. Witnesses to the aftermath of the attack, which reverberated in the consciousness of many, felt the sorry state of the Ukrainians as they negotiated their fate, along unfamiliar paths, held to ransom by the attacking Russians. In fact, even foreigners, like students coming from as far as the Philippines, based in Hungary, braced together and shared their resources, if only to extend the least help they can offer, to the newly-arrived Ukrainians. Such was the empathetic gesture of people who showed their displeasure at Russia’s *animus dominandi*, by coming to the aid of Ukraine and its people. Many in fact verbalized their

disapproval of the attack, even Russians themselves, in which by doing so, earned them the ire of their own government, which considers criticism of the attack as a criminal offense. It has been documented that about dozens of people in Russia are facing 10 or more years imprisonment for sharing what the authorities claim as false information about the Armed forces – a new crime introduced into law to clamp down on war critics (Amnesty International, 1st March 2022). Furthermore, representatives from the United Nations (UN), the African Commission on Human Rights (ACHR), the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (ItACHR) and Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for their part, collectively condemned the invasion and continuous aggression against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation (OHCHR, 4th May 2022). Meanwhile, the United Nations General Assembly has condemned in the strongest terms Russia's aggression against Ukraine in violation of the UN Charter, which only allows the inter-state use of force for self-defense or under the Security Council's authorization (Yip, 2022).

This attack is a violation of the United Nations Charter and a provocative act of military aggression by a state on another totally independent and sovereign state, whose independence and sovereignty are widely recognized by almost all countries in the international community. This pronouncement is echoed by Milanovic (2022) that "the Russian Federation has used 'force' in the sense of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter against Ukraine, and has done so on a large scale". Russia's attack on Ukraine is likewise a violation of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, because it is explicitly stated in the memorandum that the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States are prohibited from threatening or using military force or economic coercion against Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, except

in self-defense (UNGA and UNSC, 1994). As expected therefore, the attack is justified by Russia as done in self-defense as this is expressly stated in the memorandum as well. However, this argument is just a rehashed version of the statement of Russian President Vladimir Putin himself, who initially floated his rhetoric of attacking Ukraine because of Russia's displeasure in the former's desire to become a member of both NATO and the EU. At any rate, this self-defense argument of Russia is questioned by scholars and experts as shallow and defies principles of international law (Weller, 2022; Bellinger, 2022; Powell, 2022; Varaki, 2022; Torrens, 2022). Russia's explanation or argument of its attack on Ukraine as a self-defense operation is premised on the request of Donetsk and Luhansk, for military assistance. In international law parlance, this is referred to as Collective Self-defense. So, since self-defense can be considered as a legal ground that Russia can claim as a veneer for its attack, it noticeably does not depart from this and keeps itself consistently anchored on this argumentation. But then, it has to be made clear that Donetsk and Luhansk are parts of Ukraine's territory. Although a sizeable portion of their populations speak Russian as a result of the migration of Russian workers that worked in the coal mines of Donetsk and Luhansk which is popularly called as the Donbas region, after World War II, Russia cannot intervene and attack Ukraine in the name of coming to the aid of the people in the two regions. The reason for this is that these regions are parts of Ukrainian territory, even though each conducted a referendum to secede. A breakaway region's conduct of referendum to secede is not a unilateral decision (United Nations Security Council Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, as cited by Butler *et. al.*, 2012) on the part of the seceding party. According to international law experts, such a decision must be concurred by the state from which the breakaway region wishes to secede from (Lieblich, 2022) in this case, Ukraine. In

failing to observe this international law dictum, and coming to the aid of the breakaway regions, even if they succeed in declaring independence, will still amount to interference in the affairs of a sovereign state, simply because the state from which these two regions want to secede from does not allow such secession and therefore, a contravention of international law. This rests on the principle of territorial integrity which rationale being to maintain international stability and to prevent the fragmentation of states (*ibid.*). Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN political affairs chief, also shared her opinion on this when she said that “unilateral actions aimed to provide a veneer of legitimacy to the attempted acquisition by force by one State of another State’s territory, while claiming to represent the will of the people, cannot be regarded as legal under international law” (*UN News*, 27th September 2022). However, even with these legal safeguards to make a region’s secession as not merely a walk in the park, Donetsk and Luhansk, pushed through with their declaration of independence just the same, with Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik as their leaders respectively. Donetsk, officially called the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR), and Luhansk as Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), by their leaders, were officially recognized by Russia as independent states. These two regions have been fighting for independence since February 2014.

It is also important to note that Russia issued about 720,000 Russian passports to roughly one-fifth of the regions’ population (*VOA*, 21st February 2022). Whatever Russia’s motives in doing this, cannot change the fact, that in the absence of a clear act of concurrence from the government of Ukraine that Donetsk and Luhansk can secede, and become independent states, Ukraine can still exercise its sovereignty over the two breakaway regions regardless of the number of Russian passport holders within the territories of the two regions. Strictly speaking, those possessing Russian passports within the state boundaries

of Ukraine are considered foreigners, but by whom the host government is bound to respect and extend basic courtesy. So just like in other parts of the world, when foreigners encounter serious problems within the boundaries of other states, the states by which these people are citizens try their best to get them out of harm's way. Russia did not lift a finger to ferry them home, but instead claimed that this Russian-speaking population has been subjected to genocide by the Ukrainian government, portrayed as a Nazi government by Russia (Fortuin, 2022). Consequently, it slapped Ukraine with military attack. This time, Donetsk and Luhansk's request for military defense is used as the reason for the legitimacy of the attack, as collective self-defense, as it can be justified as legal under the framework of the United Nations Charter. But again, Russia's justifications citing the attack as done in the interest of both individual self-defense and collective self-defense do not sit well with international law experts. So, in order to thwart any possible argument that may give path to the filing of a case of intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, Russia annexed the two regions as part of its territory. This annexation pushed Ukraine and the European Union to file a resolution, first in the UN Security Council and later in the General Assembly, after the resolution was vetoed earlier in the Council by Russia. At any rate, such annexation gives a new twist to the problem. Since the two breakaway regions which unilaterally declared independence are now part of Russia, although such annexation may not be considered legal by most states in the international community, Russia can now argue that an attack on Donetsk and Luhansk is an attack on Russia.

Similarly, in terms of the resolution of a problem of this nature in the United Nations, an attack of China on Taiwan will result in the latter counting on the support of other states in the international community, just like what Ukraine went through. This is because

Taiwan is considerably a weak state if plotted against China's military capability. Taiwan's annual defense budget of US\$10.7 billion (*Business Insider India*, 13th July 2021) for instance which is dwarfed by China's US\$216 billion (*ibid.*), is all it takes to consider, in order to conclude that the former will surely be crippled if the latter will make good its threat to use force. China like Russia, which is undoubtedly the stronger state in this conflict, can always flex its influence to thwart any move, relative to any resolution that may be submitted to the United Nations Security Council by any of Taiwan's allies, for it to abandon the reunification path and declare itself as a separate entity, which China will surely deem contrary to its national interests. Such an agenda will not pass in the United Nations because China like Russia wields veto power in the Security Council.

What makes the China-Taiwan case different to that of the Russia-Ukraine case in so far as the problem resolution mechanism in the United Nations is concerned is that, unlike Ukraine, Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations. However, this does not mean that Taiwan is totally excluded from the protective aegis and inclusivity ideals of the United Nations. As explicitly provided in Article 31(2), of the United Nations Charter for instance, a state which is not a Member of the United Nations may bring to the attention of the Security Council or of the General Assembly any dispute to which it is a party if it accepts in advance, for the purposes of the dispute, the obligations of pacific settlement provided in the present Charter. In addition to this, Taiwan can always count on the few but loyal states, by which it has diplomatic and close relations, and are members of the United Nations. If Ukraine has the European Union as its strongest supporter in the United Nations against Russia's military adventurism, Taiwan has the United States that will surely come to its rescue, in the event of China's military attack. This is because the United States has a strong commitment to the

defense of Taiwan and the president of the United States is required to ensure that determinations on defense articles and services for Taiwan would be made without regard to the views of the People's Republic of China (Wolff and Simon (eds.), 1982). And the United States does not make this commitment a secret. This can be mirrored for instance from the statement made by the current US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi when she visited Taiwan on August 2, 2022 when she said that her visit "honors America's unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan's vibrant democracy" (*CNN*, 3rd August 2022). This is a strong statement that Chinese leaders may not find pleasing to the ear.

In both of the cases, as is already established, the protagonists involve states which are not equally endowed with political and military powers. This makes the relational intercourse between each of the pair a rather discomfiting scenario, because the powerful party is oftentimes hard to budge and have that air of superiority when dealing with the imagined less powerful adversary. As already pointed out, what the less powerful party can count on in the tussle with its powerful enemy is the support of friendly states in the international community, in which some of them can counter the influence of the powerful party in their political and military conflicts. This is what exactly happened to the Russia-Ukraine case which erupted into a regional war, and in effect feared by some to escalate into a third world war (*USNWR*, 29th September 2022). In this conflict, the former is unrestrained to do so as it wishes and undoubtedly has the military wherewithal to attack the latter.

Russia is awash with power both domestically and internationally. On the domestic front, it undoubtedly has the resources to cause uncompromising enemies to acquiesce and to suffer untold consequences. Ukraine knows by now that morality and the act of dutifully following the norms, do not always translate to a safer political milieu. That is because its enemy is a "rule-maker" state, a permanent

member of the UN Security Council, which is also a principal rule-breaker and has the capacity to destroy the world (Schenoni and Escudé, 2016). As what unfolded before the eyes of the world on February 24, 2022, Russia as a principal rule-breaker, does not always abide by international norms in dealing with other states in the community of nations. To this end, world leaders, international relations scholars, international law experts and even the UN Secretary General himself, condemned Russia's latest attack on Ukraine as a violation of the United Nations Charter and a breach of international law (Bellinger, 2022; *UN News*, 10th March 2022; Brunk, 2022; Dworkin, 2022).

The pairs both involve powerful states that can command compliance from less powerful states, which makes the situation between each of the pairs a concern of the United Nations, otherwise a conflict between them if left unchecked by the international community, may slide into a situation that can cause more harm than good.

The legal battle between Russia and Ukraine had already been heard and deliberated within the United Nations system. However, the likelihood that this problem will be given a meaningful solution is in doubt because Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto power. As already pointed out, it can always veto any resolution submitted to the Council when it deems contrary to its interests. This was exactly what happened when a four-page resolution prepared by the European Union in cooperation with Ukraine, that intends to end the Russian Federation's military offensive against Ukraine, was submitted by Albania and the United States to the Council for action. On page 3 of the resolution, No. 3 demands that the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any Member State; while No. 4 on the same page, further demands that the Russian Federation immediately, completely and unconditionally

withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders (UNGA, 2022). The 15-member council voted in such a way that the Russian Federation of course vetoed it while China, India, the United Arab Emirates abstained and the remaining 11 members voted in support of the resolution.

Failing to settle the problem in the United Nations Security Council which is the body in charge of maintaining international peace and security, the same resolution was brought to the United Nations General Assembly. This time, the majority of the Member States voted to send Russia the message that it should withdraw immediately from the Ukrainian regions it annexed as part of its territory. The vote saw 141 states in favor of the motion, 5 against and 35 abstentions (*Al Jazeera*, 3rd March 2022). The 5 countries that voted against it were Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea (*NPR*, 2nd March 2022). By this time, Russia lost its moral compass in the hollowed chamber of the General Assembly which is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations that comprise all Member States.

In terms of the time element involved in the pursuance of the resolution of the problem on the part of Russia, the case it has with Ukraine involved precipitated events, which the former saw as a litmus test on how the international community responded to a prior military operation directed against another independent state. Russia saw that the international community was lukewarm on the issue when it annexed Crimea, and the world did not respond so vigorously unlike what happened in the present Ukraine crisis. In a way, Russia thought that it was able to get away with serious repercussions after its Crimea annexation. This prior military adventure may have precipitated why it again attacked Ukraine, in a relatively short span of time since the Crimea annexation, using the same argument of self-defense in attacking

Ukraine again. This time however, it already received heavy scolding from the international community. Because of this, Russia was slapped with sanctions which resulted in economic woes for the country.

In the case of China and Taiwan, the former is very restrained on how to handle the issue. It involves of course saber-rattling but diplomacy takes more space in its strategy by reminding Taiwan and its allies, especially the United States, to observe certain agreements regarding the resolution of the problem, which the stakeholders entered into. China keeps on telling the US that dealing or contacting Taiwan and its officials is an intervention in its domestic affairs, as it considers the Taiwan issue a purely domestic issue. So, for the longest time, since 1949 when it wrested control of mainland China at the conclusion of the Chinese Civil War, after about 75 years, Beijing ventured on two military operations to pursue its reunification agenda with Taiwan. Actually, these military operations were directed at the Kinmen and Matsu Islands that lie very close to the mainland. Kinmen is just about 10 kilometers from Xiamen City of Fujian Province in mainland China. The first military attack was in the second half of 1954 which continued until early 1955 and the second was in 1958. These military attacks are called the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis respectively. In both of these attacks, mainland China was unable to control Kinmen and the Matsu Island group, because of strong U.S. military support to Taiwan. Kinmen and Matsu Islands are administered as separate counties by Taiwan.

Since 1958, after it failed to control Kinmen and the Matsu Islands, mainland China is a bit restrained and circumspect now in dealing with Taiwan on matters of reunification. The strong support of the U.S. to Taiwan, which was manifested during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954-1955 and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, and the strong emphasis it gave on economic development and the fear associated with

the collapse of its economy, are the two important factors that deter mainland China from using military force against Taiwan. Mainland China's leaders since the time of Deng Xiaoping, put more emphasis on economic development which somehow lessened its military adventurism, thereby egging it to the back burner. And this military adventurism, although not a closed option, is more unlikely now that its economy is in its best form. This is because of the thought that the good economy it enjoys today after years of prudent fiscal and economic programs and reforms, can be wiped out in just a matter of days, if it experiences the same fate Russia suffered after its attack on Ukraine. And the Chinese leaders cannot afford that to happen. So, China is left to use diplomacy in dealing with Taiwan, as the latter can also always play its U.S. card. In consonance with Public Law 96-8 or the Taiwan Relations Act, Taiwan can count on the U.S. for its arm supplies for defense purposes.

So, observing the Russia-Ukraine case, and looking at what happened to Russia as an ally, it is unlikely that China will once again flex its military muscle against Taiwan as it does not want to suffer the same repercussions Russia suffered and is still suffering to this day, as an aftermath of its attack on Ukraine. Apparently, China is put in a bind of balancing between its concern for a close ally and the avoidance of hate it could be subjected to, if it openly endorses an action widely criticized as illegal through the lens of international law (Powell, 2022) that further bred war crimes (Howard, 2022). With this, Chinese leaders are very restrained and careful in their statements about the attack. For instance, Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister said in a carefully crafted statement, that China always respects each country's sovereignty and that the Ukraine issue is complex (*CNBC*, 24th February 2022). Also, when the President of the EU Charles Michel met Chinese President Xi Jinping on 1 December 2022, Xi, referring to the Ukraine crisis, said that

it is important to prevent an escalation or expansion of the crisis, stay committed to promoting talks for peace, manage the spillovers of the crisis, and watch out for any risk of bloc confrontation (MFA, PRC, 1st December 2022). These statements are manifestations of mainland China's attitude in advocating peaceful settlement of disputes between and among states. However, this must not be taken at face value, for everything may change. But then, since these pronouncements came from high-ranking Chinese officials, a double talk will surely backfire. The world is in fact watching closely at China's every move relative to Taiwan especially after Russia attacked Ukraine. So, a deceitful plan will surely not serve the best interests of China.

3. China's Reunification Strategies towards Taiwan in Light of Russia's Attack on Ukraine

China's reunification plans towards Taiwan can be said to be pragmatic. Although mainland China does not dismiss the possibility of using force to pursue this plan, it seems unlikely that it will make true of this promise, at least in the immediate future, especially at this time when it sees the negative repercussions Russia suffered, and is still suffering as a result of its attack on Ukraine.

With Russia's attack on Ukraine, which resulted in the annexation of some of the latter's territory, the picture of mainland China attacking Taiwan had been floated as a near possibility, although any action on the part of mainland China attacking Taiwan is being pursued to attain reunification and not annexation. This is because China and Taiwan both consider themselves as part of China, and since they are at present separated after the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, any union that may result in the future will be called reunification and not annexation. With this premise in mind, this part of the paper will look at the reunification

plans and strategies of mainland China concerning Taiwan, and from here, investigate further and deduce whether or not mainland China will make true its threat to attack Taiwan, in order to attain reunification. It is also important to note that although in many official pronouncements, mainland China expresses that its reunification goal will be done in a peaceful fashion (MFA, PRC, n.d.), the real actions it did to pursue such a goal, negate the pronouncements.

After the Chinese Communists led by Mao Zedong, took control of Mainland China in 1949, the Republic of China government led by the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan, where it established its seat of government in the capital, Taipei. Fresh from its victory, the Chinese Communists after about five years, in 1954, shelled and attacked the islands of Kinmen and Matsu, which is often referred to as the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, that lasted up to May, 1955. The islands of Kinmen and Matsu are controlled by the Republic of China government and are so close to the Chinese mainland. Kinmen is only two kilometers from the city of Xiamen, Fujian Province while Matsu is ten kilometers from the city of Fuzhou, also in Fujian Province. Although at first, the United States was adamant to assist Taiwan in the midst of mainland China's attacks, it eventually came to its aid in light of the Korean War which started in June, 1950. This early reunification strategy of mainland China, using force, faltered.

In August, 1958, after about four years since the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Chinese Communists started to attack the islands of Kinmen and Matsu again. This is often referred to as the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. Although the attack ended up with mainland China's forces retreating to their bases in the mainland after the United States came to the aid of Taiwan, this mainland China's second military adventure targeted at Taiwan, served an important purpose. That is, it kept its reunification narrative alive, as part of a strategy by packaging it in a

bold form of displaying force to take the island and reunify with the mainland, if necessary.

As time went by, the political developments in Taiwan did not alter this reunification narrative. The administration of President Lee Teng-hui from 1988 to 2000 saw a marked policy for the Republic of China to promote Taiwanese identity as distinct from the Chinese identity. This was interpreted by many, including fellow local politicians of the Kuomintang or the Nationalist Party as promoting independence for Taiwan. It was during Lee Teng-hui's administration when the Republic of China government heightened its offensive to win as much recognition as possible from the international community. Lee Teng-hui even visited the United States in June, 1995, though as a "private trip" to attend a reunion at his *alma mater*, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. This earned him the reputation to be the first elected president of the Republic of China on Taiwan to visit the U.S., after the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949. This visit came about as a result of the common pleasure of US Senators from both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party to allow Lee Teng-hui to visit the US. Senator Murkowski, a Republican from Alaska and Senator Simon and Senator Robb, Democrats from Illinois and Virginia respectively, told then President Bill Clinton that such a visit will be in the best interest of the United States (*Taiwan Communiqué*, 1995). This visit however was interpreted by mainland China as interference of the United States in its domestic affairs, and of Lee Teng-hui as an advocate of independence for Taiwan. Again, these events rubbed a salt into the wound, and mainland China answered by conducting missile tests from July 1995 to March 1996, to remind both the United States and Taiwan, that such moves are not to be taken lightly. These missile tests also coincided with the 1996 Taiwan Presidential Election, interpreted by many as mainland China's tactic to intimidate the Taiwan voters not to support

independence-leaning candidates. Lee Teng-hui, the candidate endorsed by the Kuomintang, the ruling party, emerged the winner against his opponents. These missile tests conducted by mainland China from 1995 to 1996, also called the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, were far from achieving mainland China's reunification plans. Again, such tests are part of mainland China's strategy to remain consistent in its pronouncement that a declaration of independence for Taiwan will not be tolerated and that force will be used in the event of such a declaration. This consistency in its reunification strategy, especially in using force if Taiwan declares independence from mainland China, will certainly favor the latter's future narrative to justify a military attack against the former. Although such justification may not sit well with states that are diplomatically close to Taiwan, and could be interpreted very differently by some other states, this will nonetheless send a signal to the international community, that China is ready to face any consequences if only to save the Chinese nation, for it is the common aspiration and sacred responsibility of all Chinese sons and daughters to realize the complete reunification of the motherland (MFA, PRC, 2nd August 2022).

Recently, from August 2-3, 2022 Nancy Pelosi, the Democrat Representative of California and the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, visited Taiwan. According to the Chinese government, the visit seriously infringes on China's sovereignty and security, seriously undermines China's territorial integrity, seriously jeopardizes peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and seriously erodes the political foundation of China-US relations (Xinhua, 25th August 2022), although Pelosi has every reason to do so. In fact, this was not the first visit by a Speaker of the US House of Representatives because her predecessor, Newt Gingrich, also visited Taiwan in 1997. Mainland China's consistency to demonstrate its threat to use force is shown again

after Pelosi's Taiwan visit. True to form, China conducted live-fire drills in Japan's exclusive economic zone and, on August 5, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense reported 68 Chinese aircraft in the Taiwan Strait (Spengler, 2022).

Mainland China is balancing itself on a tightrope after it experienced that the use of force in the past, to achieve reunification with Taiwan did not work. This could be seen from the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954 up to the Fourth Taiwan Crisis in August 2022, when the use of force or at least the display of force failed to attain its reunification agenda with Taiwan. Now, it has to tame a bit, and use some other tactics that could possibly lure Taiwan into acquiescence. In 1997 when the control of Hong Kong reverted from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, the latter took the opportunity to highlight the idea that it is willing to offer an arrangement to Taiwan, like the arrangement it now has with Hong Kong which is the so-called "one country two systems" model. This model is not new for its history can be traced as early as 1960 when Mao Zedong said that "provided Taiwan is returned to the motherland with the exception of foreign affairs which must be handled by the national authorities, all the military and political power and the power of appointing officials may be delegated to the Taiwan authorities" (MFA, PRC, n.d.). This model had been given due notice as a template for mainland China's reunification with Taiwan after this was implemented in Hong Kong in 1997. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (1998) elaborated that the concept of "one country, two systems" will be practiced within the sovereign state of the People's Republic of China. The ministry further explained that, on the premise of one China, the main body of the country will practice the socialist system, while the existing capitalist system and way of life in Taiwan will remain unchanged for a long period of time. Furthermore, Ye Jianying, the

Chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress in a speech on September 30, 1981 said that after China is reunited, Taiwan may become a special administrative region, enjoy a high degree of autonomy and may keep its military force. Mr. Ye further said that the national government will not intervene in the local affairs of Taiwan (*ibid.*).

The idea of creating special administrative regions as mentioned by Mr. Ye, is provided in Article 31, Chapter I, captioned General Provisions, of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (NPC, PRC, website, 2019). It reads:

The state may establish special administrative regions when necessary. The systems instituted in special administrative regions shall in light of specific circumstances be prescribed by laws enacted by the National People's Congress.

This provision regarding the creation of administrative regions was added to the constitution of the People's Republic of China in 1982 during the Fifth Session of the National People's Congress. As part of the reunification narrative, Mr. Ye explicitly mentioned in his speech, that the status of Taiwan after it is reunified with mainland China is that of a special administrative region which will enjoy a high degree of autonomy (MFA, PRC, n.d.). This seems however to be a lofty goal because 80 percent of the people in Taiwan disapprove of mainland China's "one country, two systems" model and that the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) stated that the people of Taiwan will never accept the "one country, two systems" model (MAC, ROC, 21st March 2019). The MAC is a cabinet-level office under the Legislative Yuan of the Republic of China on Taiwan whose mandate is to plan, develop and implement policies relative to cross-strait relations concerning mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau.

Against the backdrop of a Taiwan public that is lukewarm to the idea of the “one country, two systems” model, wherein Taiwan is envisioned by mainland China as a special administrative region after reunification, the Chinese government through the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council Information Office published a white paper with the title “The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era” on August 10, 2022. The white paper contains a Preamble, five sections and a Conclusion. This white paper is the latest official pronouncement of mainland China regarding its reunification agenda with Taiwan. There is no doubt that mainland China puts great emphasis on the issue of reunifying with Taiwan. In the preamble of this latest white paper, it is mentioned that there were two white papers in the past published by the Chinese government, one was “The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China” in August 1993, and the other was “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue” in February 2000. It is important to note that the publication of this latest white paper on August 10, 2022 came after two events that may have bearing on the ideas contained therein, and how these ideas are packaged and presented to the public.

One of the events that perhaps influenced how at least the concepts in the white paper are presented and explained is the latest attack of Russia on Ukraine. Although of course there is no reference to Russia's attack on Ukraine in the white paper, China emphasized its desire for peaceful reunification with Taiwan. Interestingly, no less than China's President Xi Jinping, in reference to the resolution of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as a consequence of the former's attack on the latter, said that they must “stay committed to promoting talks for peace” (MFA, PRC, 1st December 2022). Mainland China already advanced this peaceful reunification narrative in the first two white

papers in the years 1993 and 2000, but its emphasis on peaceful reunification is given more focus in this latest white paper published in 2022. If the use of the phrase “peaceful reunification” is used as an indicator, then mainland China is indeed for peaceful reunification. In the first white paper published in 1993, the phrase “peaceful reunification” is mentioned 16 times, while it is mentioned 30 times in the second white paper published in 2000. In this latest white paper, the phrase “peaceful reunification” is mentioned 36 times, not to mention that the last part, Part V is titled, “Bright Prospect for Peaceful Reunification”. The three white papers emphasize that the mainland China government will pursue peaceful reunification with Taiwan and will only use force to pursue reunification as a last resort, and if the “authorities” in Taiwan promote the idea of independence.

Another event that may have influenced the content of the latest white paper is the visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan on August 2, 2022. The timing of the publication of the latest white paper can be a coincidence when it came after Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, but it can also be interpreted that such visit in some way pushed the mainland Chinese leaders to publish it as soon as possible after the visit, to emphasize that the leadership in mainland China, is not happy of United States government officials, especially the likes of a House Speaker, visiting Taiwan. And the content of the white paper points to circumstances where personalities or “elements” as it is termed in the white paper, are said to be still dwelling on the non-resolution of Taiwan’s representation. As is known, Pelosi is very vocal about her bias for the government system in Taiwan saying that her trip is a signal to the world that Washington stands with the self-governed island’s vibrant, robust democracy and has a sacred vow to support its defence amid growing threats from Beijing (*South China Morning Post*, 3rd August 2022). Although without naming names, it is stated in the white

paper specifically in paragraph 13 of Part I, that “some elements in a small number of countries, the US foremost among them, have colluded with forces in Taiwan, to falsely claim that the resolution did not conclusively resolve the issue of Taiwan’s representation” (Xinhua, 10th August 2022). This statement in the white paper can be interpreted that whoever favors either mainland China or Taiwan, in their tug-of-war as to China’s representation, do not consider the issue of China’s representation as already resolved.

As already pointed out, mainland China’s reunification plan with Taiwan can be said to be pragmatic. Although the Chinese government has been advancing a peaceful reunification plan with Taiwan, this has not been the case if this will be plotted against the series of military activities by mainland China’s forces directed at Taiwan’s controlled areas of Kinmen and Matsu Islands, especially during the 1950s. This military adventurism had been tamed through the passing of time in which mainland China’s reunification plan took a concrete idea of “one country, two systems”. The Chinese government traces this concept as early as 1960 in which it credited Mao Zedong to be the first leader to float the idea. From the point of view of the mainland China government, the “one country, two systems” concept foresees Taiwan as a special administrative region in which it will be given full autonomy. Taiwan authorities will be accorded administrative powers except the power to conduct foreign relations which will be done by the central government. The people of Taiwan on the other hand will be accorded freedom, including freedom of religion. For as long as the authorities in Taiwan do not deviate from the “One China Principle” by declaring independence for Taiwan, the mainland China government will pursue peaceful reunification.

4. Deterrence of China's Use of Force against Taiwan

For a long time already, almost 75 years after the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, mainland China and Taiwan have existed as separate political entities. Mainland China considers Taiwan as one of the provinces of China, but whether or not it is one of China's provinces, its de facto existence complete with the requisites of a state, is hard to ignore. The Republic of China on Taiwan also considers itself as part of China. The disagreement between the two is not on the basis of whether they belong to China or not but on who represents China in the international community. Since their separation in 1949, Taiwan has been vacillating in its stance whether to maintain the status quo as part of China or declare independence altogether as a separate political entity. In light of mainland China's reunification plan, declaration of independence by Taiwan will be dealt with by force if necessary. As stated in the latest white paper published by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and The State Council Information Office, "the state shall never allow the 'Taiwan independence' secessionist forces to make Taiwan secede from China under any name or by any means" (Xinhua, 10th August 2022). To this end, the possibility of mainland China attacking Taiwan is real, especially in light of the leaders of Taiwan perceived by the government of mainland China as secessionists. There are however factors that may deter mainland China in attacking Taiwan to pursue its reunification dream. These factors are:

(A) Fear of Economic Collapse

One of the worst-case scenarios that can happen to mainland China if it attacks Taiwan is the possibility of economic sanctions in all forms, which will surely cripple its economy. This is a grim prospect considering that mainland China's economy is built on the good

economic relations it has cultivated with other countries. If that good economic relationship falters, its economy will collapse, as a result. The Chinese leaders of course cannot allow this to happen.

Mainland China is not so endowed with resources needed for its economic development. It has however depended on its human resources, and it uses its abundant labor to assemble imported inputs into low-tech consumer goods and capital goods exports, making it the world's workshop (Li, 2007). Mainland China has been so successful in cultivating good economic relations with many countries in the world that it posted a whopping trade surplus of US\$676 billion in 2021 (Bloomberg, 14th January 2021). Trade surplus is manifested when a country's exports exceed its imports. It represents a net inflow of domestic currency from foreign markets. So, trade surplus is a good indicator of a healthy economy. Because of this economic strategy, mainland China is able to sustain remarkable economic growth despite its deficit in natural resources which are pivotal to development. This economic characteristic of mainland China however, makes it vulnerable to economic collapse once economic sanctions or economic embargo are put forward by other states that do not share in its political stance on many issues, like the issue surrounding an all-out military attack on Taiwan in the name of reunification, for instance. China's trade surplus, indicating a steady flow of domestic currency from its trading partners will certainly be wiped out in a very short period of time, if these trading partners will stop their economic intercourse with mainland China. An attack on Taiwan by mainland China will certainly have serious economic consequences that will be detrimental to mainland China's economic stature in the international community. During a worst situation, mainland China may still continue to produce goods, of course, but marketing these goods will be a challenge. This is similar to Russia's oil when many prospective markets stopped patronizing the

commodity. And to think that oil is more important than consumer goods of low quality, that are often the trademark of Made in China merchandise, the boycott of such goods is easier to rally support.

It is also important to note that unlike Russia which possesses huge oil reserves, China does not have that leverage. In terms of oil reserves, China ranks only 14th in the world (*Worldometer*, n.d.), as compared to Russia's rank at 8th in the world (*Worldometer*, n.d.). China sources its oil requirements from other countries and currently Turkmenistan is the largest supplier of China's oil (BBC, 6th December 2022). And despite the fluidity of its oil reserves, Russia still suffered economically, after a decision to stop buying Russian oil was effected by many countries, especially those which had been its traditional economic partners like Great Britain, Germany, France and many other countries in the European Union. After this incident, the supply of Russian oil was simply overflowing and the country even offered to dispose of it on a discount (*ibid.*) but only few countries took the offer. It is such an irony that a resource considered scarce, and is an important driver for economic activities in many other countries, is lying idle in a country awash with it, but has very limited options on how to maximize it for further economic growth and development. This is what economic sanctions or an embargo for that matter, can do to punish even a state considered powerful, if it does not comply with international norms and standards. Or if in the eyes of the international community, a strong state bullies a weak state, to the extent of using force to make the weak state and its innocent citizens suffer untold misery. But then, this is a given in international relations, for the world out there is cruel and laden with double standards (Escudé, 2014). Sometimes however, this cruelty and the audacity of some state actors to apply double standards, work in favor of the underdog.

(B) Taiwan's U.S. Card

As has already been seen during the Taiwan Strait crises, specifically during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954-1955 and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, the United States came to the aid of Taiwan, against the military attacks of mainland China.

The United States government is mandated by law to help Taiwan in the event of a military attack from mainland China. Aside from military intervention, the United States government is as well mandated by law to sell or provide arms and military hardware of defensive nature to Taiwan. This commitment on the part of the United States government is enshrined in Public Law 96-8 otherwise known as the Taiwan Relations Act, approved on April 10, 1979 during the 9th Congress of the United States of America.

One of the important provisions in the Taiwan Relations Act is mentioned in the section on Findings and Declaration of Policy. Under this heading, Number 3, Subsection B of Section 2 states that “the United States decision to establish diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China rests upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means” (Wolff and Simon (eds.), 1982). It is no wonder therefore that in all of the three white papers published by the People’s Republic of China, relative to its reunification plans with Taiwan, it consistently proposes peaceful reunification. Any deviation from this peaceful mode of reunification is in contravention to Public Law 96-8 or the Taiwan Relations Act of the United States of America, and therefore it can assert its intervention in favor of Taiwan should a military attack be launched by mainland China.

In Number 5, Subsection B, Section 2 of the Act, it states that the United States will “provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character, while Number 6 of the same subsection and section provides that “the United States maintains its capacity to resist any resort to force or other

forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan” (*ibid.*).

Considering that a military confrontation between and among states is staged using military hardware and equipment, it makes sense to compare the militaries of the United States, mainland China and Taiwan as they are the actors that will be immediately involved if such confrontation comes to a head. In an article of *Business Insider India*, where the world’s 20 strongest militaries were ranked, the United States came out as the world’s strongest military, mainland China’s military came in third while that of Taiwan came in 13th. In terms of budget, the United States has a whopping US\$601 billion military budget compared to mainland China’s US\$216 billion military budget. Taiwan on the other hand has a US\$10.7 billion military budget. In terms of military hardware and equipment, the United States has 13,892 aircrafts while mainland China has only 2,860 aircrafts. Taiwan on the other hand has 804 aircrafts. As for submarines, the United has 72, mainland China has 67 while Taiwan has 4. Mainland China is ahead of the United States and Taiwan in terms of tanks as it has 9,150 compared to 8,848 of the United States and 2,005 of Taiwan (*Business Insider India*, 13th July 2021).

What defines the United States military supremacy is its possession of 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers that help the nation to project global power (*Executive Flyers*, 17th October 2022) which is nearly as many as all other countries combined. In contrast, mainland China has only 3 aircraft carriers in which the third and most advanced, named “Fujian” was just launched on June 17, 2022 (*CNN*, 17th June 2022). At any rate, the aircraft carriers of the U.S. Navy are still the world’s best, enjoying a glittering record since World War II and an enviable naval culture (Song, 2022).

The data show that the U.S. military is still the best and strongest in the world, both in terms of budget and hardware or equipment. Since the strongest military in the world will come to the aid of Taiwan in the event of an attack from mainland China, as stipulated in Public Law 96-8 otherwise known as the Taiwan Relations Act, mainland China and its leaders will have second thoughts of attacking Taiwan to pursue their reunification plan with Taiwan.

5. Conclusion

The military attack of Russia on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was a notable event that drove China observers and scholars to draw parallels by advancing a possible scenario of mainland China attacking Taiwan, just like what Russia did to Ukraine. They opined that the military confrontation between the two states will inspire mainland China to attack Taiwan, to pursue its reunification plan with the self-governing island-state. By advancing this scenario, these China observers and scholars failed to take into account that the Russia-Ukraine case is different from the mainland China-Taiwan case. Here, it is important to consider that the surrounding circumstances why Russia attacked Ukraine is a lot different to the circumstances that mainland China is drawing to justify its reunification plan with Taiwan. Lexically speaking, Russia's attack on Ukraine resulted in the former annexing as part of its territory, certain territories of the latter. This is because they are independent states and they recognize each other as such. This is not however the case of mainland China and Taiwan because both consider themselves as part of a common nation, China. Their point of contention centers on which entity represents China. Since they are at the present time still separated, any union in the future that may come about by using whatever mechanism cannot therefore be termed as annexation but

reunification, meaning, they will again be unified like their situation before the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949.

When the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, the Chinese Communists led by Mao Zedong took control of mainland China, and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces, including government officials of the Republic of China, fled to Taiwan where they established their seat of power in Taipei, the new capital of the Republic of China government. Since then, there existed two entities claiming to represent China in the international community. Mainland China is claiming that the issue of Chinese representation in the community of nations particularly in the United Nations has already been resolved. However, the Republic of China on Taiwan is singing a different tune saying that mainland China cannot claim sovereignty over Taiwan because the Chinese Communist government has not yet conquered or occupied Taiwan and its claimed territories even just for a single day. Under this situation, mainland China is openly advocating its reunification plan with Taiwan. After it occupied and controlled mainland China, the Chinese military attacked Kinmen and Matsu Islands using military force, first in 1954-1955 and the second was in 1958, which are also referred to as the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis respectively. In both of these attacks, mainland China was unsuccessful partly because the United States came to the aid of Taiwan. These military attacks are contrary to the peaceful reunification narrative that is being formally advanced by mainland China, by offering the "one country, two systems" model of reunification. Under this model, Taiwan will become a special administrative region, just like the situation of Hong Kong after it reverted to mainland China's control on July 1, 1997, after 156 years of British rule. At any rate, on paper, mainland China is consistent with its peaceful reunification narrative. This has been mentioned in all three white papers published by mainland China

relative to its reunification plan with Taiwan. The first white paper was published in August 1993 with the title “The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China” where the phrase “peaceful reunification” was mentioned 16 times. The second white paper was published in February 2000 with the title “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue” where the phrase “peaceful reunification” was mentioned 30 times. The most recent white paper was published in August 2022 with the title “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era” where the phrase “peaceful reunification” was mentioned 36 times. These white papers obviously advance peaceful reunification with Taiwan but do not dismiss the use of force to attack Taiwan if it deviates from the One China policy, or if Taiwan declares independence.

Given the surrounding circumstances, especially in the context of Russia’s attack on Ukraine, when China saw firsthand how Russia had been castigated by the majority of states in the international community, leading it to suffer economically and morally as well, there is evidence that China is more circumspect now more than ever, in dealing with Taiwan on the issue of reunification. Distancing itself a bit from an ally that is Russia, mainland China abstained during a vote in the United Nations Security Council in a resolution crafted by Ukraine and the European Union outlawing Russia’s annexation of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region that are parts of Ukraine. Referring to Russia’s annexation of the two regions, China through its Foreign Minister Wang Yi then manifested by saying that “China always respects each country’s sovereignty and that the Ukraine issue is complex (CNBC, 24th February 2022). This manifestation is rather irregular considering the fact how the two allies, Russia and China, worked and supported each other in the past on many issues of common concern.

This paper therefore concludes that on the issue of mainland China’s reunification strategy towards Taiwan, the use of military force

to realize such reunification, appears to be a remote possibility. Aside from the fact that mainland China, in its official pronouncements, advances peaceful reunification with Taiwan, there are other deterrent factors which discourage it to engage in military adventurism once again to realize with finality its reunification plan with Taiwan. The fear of economic collapse as a consequence if it attacks Taiwan to realize reunification, is a real concern that China must consider. This is on the thought that its economy is built on a relational economic intercourse it so adroitly built with many countries, enabling it to realize trade surplus in its favor. Since a trade surplus hinges on good trade relationships, such trade surplus can vanish if China lost these prized trade state-partners. Once this happens, China's economy is doomed to fail, and that is tantamount to economic suicide which China cannot perhaps afford to face, especially during this period in its history. The unequivocal support of the strongest military in the world, that of the United States to Taiwan, in the event of mainland China's military attack, is another factor that China has to bear in mind. Since Public Law 96-8 or the Taiwan Relations Act mandates the United States government to aid Taiwan in the event of mainland China's attack, it is almost certain that a military attack of mainland China on Taiwan will result in a heavy military confrontation. All things being considered then, China will be defeated in this military conflict, reason enough for China to go slow and be circumspect in its reunification strategies towards Taiwan.

Note

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