Whereas operational and tactical surprise will remain a core component of PLA doctrine, it is unlikely Beijing will conclude as the PLA's military capabilities increase that, in responding to threats to high-value security or sovereignty interests, the advantages of surprise attack exceed those sought by deterrence signaling that includes the mobilization of military forces. It is possible, for example, to develop a scenario where Beijing chooses to launch a massive surprise missile and air attack on Taiwan to crush the island's defenses before the United States can intervene with forces sufficient to offset China's military advantages. Such a scenario, however, has to ignore past Chinese responses to anything Beijing perceives as a move toward independence or a change in the U.S. policy of not supporting Taiwan independence. In each case, China has quickly if not immediately threatened military coercion. In each case, the United States has made clear to China that its policy has not changed and Taipei has ultimately backed down from the statements or actions that led to Beijing's forceful response. Moreover, neither China nor the United States seeks a military confrontation over Taiwan. Both seek to avoid such a confrontation because the consequences, although not known, are potentially so severe for the security interests of both.

The threat of surprise attack seems limited to those situations where Beijing can realistically expect a quick military success followed by the neutralization of the adversary. Any such attack on U.S. forces, even if it achieves initial military success, is unlikely to be followed by the political and military neutralization of the United States. The more probable result, as Beijing no doubt appreciates, is the creation of a state of war between China and the United States. That probable consequence is enough to convince Beijing that in an emerging potential military confrontation with the United States, the deterrence signaling it has practiced for decades has far better promise of an acceptable outcome than surprise attack.

China's Crisis Decisionmaking Process and Crisis Management

Although defining a political-military "crisis" can become extremely complicated, this analysis will employ a simple definition. A *crisis* is defined as an unanticipated event perceived as threatening high-level interests of at least one set of decisionmakers while providing only a limited time for response.[16]

Dynamics Influencing Crisis Behavior

- elite perceptions and beliefs
- perceptions of the international environment

- domestic politics and public opinion
- decisionmaking structure and processes
- information and intelligence receipt and processing
- distinctive features that may be unique to one of the participants.[17]

It is entirely plausible that decisionmakers confronting a political-military crisis may have distinctly different perceptions and beliefs from their counterparts on the other side, and that these will lead to different perceptions of the international environment within which the crisis is evolving and the influence of domestic politics and public opinion on their decisions. That is, even before the crisis decisionmaking process is activated and the information and intelligence on the events leading to the crisis evaluated, the parties to the crisis could be approaching each other with distinctly different understandings of what the events entail for their interests. In some cases, the perceived importance of the interest will vary considerably between the two countries. Negotiating a resolution to the crisis therefore requires some understanding of each other's beliefs about what is at stake for what particular interests.

Sino-American Asymmetries: Chinese Views[18]

From a Chinese perspective, Sino-American crises did not occur in locales where core security interests of the United States were at stake. Whether in Korea, China's offshore islands, Vietnam, Hainan, or Taiwan, China's interests were under greater threat because the locales were on or near China's national boundaries. Moreover, in crises over the offshore islands and Taiwan, China's territorial integrity and national sovereignty were at stake. The same was true of the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. These perceived asymmetries of interest contribute to China's view that U.S. policies and strategies are similar to those conducted by imperialist and hegemonic powers in the past. This gives rise to China's tendency to view its position in these crises in a self-righteous manner that grants the United States little moral ground in Asian security issues, particularly those that involve what are perceived as China's core interests.

These same crises are seen as demonstrating the asymmetry in national power between the United States and China. That is, Beijing recognized that the United States could apply more policy instruments to affect a crisis than could China. The United States could

select from or integrate economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, military power, and the mobilization of allies, even in the United Nations. With only limited effective instruments of power, China had to either accept the compromises offered by the United States or use or threaten force even though its military capabilities were far less than those of the United States. Despite its overall military inferiority, China could inflict great costs on the United States as it did in the Korean War. From this came the belief that resolve and determination joined with a limited nuclear deterrent could in part compensate for military inferiority. Nonetheless, China's recognition of the power asymmetry between itself and the United States partially explains why none of the post–Korean War crises involving the United States evolved into direct military conflict. Indeed, Chinese and American scholars agree that a characteristic of Sino-American crises is China's consistent policy of seeking to avoid a military confrontation with the United States even as it employed or threatened the use of military force.[19]

This record does not, however, necessarily transfer to a potential Taiwan crisis. Here some Chinese hold the view that whereas Taiwan involves a core interest for China, it is only of marginal strategic interest to the United States. Consequently, China should not be fearful of employing military force to deter Taiwan's de jure independence because the United States could well decide that a war with China over Taiwan is simply too costly given the island's low strategic value to the United States.[20]

Two fundamental guidelines are seen as governing China's confrontation with a strategic rival, both originating in the mind of Mao Zedong in 1930s and 1940s.[21] In those years, the Chinese Communist Party faced much stronger adversaries in Japan and the Kuomintang. The first guideline is to despise the enemy strategically but take him seriously tactically. Wang and Xu assess this guideline as directing China to be politically principled but tactically flexible. The second directs China to fight on just grounds, to its advantage, and with restraint. From these components stem the following principles:

- China will not attack unless it is attacked. When attacked, China will certainly counter-attack.

- China must never fight unless victory is assured through planning and preparation.

- When the attacker is repulsed, China must bring the fight to a close. China must not be carried away by success.

These guidelines and associated principles were applied in the 1962 border war with India and the 1979 invasion of Vietnam. Both were declared to be defensive counterattacks. They have also been applied in confrontations where no fighting occurred. China assumed the moral posture in the confrontation that stemmed from the U.S. Navy's EP-3 collision with a PLA Navy F8-II, arguing that the EP-3 was spying on China. Morally, therefore, China was in a defensive posture. A similar interpretation is applied to the negotiations following the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, which Beijing could not accept as accidental.

Crises and China's Learning Curve[22]

Wang and Xu discuss what they identify as a learning curve in China's approach to Sino-American crises over the years since 1950, including methods of crisis management. Mao Zedong together with Zhou Enlai and other senior leaders could make authoritative decisions at both the strategic and tactical levels with little or no opposition. Lower level officials and the general public would not be informed, and the Chinese people could be easily mobilized because they followed official direction without much opposition. Chinese leaders today face a different decisionmaking environment. Political leaders at all levels are much better informed of state matters, nationalist sentiments have risen, and freedom of expression through the Internet is now widespread. Consequently, decisionmaking has become increasingly complicated as crisis management has demanded greater cooperation and coordination across the Chinese government.

The increasing complexity of China's decisionmaking process reported by Chinese scholars is found also in the research conducted by Western academics.[23] Whereas the always opaque Politburo Standing Committee remains at the apex of any foreign and security policy decision, the number of official actors seeking to influence the decision has dramatically multiplied. This expansion reflects China's greater and expanding diplomatic, military, commercial, trade, tourist, and academic interaction with the world together with vastly expanded knowledge of world affairs among the general public. China's foreign and security policy formulation now includes not only the apex of Chinese Communist Party organs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but additionally a variety of government agencies, departments of the PLA, Chinese think tanks, and China's multinational corporations. To these actors it is essential to add the expansion of Chinese public awareness of the world beyond China and the far from passive generation of "netizens" willing to express their opinions over the Internet on domestic and foreign policy issues. Whereas it is true that Beijing can make decisions without excessive concern for public opinion, where the decision involves the United States, Japan, or Taiwan, China's increasingly

nationalistic netizens (450 million by one estimate[24]) will be heard from. These expressions of public opinion can then raise questions about the CCP's ability to govern and potentially restrain the leaders' freedom of action.

When viewed from the perspective of a potential Sino-American political-military crisis, the complexity created by the variety of forces seeking to influence the decisions as they evolve creates a major analytic problem. Not the least of the problems encountered is the inability to know or measure the degree of influence wielded by the PLA through its General Staff Department (GSD) or the considerations within the CCP Central Military Commission (CMC) headed though it is by the General Secretary of the CCP—currently Xi Jinping. One aspect of this analytic dilemma is clear, however. Not only do PLA authors now publicly debate foreign policy and security issues, but the PLA appears increasingly willing to demonstrate its improving capabilities no matter how much this antagonizes China's neighbors and the United States. Moreover, in coming years as PLA capabilities continue to improve, China's reluctance to confront the United States military that has marked past crises may dissipate.

Despite the number of Sino-American political-military crises of varying intensity that have taken place over the past 62 years, including most recently the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait political-military confrontation, the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and the USN EP-3 collision with a PLA Navy fighter near Hainan Island, there is as yet no effective crisis management mechanism in place that has contributed to emergency communication between high-level officials of both countries. A "hotline" linking the presidents of the two countries was established during the Clinton administration, but no use of it was made during the naval aircraft collision. More recently, in 2008 a direct telephone link or "hotline" was established between China's Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the U.S. Secretary of Defense. The first and largely ceremonial conversation between China's Minister of National Defense, General Liang Guanglie, and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was held on April 10, 2008.[25] These direct telephone communications between the heads of the respective governments and militaries will be beneficial only if they are used and there is someone in authority to talk with. The procedure for making a telephone link is that the side wishing to talk must notify the other of the time and proposed topic. If the other side agrees to talk, then the staffs of both sides will arrange the specific time for the call. Despite these arrangements, China has twice closed the military hotline in response to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Following announcement of the October 2008 arms sale, China severed the hotline until 2009 when the Vice Chairman of the CMC, General Xu Caihou, visited the United States, and again in January 2010 when the United

States announced another Taiwan arms sale.[26] How well the two hotlines would serve to ease any political-military crisis is therefore open to question.

Consequently, an analytic framework designed to enhance understanding and anticipation of diplomatic indications that China may be planning to employ military force in a crisis is limited by the absence of any certain understanding of China's crisis decisionmaking processes. Judgments will have to be made based on indicators drawn from previous crises where China has threatened or employed military force. Given the increasing complexity of China's crisis decisionmaking process, it is improbable that firm conclusions can be drawn other than in a crisis emerging from an effort by Taiwan to receive international recognition of its de jure independence—an extremely unlikely event.

Signaling the Intent to Employ Military Force—China's Warnings Calculus

In past responses to an international crisis or dispute that directly affected Chinese interests, Beijing has deployed a hierarchy of authoritative leadership statements, official protests, and press commentary intended to assert its claims and to deter its antagonists. If the crisis persists and Beijing perceives its interests are not satisfactorily taken into account, its statements escalate in level and may include at first implicit and thereafter increasingly explicit warnings that it may use military force to achieve its goals. This was the case in each of the major instances in which Beijing has resorted to military force—in Korea in 1950, in the Sino-Indian border dispute in 1961–1962, in the Sino-Soviet border dispute in 1968–1969, and in China's attack on northern Vietnam in 1979. It was also true in instances in which Beijing's effort at deterrence succeeded and ultimately stopped short of using military force, as, for example, with respect to the American combat effort in Vietnam in 1965–1968 and to the debates in Taiwan in 1991 about delimiting the ROC's sovereignty claims.

That Beijing uses such a warnings calculus should not surprise anyone. Most countries, including the United States, deploy a hierarchy of escalating statements intended to warn of use of force and so deter adversaries in disputes and crises. Through public statements by authoritative spokesmen from the State Department up to and including the President, Washington may escalate from statements that make no explicit or implicit reference to potential use of force to statements that advise that "no option has been taken off the table." It may then take deterrence up a notch by admonishing that "all options are on the table." From there, Washington may advise more explicitly that "the military option is on the table." Finally, if its previous warnings have gone unheeded, Washington may declare that it may have "no other option but military force."