

States announced another Taiwan arms sale.<sup>26</sup> 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.”

### Beijing's Hierarchy of Warning Statements

The official and leadership statements and media commentary Beijing deploys in international crises and disputes fit into a hierarchy based on the relative authority of their origin. The authority of leadership statements reflects the relative standing of each leader in CCP or PRC government institutions. A statement by a provincial party chief in the CCP hierarchy or governor in the state hierarchy, for example, is less authoritative than a statement by a member of the CCP Politburo or Secretariat or State Council minister, respectively. The statements by the latter officials, in turn, are less authoritative than those uttered by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee in the party hierarchy or the State Council premier in the state hierarchy, respectively. And all such statements are less authoritative than statements by the party general secretary (or chairman in Mao Zedong's day) or the PRC president.

Similarly, the authority of statements made by military leaders reflects their relative standing in the People's Liberation Army structure. A statement uttered by, say, a military district commander or political commissar is outranked in authority by a statement by the commander or political commissar of a military region. In turn, those statements are outranked by those issued by the director of the General Staff or General Political Departments, which are themselves of less authority than statements by the Central Military Commission and its chairman or vice-chairmen.

All statements and speeches by leaders are authoritative within this hierarchy of authority. These include:

- statements by Politburo members, PRC officials, and PLA leaders in meetings with foreign guests
- speeches by any of these leaders at welcoming banquets, press conferences, and while traveling abroad
- interviews with PRC and foreign media.

Which leaders make statements on foreign policy issues normally reflects policy responsibilities and protocol. All leaders are expected to convey a unified position of foreign policy issues and so normally may be taken as reflecting the leadership's consensus on the issue at hand.

Attention must be paid, however, to the source in assessing leadership statements. Leadership statements that are *publicized in PRC media*, whether in Chinese or as translated into Beijing's foreign-language channels, are always authoritative because they have been officially vetted and translated. Leadership statements reported by foreign media are authoritative but require caution because their rendition and translation have not been vetted by Beijing for publication.

The statements and protests of foreign crises and disputes issued in the name of institutions—normally the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)—also feature a deliberate inherent hierarchy of authority. The bottom rung in authority is the statements uttered by the MFA spokesman at his routine press conferences. Before the MFA began the practice of routine weekly and then daily press briefings in Beijing, such statements were ascribed simply to the “MFA spokesman.” Above that in authority is the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement,” the top level of authority in MFA utterances. All MFA statements are in turn outranked by “PRC Government statements,” the top of the official state utterances.

Finally, the only channel for authoritative media commentary on international disputes and crises is *People's Daily*, which speaks in the name of the CCP Central Committee. *People's Daily* publishes a wide range of reporting (often from the Xinhua News Agency), commentary, signed articles, and editorial comment, and not all of such vehicles are authoritative. In this context, the term “authoritative” refers only to commentary that speaks for *People's Daily* as an institution and, by extension, for the party Central Committee. Such authoritative comment fits into a deliberate hierarchy. The most authoritative vehicle historically has been the “editorial department article” (本报编辑部文章). Historically, these are extremely rare and have been reserved for the most significant issues in intercommunist relations—Khrushchev's “secret speech” and de-Stalinization in 1956, issues in the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, the question of “joint action” with Moscow against the United States in Vietnam in 1965, and Albania's critique of Mao Zedong's “theory of the three worlds” in November 1977. Beneath that level, and far more common, are “editorials” (社论) and, at the bottom rung, “commentator articles” (本报评论员文章).

In addition, there are occasional vehicles for comment that do not clearly speak for the *People's Daily* as a whole but are clearly more significant than ordinary commentary in the paper and so are sometimes referred to by propaganda analysts as “quasi-authoritative.” These include articles under such bylines as “observer” (观察家) and “special” or “contributing commentator” (特约评论员). As discussed below, these have come and gone in *People's Daily* from period to period and so analysts must be alert to changing patterns in media commentary over time. All other content in *People's Daily*—including lower-level commentaries, signed

articles, and reporting—is not considered authoritative in the sense of speaking for the regime as a whole and so is not relevant to Beijing’s hierarchy of warning statements.

Other media often feature an inherent hierarchy of commentary and often publish or broadcast commentary on foreign crises or disputes in which Beijing has a stake. The PLA newspaper *Liberation Army Daily*, published by the General Political Department, for example, publishes “editorials” and “commentator articles” which speak for the paper as an institution, as do other nationally circulating dailies such as the united front and intellectual affairs newspaper *Enlightenment Daily* and all provincial party newspapers, such as Shanghai’s *Liberation Daily*. The authority of such comment, however, is a step or more removed from the core authority of *People’s Daily* and so is not normally relevant to Beijing’s hierarchy of warning statements. Finally, commentary issued by the Xinhua News Agency, the official mouthpiece of the PRC State Council, is not authoritative except in instances when Xinhua transmits an issuance as an “authorized” comment or statement.

The hierarchies of authoritative leadership statements, official protests, and media comment fit together in a three-tiered array. The structure of each hierarchy as deployed in the post-Mao period is shown in the table below.

These hierarchies also establish a ladder of increasingly authoritative responses that Beijing has used to convey increased urgency and weight and thus intended significance to its responses in an escalating crisis or dispute. At the lowest levels of statement or commentary, Beijing may

**Hierarchies of Authoritative Statements (Highest to Lowest)**

<b>Leadership Statements</b>	<b>Official Protests</b>	<b><i>People’s Daily</i> Commentary</b>
Chinese Communist Party general secretary and People’s Republic of China (PRC) president or premier	PRC government statement	Editorial
Politburo member and PRC vice premiers	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) statement	Commentator article
Central Committee department chief or PRC minister	MFA spokesman statement	Observer article
Provincial party chief or governor	MFA press briefing comment	Quasi-authoritative commentary

simply be putting its position on record concerning the issue at hand and without connotation of a potential response by force. If there is such a connotation, it is usually expressed vaguely—stating, for example, that the opposite party “must bear responsibility for all of the consequences” that ensue. Higher level statements and commentary carry far more weight, underscoring the seriousness with which Beijing views the evolving situation. They need not convey an implication of a threat of military force, but if they do, such warnings are increasingly explicit and usually unmistakable.

When Beijing wishes to convey a potential use of force, it deploys a lexicon of threat and retaliation warnings. It is the presence of these warnings in authoritative statements and commentary with increasing explicitness that conveys Beijing's readiness to use force. The following list presents this lexicon in roughly ascending order of threat:

- X is “playing with fire” and may “get burned”
- Beijing so far has “exercised the greatest restraint and forbearance” but this “should not be taken as weakness and submissiveness”
- Do “not turn a deaf ear to China's warnings”; China “cannot stand idly by”
- “How far will you go? We shall wait and see”
- “China's forbearance has limits”; X is “deluding itself in thinking we are weak and can be bullied”
- If X does not cease its behavior, it “will meet the punishment it deserves”
- “Do not complain later that we did not give you clear warning in advance”
- We have been “driven beyond forbearance” and are “forced to counterattack”; our “restraint was regarded as an invitation to bullying”; our “warnings fell on deaf ears”
- “We will not attack if we are not attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack.”

By tracking the level of authority and content of leadership statements, official protests, and *People's Daily* comment, and taking note of the threat and retaliation warnings they contain,

therefore, analysts may assess the intent and seriousness of Beijing's response to an escalating dispute or crisis and detect any implication of potential use of military force.

Beijing's calculus of warnings was deployed during many of the crises it faced since 1949. It was deployed in rudimentary form in the summer and early fall months of 1950, preceding China's intervention in the Korean War after U.S. and UN forces crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and moved up to the PRC-Korean frontier on the Yalu River. It was used again during the 2 years preceding the brief war with India over the territorial dispute. It was used in 1965 as U.S. forces intervened in Vietnam, presenting Beijing with a crisis that resembled in their eyes the American threat in Korea in 1950. It was deployed in sharply escalated fashion in the Sino-Soviet border crisis of 1968–1969 and again in the contest over Vietnamese regional ambitions in 1978. The following discussion shows how Beijing deployed this calculus of threat and retaliation in two of these past examples.

#### **A Classical Example—The Sino-Vietnamese Border Crisis, 1978–1979**

Beijing's use of its hierarchies of leadership statements, official protests, and authoritative *People's Daily* commentary is clearly visible in its escalating treatment of its border crisis with Vietnam beginning in July 1978, culminating in its military attack on northern Vietnam on February 17, 1979.<sup>27</sup> The Sino-Vietnamese border emerged in the context of a larger Chinese effort, begun openly in early 1978, to blunt what it perceived to be Vietnamese efforts, abetted by the Soviet Union, to consolidate “regional hegemony” over its Indochinese neighbors Cambodia and Laos and, by extension, in Southeast Asia generally. In the context of escalating tensions between Hanoi and Phnom Penh in 1977 and early 1978, Beijing began to protest what it characterized as persecution of ethnic Chinese in a registration drive in southern Vietnam. In parallel with Chinese criticism of Hanoi's policies toward Cambodia, Chinese leadership statements, official protests, and authoritative *People's Daily* comment complained about Vietnamese mistreatment of ethnic Chinese. Chinese steps along the way included the dispatch of two ships to Vietnamese ports in mid-June to pick up “victimized Chinese nationals” (an effort that Hanoi blocked by not allowing the Chinese ships to dock), a total cut-off of Chinese economic and technical aid to Vietnam (announced in early July 1978), and the opening first of ambassadorial and then vice foreign ministerial talks on the issue. In this context, the Sino-Vietnamese border crisis emerged in July as a means to bring additional pressure on Hanoi over the larger contest over Cambodian and Vietnamese power.

After detailing incremental steps in Beijing's approach to the larger issues of Vietnamese-Cambodian tensions and Vietnamese treatment of ethnic Chinese (the Hoa people) in which

the border crisis was embedded, appendix 1 charts Chinese leadership statements, official protests, and authoritative *People's Daily* commentary in the escalating border crisis; the appendix tracks statements from late July 1978, when Xinhua began reporting local Yunnan and Guangxi officials lodging a joint protest over Hanoi's forcing ethnic Chinese across the border into China, down through February 17, 1979, when PLA forces launched their "punitive" strike on northern Vietnam. Appendix 1 does not include corresponding statements by Vietnamese officials and authoritative commentary by the Vietnamese Communist Party's newspaper, *The People (Nhan Dan)*, which would be useful in analyzing the crisis overall. Only the Chinese side is needed to dissect Beijing's warning signals.

Several fundamental points emerge from appendix 1's compilation of authoritative Chinese warning statements. First, the level of authority of statements concerning the border crisis in each tier rises, reflecting the escalating seriousness with which Beijing portrayed the crisis. PRC protests began with low-level regional officials protesting border incidents on July 26 and 29, 1978. Such incidents were then taken up by PRC Vice Foreign Minister Zhong Xidong in successive sessions of talks in Hanoi in August and September, supplemented in early September by statements by the State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office and by the MFA's Asia Department Director Shen Ping. In late October, the MFA began issuing "strong protests" in its own name, until a PRC Government statement declared on February 17, 1979, that Beijing was "forced to counterattack" Hanoi's activities with military force.

Authoritative *People's Daily* commentary shows a comparable pattern of escalation. Its first authoritative comment on the border crisis came on September 4. Thereafter, *People's Daily* notched up the level of its authoritative comment by publishing editorials, beginning with its first on November 10 and ending with its fourth on February 18, 1979, marking the launch of the PLA's strike on northern Vietnam.

A second point for attention is the escalation in language used in official protests and *People's Daily's* commentary and, in particular, the introduction of higher levels of phrases intended to convey the potential for a military response. On November 7, 1978, the MFA's "strong protest" over an "extremely serious bloodshed incident" on November 1 on the border noted for the first time that Beijing has so far "exercised the greatest restraint and forbearance," warning that Hanoi should not mistake Beijing's restraint as "weakness and submissiveness." Thereafter, a *People's Daily's* editorial on November 10 warned that Hanoi's "arrogant hostility to the Chinese people" had become "quite intolerable" and "sternly" warned Hanoi to pull back from Chinese territory and "not to turn a deaf ear to China's warnings." "How far will you go?" the editorial concluded, adding that "we will wait and see." On December 13, another MFA "strong protest"

over “incessant” Vietnamese encroachments and provoking “serious incidents of bloodshed” charged that Hanoi had “turned a deaf ear” to Beijing’s repeated protests and warned that “there is a limit to China’s forbearance and restraint.” On December 24, a new MFA “strong protest” over a December 23 Vietnamese border intrusion into Guangxi noted that local Chinese militiamen were “compelled to return fire in self defense.” And on December 25, a *People’s Daily’s* editorial, entitled “Our Forbearance Is Limited,” declared that Hanoi had “gone far enough.” China, it stated, “will not allow itself to be bullied by others,” will “certainly counterattack if attacked,” and “means what it says.” If Hanoi continued its border intrusions, it would “meet the punishment it deserves.” “Don’t complain later that we did not give you clear warning in advance,” the editorial concluded.

The pattern of escalating language in the Sino-Vietnamese border crisis suggests significant turning points. Up through early November, Chinese protests and commentary had been vague regarding the consequences of what it was depicting as continuing Vietnamese provocations on the border. The shift to sharper warning language in the November 10 *People’s Daily* editorial appears to reflect Beijing’s implicit public warning that it was prepared to use military force. And the statements in the December 25 *People’s Daily* that Hanoi had “gone far enough” and that Beijing had now given “clear warning” conveyed Beijing’s decision that it had now decided to use force. Subsequent statements by Chinese leaders—such as Deng Xiaoping’s in Washington—about the need to “teach Vietnam a lesson” bear this judgment out.

Finally, it is noteworthy that turning points in Beijing’s escalating statements on the border crisis coincide with major turning points in the larger contest that Beijing was waging against Vietnamese expansion in Indochina. The November 10 *People’s Daily* editorial on the border crisis immediately followed the signing in Moscow of the USSR-Vietnam security alliance, an event that Deng Xiaoping denounced during a visit to Bangkok as confirming Soviet-Vietnamese complicity in Hanoi’s expansionist agenda and as an event to which “we will attach importance.” And the *People’s Daily’s* December 25 editorial declaring that Hanoi had “gone far enough” in its border provocations coincided with the full-scale assault of Vietnam’s army against Cambodia.

### **Another Classical Example—The Sino-Indian Border Crisis, 1961–1962**

As sketched in the first section of this paper, the brief Sino-Indian border war in October–November 1962 was rooted in Beijing’s larger concern of consolidating its claims to sovereignty over Tibet. Its construction of a road accessing western Tibet from Xinjiang in 1957 and the road’s discovery thereafter by India led to failed border negotiations over subsequent years and



eventually to New Delhi's "forward" policy in 1961 of advancing Indian Army sentry posts into the zone disputed with China. After more than a year of successive official protests and authoritative *People's Daily* commentary, Beijing moved with military force on October 20, 1962.

As the details in appendix 2 show, the protest calculus employed by the PRC's MFA and *People's Daily's* hierarchy of authoritative commentary was different in the 1960s than the practices of the post-Mao period exemplified in the 1978–1979 Sino-Vietnamese border crisis analyzed above. In particular, following media practices of that day, *People's Daily* published authoritative "observer" articles instead of commentator articles. But the same pattern of escalating authority and language was evident in the 1961–1962 border crisis with India.

### **Signaling Case Studies—Taiwan**

Over the past two decades, Beijing has deployed its classical hierarchy of warning signals at least four times regarding Taiwan. These were:

- in 1991, as the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) made explicit its Taiwan independence platform and the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) moved to convene the first session of the ROC National Assembly since 1946
- in 1995, after Washington surprised Beijing by issuing ROC President Lee Teng-hui a visa to visit the United States
- in 1999, when ROC President Lee Teng-hui described the relationship between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland as a "special state-to-state relationship" in the early months of campaigning for March 2000 general elections
- in 2003–2004, when ROC President Chen Shui-bian and DPP politicians pressed passage of a referendum law and then put referenda on the ballot for March 2004 general elections.

In none of these instances did Beijing ultimately use military force against Taipei, although once Beijing's efforts to deter Lee Teng-hui from actually making his trip to the United States in June 1995 failed, Beijing did stage over the ensuing 9 months a series of three military exercises—including missile "test" firings into the East China Sea in August 1995 and off Taiwan in March 1996—to underscore its readiness to use military force to achieve its objectives. And in 1999, Beijing's warnings about potential use of military force reached the highest levels