

Will the New Administration Defend Taiwan?

Interview with Stephen Bryen

by [Jerry Gordon](#) (March 2021)



US-China Red Lines drawn.

Tensions are rising in East Asia as China's President XI Jinping threatens to declare war should Taiwan declare "independence" as he considers it an integral part of One China. Taiwan's President Tsieh Ing-wen after her landslide re-election victory in 2020 [called](#) on China to "face reality" and "review" its current policy toward the de facto nation that Beijing claims is part of its territory.

Emily Horne, spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council, [said](#) the U.S. commitment to Taiwan was “rock-solid” after the island’s de facto ambassador in Washington, Hsiao Bi-khim, attended Biden’s swearing in on Wednesday.

“President Biden will stand with friends and allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in the Asia-Pacific region—and that includes Taiwan.”

Xi’s intent to end Taiwan’s autonomy is reflected in red lines being drawn in readouts of Lunar New Year’s calls between US Secretary of State Blinken and China’s [Yang Jiechi](#), the Xi regime director of China’s Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs. Yang’s speech made before the National Committee on US-China Relations warned the Biden Administration [saying](#):

“[it] should make a significant response to China’s sincerity within his first 100 days, as the sincerity and patience will not last forever.”

Yang urged the Biden team to depart from “the previous administration’s ... strategic misjudgment ... [of] view[ing] China as a major strategic competitor, even an adversary.”

He said Washington must “respect China’s position and concerns on the Taiwan question, ... stop interference in the affairs of Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang, which all matter to China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and stop attempts to hold back China’s development by meddling in China’s internal affairs ... These issues concern China’s core interests, national dignity [and] constitute a red line that must not be crossed. Any trespassing would end up undermining China-U.S. relations and the United States’ own interests.”

Blinken’s State Department [readout](#) of his conversation

with Chang noted:

Blinken “stressed the United States will continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values, including in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, and pressed China to join the international community in condemning the military coup in Burma.”

On the most sensitive issue embroiling U.S.-China relations, Blinken “reaffirmed that the United States will work together with its allies and partners in defense of our shared values and interests to hold the [People’s Republic of China] accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, including across the Taiwan Strait, and its undermining of the rules-based international system.”

The White House [readout](#) from President Biden’s Lunar New Year call with President Xi affirmed the Administration’s position, saying:

Biden[was] “committed to pursuing practical, results-oriented engagements when it advances the interests of the American people and those of our allies.”

“President Biden underscored his fundamental concerns about Beijing’s coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan. The two leaders also exchanged views on countering the COVID-19 pandemic [the WHO just concluded a review of the Wuhan Virology Laboratory with [discovery](#) of 19 cases of the “novel” SARS COVID-2 in Hubei Province in October 2019 raising questions about how early China knew about the devastating global pandemic and neglected to warn the international public health system], and the shared challenges of global health security, climate change, and preventing weapons proliferation.

President Biden committed to pursuing practical, results-oriented engagements when it advances the interests of the American people and those of our allies.”

The rapidly emerging China Threats in the South and East China Seas.

These opening rounds belied the facts of the situation in the conflict zone of the Indo Pacific region in the South and East China Seas. The weekend following Biden’s Inauguration, to which he had invited Taiwan’s Washington, DC representative, the People’s Liberation Army Air Force or “PLAAF” sent jet fighters and bombers in two days of major sorties [invading](#) Taiwan’s southwest Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). The Biden Administration’s first demonstration of force against the Xi provocations was the [dispatch](#) of the Admiral Arleigh Burke-class Guided Missile Destroyer, the [USS John S. McCain \(DDG-56\)](#) through the Taiwan Straits a furtherance of the US policy of maintenance of Freedom of Navigation of the Seas in one the world’s major maritime trade areas. China strenuously objected to the “symbolic” presence in the South China Seas [of two US Carrier Task Force groups: The USS Nimitz CVN-68 and USS Theodore Roosevelt \(CVN-71\)](#) engaged in “interoperability” exercises.

On February 1, 2021 China unveiled a new threat—a [“virtual declaration of war](#) “against US allies, Vietnam, Philippines, and Japan, violating the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). This despite the International Court of Claims at the Hague ruling that condemned China for creation and militarizing man-made islands bult from reefs and shoals intruding the Exclusive Economic Zones of these nations. China had built a fleet of 130-armed Coast Guard Vessels which under the new law enabled them to fire upon vessels approaching these disputed areas in both the South and East China Seas. The Philippines, that under the Duterte regime had previously endeavored to engage XI’s China to compete did a swift turnabout. It dramatically changed

position after China threatened actions under the new law to attack Philippine vessels and sought to re-engage in discussions with the US regarding renewal of the 1998 Visiting Forces Treaty enabling US military to conduct training on the country's sea frontier. The US has [vowed](#) to defend the Philippines against this new threat from China.

Of concern to Taiwan and Japan was the [dispatch](#) of armed Chinese Coast Guard vessels to the fisheries rich uninhabited Senkaku Islands in the First Island chain to reinforce its claims a thinly veiled threat to Okinawa and both Japan Coast Guard and Naval Self Defense and US bases. *The Japan Times* [noted](#): "The United States, under new President Joe Biden, has reaffirmed previous U.S. policy that the Senkakus are covered under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan security treaty."

Future War Scenarios pitting China against Taiwan and the US.

Xi's leadership of the Chinese Communist Party appears to be channeling Mao Tse Tung's dictatorship while building a formidable global economy, significant military force and ratcheting up Orwellian controls over a restive population. China has a large air fleet of over 3,000 aircraft including both stealth jet fighters and capable nuclear bombers, a blue water navy with sizeable nuclear sub force and a formidable missile capability. China's military is building a drone capability enhanced by Artificial Intelligence applications. Its cyber warfare and undercover intelligence activities at US, Canadian and UK universities have given rise to concerns over theft of advanced intellectual property. China's nuclear force is comparable to that of Russia. Scenarios developed by the RAND Corporation and US military planners have highlighted the risks of a global war including the potential use of nuclear weapons. The results of these war games may show China prevailing, even though it has not been tested on the battlefield during the Korean peninsula when Supreme Commander McArthur had proposed use of tactical nuclear weapons. A

novelistic treatment of a such a China US war game is the forthcoming novel to be published in March 2021, [2034: The History of the Next World War](#) by Elliot Ackerman and former NATO Supreme Commander, US Admiral (ret.) James Stavridis. It portrays the escalation of cyber and AI threats giving rise to a devastating attack on a US Seventh Fleet destroyer task force by Chinese Blue fleet naval forces, an invasion of Taiwan culminating in the use of tactical nuclear weapons by the US. Except of 2034 were published in the February 2021 *Wired Magazine*.

Against this background we held an interview with Dr. Stephen Bryen, who had published a policy paper for the Center for Security Policy, [Recommendations on How the United States Could Defend Taiwan against Invasion by China](#). Dr. Bryen is a former Senior Staffer on the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, a Reagan era Deputy Undersecretary for Technology and Security, former CEO of defense contractor, Finmeccanica North America, *Asia Times* columnist and former Member of the Congressionally-chartered bi-partisan [US-China Economic Security Review Commission](#).

Among the highlights of this interview are the following:

- China's PLAAF air fleet hosts stealth fighter called the [Chengdu J-20](#). They have the [Xian H-6](#) bomber, which is a very capable bomber, and a new stealth bomber, [the H-20](#), on the way. They have lots of missiles which is their strongest capability. They have the [DF-21D](#), which is an anti-ship missile, which the Chinese call the "carrier killer." They have another version with a longer range, [the thermo nuclear equipped DF-26](#), capable of reaching US bases in Guam. However, none of these systems have been tested in combat.
- The US should create a Joint Military Command involving Japan, Taiwan and other members of the so-called QUAD political alliance opposing China regional threats: i.e.,

India and Australia.

- The US should consider providing Taiwan advanced V/STOL Marine Harrier Jets and/or F-35B's, the latter on a lend-lease basis to defend against Chinese attacks on air bases of the island nation.
- Japan's Air Force equipped with F-35Bs and its Navy with attack submarines are capable and make a good account during any prospective conflict. However, sole reliance on US procured Patriot 3 ground-based air defense system is problematic- see below.
- The US provided Patriot 3 ground-based missile defense system is ineffective to deal with Chinese and Iranian Missile threats as it lacks effective radar and interceptors to contend with China's significance missile threats. The Stunner interceptor successfully tested in Alaska with the Arrow -3 system. The US needs more than one option to field an effective defense system.
- To lessen its investment exposure in China Taiwan should be encouraging its technically advanced companies like [Han Hai Precision Industry Company Limited](#) trading as Foxconn Technology Group that manufactures the Apple I Phone and a host of private label cell phones, tablets and 5G equipment, [Taiwan National Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited](#) (TSMC) and defense contractor AIDC ([Aerospace Industries Development Corporation](#)) to invest in the US. TSMC is slated to open a \$12 billion semiconductor manufacturing and research facility in Arizona employing upwards of 600 engineers and technicians.



Jerry Gordon: We are here with Dr. Stephen Bryen, a former senior official of the Pentagon during the Reagan Era, noted military technologist and a former Commissioner on the [US-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#), which we understand is a bipartisan organization set up by the Congress. The topic that we are going to address today is a rather timely and disturbing one in many ways. It was triggered by a recent policy position paper that Dr. Bryen wrote for The Center for Security Policy, [Recommendations on How the US can Defend against China's Invading Taiwan](#). Steve, what is the basic thrust of the paper that you issued recently?

Stephen Bryen: The basic thrust is we need to do some things to be able to defend both Taiwan and Japan for that matter and encouraging our government and the other governments too, to do these things. The most task is that we need a joint military command that includes Taiwan, Japan, and the United States. There is no such joint command today. In addition, there are other steps we need to take in terms of equipment

and hardware to better defend Taiwan and defend US bases in Japan. We have 23 bases air and naval bases in Japan, four of them are naval bases in Japan and Okinawa, the others air bases (which we share with Japan) which could come under attack if we attempt to defend Taiwan. We must defend those bases more effectively than we can right now. There is an agenda here that needs urgent attention. I want to emphasize that this threat has been dragging on for an awfully long time. I was in Taiwan in 1996, when the Chinese were threatening an invasion and missile attack. It was only the fact that the US carriers finally came into the picture that the Chinese backed off. We have known this for a long time. However, we have been extremely poor at fixing the problems we have, and we have got plenty of them, because China has been significantly building up its military capabilities. Now they are becoming more aggressive in confronting Taiwan, Japan, and other countries in the South China Sea, taking over islands and reefs and militarizing them that China had no right to do. We are dealing with an aggressive expanding China and who knows what will happen tomorrow? We do not know when. The only thing we can do is prepare and I think we are extremely far behind.

We must coordinate because you cannot have the Japanese Air Force, Taiwanese Air Force, and the US Air Force, each operating independently trying to deal with the Chinese, where allied and friendly forces might end up shooting each other down. We need to coordinate our military assets including the US, Japan and Taiwan at an extremely high level and we also need to make sure that all the equipment is compatible so that we do not knock each other off, so that we can share targets and do our job. There is a lot here that must happen, that is not happening.

Jerry Gordon: How complicated are the US relations with Taiwan?

Stephen Bryen: They got a bit better under President Trump. I

do not know where they are going to be with President Biden. They were always kind of shaky because US has an interest in China, US wants to do business with China. The US does not want a war with China, we do not want to antagonize China, so we have treated Taiwan as a second-class citizen. More like a third-class citizen, very badly even though the Taiwan Relations Act, which Congress passed in 1979 states that we should make sure that Taiwan can defend itself. We have not lived up to that requirement. Beyond that, we have not made any commitments to defend Taiwan ourselves. It is a very troubling situation. The Taiwanese are, as you might imagine, quite nervous and should be because it is scary, there are almost 24 million people in Taiwan.

Jerry Gordon: One aspect of that is the series of dramatic intrusions of the Taiwanese Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) by the Chinese or the People's Liberation Air Force.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, the PLAAF we call it. The PLAAF has been doing this for about the last eight months. However, they have stepped it up even more in the last couple of weeks. The US never complained about it, at least not in public. That was not good. We should have really raised hell about it. Secondly, they are sending fighter bombers and nuclear bombers that are circling Taiwan. This is dangerous because at some point, somebody is going to make a mistake.

Jerry Gordon: I noticed that the US Air Force Base in Guam launched B-52s purposefully penetrating the Chinese Air Defense Identification Zone.

Stephen Bryen: I do not know if they did that. I think they flew down the middle. However, they certainly did not fly up against the Chinese mainland because they would have been shot down.

Jerry Gordon: Speaking about the B-52s since you are a technologist, why is this cold war aircraft that may be 90

years old in the next decade, still in use?

Stephen Bryen: We are planning to keep them for 100 years.

Jerry Gordon: For 100 years?

Stephen Bryen: That's the plan. The Pentagon says, "We're going to keep them for 100 years." From the time they first went into service to the time they finally retire them. Look, the B-52 is a huge aircraft. It has eight engines, it is massive. It is a great platform to launch other things from. You can use it as a stand-off platform. Against modern air defenses, it would be toast. It cannot survive against modern air defenses. However, if it is far enough away, then it can launch cruise missiles or other kinds of missiles or stand-off weapons. It is a big platform. You can put a lot of stuff on it. It is still formidable. It used to be nuclear but not anymore although the Air Force is thinking about putting a new generation of nuclear weapons on them at a cost of more than \$1 billion. It sure can carry a lot of stuff, it is a big one.

Jerry Gordon: What about the new B-21 Lancer?

Stephen Bryen: It is not here yet; we do not have it.

Jerry Gordon: What mission profile is the B-21 going to have?

Stephen Bryen: The B-21 is a penetration bomber like the B-2, because it is stealthy and the B-2, could not carry a lot. The B-21 should carry a lot more and it will have much more modern electronics than the B-2, the B-2s are already getting old. The B-1, which is called the Bone among the military, is not stealthy. It is a terrific airplane, but it is not stealthy. It played a big role in Afghanistan actually, where it was especially useful. There is a lot of controversy about whether bombers should be part of our arsenal today or we should be looking at other things, but the one advantage of bombers is they carry a lot of weaponry. Given the kind of threat that China poses, you need a lot of it. It is that simple.

Jerry Gordon: Getting back to China's aggressive actions, China's president, Xi Jinping, would appear to be channeling Chairman Mao, with basically high tech behind him. What are his views on Taiwanese independence?

Steve Bryen: He made it clear. He is totally against it and says, "If they declare independence, we are going to declare war on them." So, if anybody thinks Taiwan will make such a declaration, the fact is the Taiwanese have no plan to declare independence because in fact, they are de facto independent anyway.

Jerry Gordon: What is Xi Jinping's strategy concerning dominance of the South China Sea area?

Stephen Bryen: It is more than the South China Sea. It is the whole East Asian area. Then there is the First Island Chain. It includes Okinawa and Taiwan. The biggest prize in that chain is Taiwan because the Chinese are trying to get us out of that area. If they control Taiwan, essentially, they can then pressurize the Japanese and get them to make concessions, maybe push the US Marines, the US Air Force, and our Navy out of Okinawa, even force them out of Japan. It is a big deal for them strategically because they want to control the First Island Chain. They have made that emphatically clear. There is no secret about their strategy. The question is, can they execute it, can they get away with it, can they pull it off? That is the question.

Jerry Gordon: Having said that, historically, when the People's Republic of China was declared, they failed to execute an invasion of nearby islands.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, it was in the late 40s, 1947. When they attacked Quemoy or Kinmen as it is called, Quemoy is the Portuguese name, they also attacked Penghu and Matsu. However, the big battle was in Kinmen, where they sent about 9,000 invasion troops that landed on the beach for what became a

three-day battle in which they were wiped out by the Taiwanese. They thought that the Taiwanese would cut and run and would not fight but in fact, the Taiwanese fought very well. Mao's idea was to force Chiang Kai-shek, which was not really his name, it was Jiang Jieshi, to resign, to go away, for his regime in Taiwan to collapse. It did not work. I presume that they have the same idea today, that they may attack Penghu or Kinmen to try and humiliate Taiwan. I think Taiwan will fight for sure, absolutely.

Stephen Bryen: How credible are China's air, naval and missile forces compared to the US in the Indo-Pacific region? They have the advantage of being near their targets as opposed to the US, which must travel long distances. They have modernized a great deal. They even have a stealth fighter called the J-20, the Chengdu J-20. They have the Xian H-6 bomber, which is a very capable bomber, and a new more modern bomber, the H-20, on the way. They have lots of missiles which I think is their strongest capability. They have the DF-21D, which is an anti-ship missile, which the Chinese call the "carrier killer." They have another version with a longer range, the DF-26. They have all this weaponry. However, no one can say how good it is because it has never been in combat. You learn a lot when you put an aircraft or a missile in combat, whether it really works. There is always a tendency for what I call over-selling, which is both an internal problem and an external problem. It is an internal problem because, the military like to tell leaders "Oh, I got this terrific missile. Give me some more money and I'll make a lot of them." but you don't know if it's a terrific missile. You say it is, but you must really demonstrate it and it is not so easy to prove. I am a little cautious about saying how good the Chinese military really is because it has never been in combat in any big way since 1950 in Korea. It has never been in any important battle, other than shooting down youngsters in Tiananmen Square. Right now, China is fighting with the Indians along the border in the North East of India. I think the Indians are doing well. We

must wait and see. I do not think the Chinese are successful. Do not believe their propaganda. Externally, we tend to believe what they say, because we do not have any independent way to validate it and we may overestimate their capabilities, but it all comes out in the wash when you get in a fight.

Jerry Gordon: Taiwan as a remarkably dynamic, democratic, and entrepreneurial asset of the United States. How big are its investments in China, the US and globally?

Stephen Bryen: Taiwan started investing in China about, I would say 15 years ago. They have some big factories in China that are owned by and run by Taiwanese companies. The biggest one and the one that has gotten the most interest, is owned by a company in Taiwan called Han Hai Precision Limited. We know it as Foxconn and Foxconn manufactures computers, laptops, tablets, and cell phones for other companies. They do not sell anything under their own name.

For example, the Apple iPhone is made by Foxconn. Foxconn employs one million people in China –by any measure, it is a huge company. Now, that has created a kind of problem for the Taiwan government because on one hand, it is important to the country's economy. We are getting some feedback that is an issue internally in Taiwan. I think now, the Taiwanese are starting to pull their horns in a little realizing they probably are a little overexposed in China. They are trying to be more careful and limit the amount of overseas investment in China from Taiwan. In the US, the Taiwanese do not have so many investments. They are starting but they are way behind the power curve.

Jerry Gordon: One of the major Taiwan exports is in fact a company that develops and manufactures semiconductors, which is now in the process of building a 12-billion-dollar facility here in the United States, in Arizona with staffing of more than 600 engineers and technicians. Is that a way of ensuring that they have investments offshore, should something happen?

Stephen Bryen: Yes, I think that is a fair interpretation. You are talking about Taiwan Semiconductors.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, I am.

Stephen Bryen: Which is a first-rate company and great state of the art manufacturer. They are supplying a lot of the 5G equipment with semiconductors for those phones, including those in China. That was one of the things they got cross-wired with the US government in the Huawei business, because Taiwan Semi was hanging out there in trouble as the US put an embargo on serious exports to Huawei. We relaxed the export restrictions because it also hurt US companies and there was a lot of pressure to allow semiconductor exports to that company. Trump backed down.

Jerry Gordon: You also mentioned in our discussion prior to this interview that Taiwan has a decent defense development company and should be “co-investing” in US defense companies. Is that part of the strategy you are talking about?

Stephen Bryen: I always thought that it was. First, I think Taiwan should invest in the United States. I have emphasized that Taiwan’s defense industries ought to be present in the United States, partnering with US defense companies in the United States, and active in our defense market, just like any other defense company but they have not done that, up to now. Their biggest defense company is their aerospace company AIDC (Aerospace Industries Development Corporation). It has some offices here. However, they have not invested in US manufacturing and they do not directly compete for US defense contracts in the US where they would manufacture here. I think that that is something that they should think about. I think it would help in many respects, politically and operationally, for them to do that. They should be part of the bigger defense industrial base of the United States. That would be their salvation, in a way.

Jerry Gordon: How credible is Taiwan's air defense system to cope with these Chinese air threats you have been talking about that seem dire?

Stephen Bryen: The major system that they have is the Patriot PAC-3. The Patriot PAC-3 needs improvement. It has not performed as well as one would have liked. I have been watching that for quite a while. It is extremely difficult to get a straightforward honest assessment of Patriot. It is made by Raytheon (but Lockheed also builds one of the Interceptor missiles), because there are too many people invested in making sure that that is all the US buys. We are joined at the hip with Raytheon's Patriot, which is a mistake. If you look at Russia, they have 12 different air defense systems that they are supporting because they do not trust one and they are smart not to trust one. We, on the other hand are stuck with essentially one system for tactical land-based protection. We have different ones for sea but for land-based protection, the major thing we have is Patriot. Now, what we have seen in Saudi Arabia, which is where we can watch Patriot operate, is that Patriot can hit a missile but not always. When it hits a missile, it does not always kill it. The other problem is that, if you look at the video, you are seeing these things a few thousand feet away from their ultimate target, not miles away. The other limitation, it seems, is that Patriot cannot acquire and hold a target until it is quite close to hitting it. Now, any missile that is in free-fall at the end of its trajectory takes a lot of kinetic energy to kill it. This is not been particularly good. These missiles keep coming even after they are hit. They may not exactly hit your target and we are talking about missiles, Iranian missiles supplied to the Houthi's in Yemen, which are not so accurate in the first place. What scares me is that China has lots of missiles and the PAC-3 may not be enough in its current configuration. I made a couple of suggestions. One of which is already being done in some places. That is a better radar so that we can hit missiles further away from where they are aiming. That helps.

The second thing is a better interceptor missile. They have two now, one made by Raytheon, another made by Lockheed Martin. I am not sure which ones the Saudis are firing but my guess is they are firing both types. There is a third missile called Stunner. It is a joint venture between the Israelis and Raytheon. It is what is on Arrow 3. We now know that it works well, because it was tested in Alaska against ICBM targets in the exoatmosphere and it nailed them way out, not anywhere near where that missile's heading. It looks exceptionally good. I think that is something that we should think about upgrading, not only Taiwan's air defenses but the Japanese air defenses which also use Patriot and US air defenses on Okinawa which also use Patriot. That change to the Stunner interceptor could improve the chances of destroying Chinese missiles. I wish we had something better, but honestly, we do not right now. So, it is a very short-term remedy, better radar and adding another interceptor missile that can hit further out. Those would help.

Jerry Gordon: That brings me to the question about why Taiwan and Israel on the defense side have not gotten together? You gave the example of the Stunner missile that is a joint "US-Israeli development"?

Stephen Bryen: I think for Stunner, it is up to Raytheon, not Israel, to sell it. I do think Israel's in a position to sell it as it requires a US export license. This is better, as Israel does not sell anything to Taiwan these days, at least not openly, because they are afraid of the Chinese cutting them off. That is the truth. They used to. Years ago, the single biggest provider to Taiwan other than the US was Israel. However, as Israel got cozy with the Chinese, that trade disappeared. I do not think there is much prospect these days for Israel to directly sell to Taiwan but there is plenty of prospect for Israeli products made in partnership with US companies, for US companies to sell to Taiwan if the administration will approve the sale, of whatever it is. It is

bit better than it was in the past but there is still a long way to go to give Taiwan the tools it needs to defend itself.

Jerry Gordon: Did the Trump administration allow the delivery of Harpoon missiles to deal with seaborne invasion?

Stephen Bryen: Taiwan had Harpoons, but they asked for a lot more and the Trump administration approved it. The Harpoon's an old weapon. There are more modern ones coming along that ought to be also provided to Taiwan. But right now, at least Taiwan has the Harpoons and is getting more. I was pleased that the Trump administration approved the delivery of those Harpoons, because it will help the Taiwanese deal with the threat of a sea invasion.

Jerry Gordon: Taiwan's air force has aging fleet of F-16s of the first variety. They are about to get deliveries of the new F-16 V-series. However, you had a rather novel suggestion. Is that still viable?

Stephen Bryen: I do not know if it is viable, but I will tell you what it is and let you decide if it is viable. Taiwan has F-16 A/B models, which are in the process of being upgraded, which is a good thing. New radars and new electronics, some improvements in the engine but it is still not the equivalent of a new airplane. Under Trump, Taiwan had been approved to receive the F-16V. The V-model is quite a lot more advanced than the old ones they have. However, they do not have them yet and it will be some years before they get them. The problem for Taiwan is that it must be able to protect its air bases from missile attack, if its air bases are destroyed and it has quite a lot of air bases then I do not care what kind of air force you have, you cannot use it, if there are no runways and logistical support, all that sort of thing. One of my ideas is to give them V/STOL, vertical short take-off and landing aircraft, because you do not need a runway and an airport. You can put them in different places where they are going to be awfully hard to find. Now, there are two V/STOL

candidates, the F-35B, the B-model is a V/STOL aircraft, or the possibility of the Harrier II, which the Marines have. Let me start with the second and go to the first. The Marines are in the process of acquiring F-35Bs to replace the Harriers II that they have. The Harrier IIs, are much more advanced than the old British Harrier. They are made in the US. As an interim solution, they would give the Taiwanese a platform they could use that's vertical take-off and landing. That is one solution. The question is how fast these aircraft will become available but let us say they may become available in the next two or three years. The second solution is to provide for Taiwan to get F-35Bs under some program, like a lend-lease program or anything we can dream up to help finance these aircraft. What I do not know is how fast we could get them to Taiwan. Can we get them there in a timely way? In fact, that is true of both solutions. However, I think there is no doubt that, given the problems of the air defenses that we now have, that having a vertical take-off and landing aircraft would be an asset for Taiwan and would help them defend the island. The options are either the Harrier IIs, which are up to date, but retiring from the US Marine air fleet or the F-35B, which is the better solution, but the question is the timetables, the availability, the impact on the US forces. There are a lot of questions that the experts would have to answer. Otherwise, we would have to defend Taiwan from outside, entirely.

Jerry Gordon: The US has a so-called Quad Alliance concept involving India, Japan, Australia, and the US, to oppose China's threat in the Indo-Pacific region. The issue is, how credible is Japan militarily and why shouldn't this joint military command also include Taiwan?

Stephen Bryen: It is a political alliance, not a joint military command. We need a joint military command, but we do not have one. Now, the second question is, what about Japan's military? Japan has what is called a self-defense force. That means a little military but there are some things Japan does

have. They have a decent air force, including F-16s and including F-35s now. So, they have a good air force. I mean, it is an American-style air force, and it is capable. I think it is around 100 aircraft. In any case, it has a decent number of aircraft and if Japan is called upon, they could use those assets. Secondly, Japan has a small but credible navy. Part of its fleet are submarines. Japan has quite good diesel electric submarines, now with the new ones coming on stream, with air independent propulsion, AIP, which means they can operate for exceptionally long periods under water. These are attack submarines, these are not anything other than that. They could wreak havoc on the Chinese navy. Those are the two things that Japan has. Its land forces are inconsequential. They are no role other than defending Japan. They are not expeditionary so they cannot go anywhere. They have no assets to move them and anyway no one knows whether they are any good in the first place. However, the air force we know is rather good as is its navy. We do joint exercises with the navy. Japan is also considering the possibility of putting F-35B V/STOL aircraft on some of their larger ships. They have not done it, but they could. I would say it is good.

Jerry Gordon: How credible is China's military cyber warfare and AI applications drone systems compared to the US and other countries?

Stephen Bryen: In terms of drones, they have copied just about everything we have. The most credible of them is called Wing Loong II. The UAE bought several of them and supplied them to Field Marshall Haftar's Libyan National Army forces. We have seen them in action. Some of them are in Africa. I do not think they are particularly good. They are unreliable. A lot of them have crashed. I mean China can churn out so many of these things that even if they are unreliable, it almost does not matter because they can put so many of them out there.

Jerry Gordon: What about China's military AI applications.

Stephen Bryen: David Goldman has written a recent article in *Asia Times*, [saying](#) that China is ahead of the United States in AI.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Stephen Bryen: I would question that. Maybe commercial products: they will be introducing a lot of AI, what they call internet of things, gadgets. On military AI applications, I have not seen any sign of it. We are just getting started really with AI in the US military. I think it is going to be an important factor, because I think, despite a lot of carping in the air force and the navy instead of building manned fighter airplanes, we are going to build fighter drones, that will fly with airplanes. In fact, the British are far along with one of these. They are going to fly with our fighters and bombers and then go off and do their thing. To do that they are going to need a lot of sensors and AI to be able to do this, otherwise, they will be getting knocked down. I think that that area is one that we should watch: robotic forces; land, sea, underwater and air and for that matter, missiles too, that are even in space. They are going to have to have a lot of artificial intelligence applications to replace the human being and I think it is a lot cheaper. You do not need to support a pilot inside of a cockpit, with their oxygen and with all the other things the pilot needs. It could be very cost-effective. I think the future war, it is not here yet is a place that we are going to see this more and more. I know that the air force does not like it because they want pilots and airplanes, and navy does not like it because they want seafaring navy people and not gadgets. Submariners do not like it because nobody in the sub. It is a cultural change for the military. I think we are going to see that more and more AI will replace conventional platforms everywhere. It is coming.

Jerry Gordon: There was an interesting novel that you and I discussed called, [2034: The History of a Future War](#). The fictional war is between China and the United States. It

features a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the very same subject that we are talking about in this interview. The authors are Elliot Ackerman and former NATO Supreme Commander, Admiral James G. Stavridis.

Stephen Bryen: Jim Stavridis knows what he is talking about. So, I must show some humility here but there been a lot of war games and simulations, not just novels. Let us say if you must use the simulations of a China US conflict RAND Corporation suggests if we got into a fight we would be devastated. We are going to be defeated. Knocked out. But I do not think so.

Jerry Gordon: You mean where the Chinese in both the novel *2034* and those RAND simulations shows the US Seventh Fleet being defeated and Taiwan invaded?

Stephen Bryen: Yes, they will sink the US fleet, destroy Taiwan and everybody will be killed, and China will be the superpower and we will be making cell phones for the Chinese. I think that under-rates our military.

Jerry Gordon: That means that 'president for life' Xi Jinping, is not going to be deterred from his objective of having one China, no separate Taiwan?

Stephen Bryen: It is a danger to put out these stories, because it encourages the Chinese to believe their own lies. If they think they are superior, then why not be superior and launch a battle. There are some tricky aspects to all this. One is whether it is a conventional war or whether it is a nuclear war. It is a nuclear war, what kind of a nuclear war are we talking about? Tactical weapons? I do not believe in tactical nuclear weapons. Because one man's tactical nuclear weapons are another man's existential threat. There has always been that lurking issue in dealing with massive Chinese forces and small US forces. It goes back to the Korean war. In the Korean War, MacArthur and other Pentagon generals wanted to use atomic weapons, 10 of them if I remember. Can you imagine

10 Hiroshima's?

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Stephen Bryen: What a horrible thought because they felt they were going to get pushed into the sea. If the US felt it was going to be defeated, would it use nuclear weapons? Or turn it around the other way, if the Chinese felt they were going to be defeated, would they use nuclear weapons? They have plenty of them. These are extremely dangerous situations. I worry about it a great deal. I think that is a particular risk in the Asian context and it always was a risk with the Soviets as well because they have tactical nuclear weapons, even suitcase weapons apparently. There was always a chance they might try to do that. It is a mass versus capabilities problem and how do you end such a war? My former late colleague, Fred Ikle, who was a brilliant man, said "The problem is not starting a war, the problem is how you end it." How do you get out of it? How do you defeat an enemy? How do you defeat China? You cannot. You can only push them back, but you cannot defeat them. There are a lot of good reasons to avoid war. The last thing I think anybody would want is a war in Asia or anywhere else for that matter. I doubt whether the Chinese believe that. I think they think they could win. Every time you publish these war scenarios, that we are going to get destroyed by China, you are encouraging them. They will think they can get away with it. Look what they did in the South Sea Islands, those islands, and reefs that they took over. They were not theirs. They went to the International Court of Justice and the International Court of Justice said, "You don't own them, they are not yours." The Chinese said, "We're not interested, we're going to take them anyway." They did. Worse than that, once they took them, they put missiles, airfields, naval ports and militarized them. They tried to create a choke point in the South China Sea where 80% of the traffic, the life blood of all of Asia goes. They knew what they were doing. Who knows what they will do next? Will they

decide to try and clobber Taiwan or Kinmen or Penghu or some other and try and get away with it? What would we do? These are unanswered questions right now. The worst thing we can do is encourage them. I emphasize again, we have a great Air Force, the best in the world. Nobody could challenge us. We have a fabulous Navy, the best in the world, huge. Nobody challenges that. We have a great Army and Marines. We know how to fight, and we have been fighting for a long time in different places, so we know what works and what does not. We need to tell the Chinese, "Don't mess with us, because if you do, you're going to be damn surprised." That is the lesson. That is why I do not like Elliot Ackerman's and Admiral Stavridis's book, *2034*. I do not like the war games that have been carried out because they encourage the enemy.

Jerry Gordon: How do you feel the long-term prospects are going to be for this President in China, Mr. Xi Jinping? He appears to be, as I said earlier, kind of a version of Mao but with a lot of technical steroids in his system and governance.

Stephen Bryen: He is a formidable, powerful leader. We do not have any real insight into how serious the opposition is to him. He has been arresting a lot of people for corruption who are clearly his political enemies. That is what dictators do; that is not a big surprise. Does that mean that he has got iron-clad control, or does it mean a lot of people would like to kill him? I do not know the answer to that. I have no secret intelligence, nor any sources. There is a lot of discontent in China, but does that translate into anything? Who knows? I think we are going to be surprised. One day there may be another Tiananmen or something equivalent happening. I remember when I was in China in 1987, I think there had been riots in Shanghai. Later the same day in Beijing I was in a car with a several Chinese scientists from the Academy of Sciences. I said, "Have you heard about the riots?" Nobody knew anything. I said, "Well, I think there have been riots in Shanghai." Nothing. Then the driver who spoke was not supposed

to know or speak English, said, "Oh yes, I heard it on the VOA (Voice of America) this morning." I have no idea at all, how stable China is. No one knows if North Korea is stable or not. Everything is a guessing game; it is a black box. We get little hints here and there, we can see some things but to judge that something might change, we have no clue. If you asked the CIA, they would give you one of their brilliant reports and say, "On the one hand and the other hand." But they do not know either.

Jerry Gordon: Xi Jinping appears to be creating an Orwellian system for basically controlling thoughts and attitude of his entire population. The worst example of that, I think, is the ethnic cleansing genocide that is going on with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Stephen Bryen: Yes, that is terrible. It is genocide against the Uyghurs, Tibetans. A terrible thing. Have the US complained much about it? Not very much and even if we complained, what are we going to do about Chinese human rights violations? Have we gone to the UN and said, "We demand that this stop?" Then we will attempt to obtain a UN resolution, which we will not be able to pass at the Security Council because of China's veto power. But at the least we would have tried to embarrass them. The only weapon we have is to try and embarrass the Chinese regime. That is upsets them a lot, challenges their legitimacy.

Jerry Gordon: The US has not said terribly much about the persecution of Christians in China whose churches have been closed.

Stephen Bryen: They've said nothing about the Christians in China. Nothing. They are shutting down Christian churches and pulling the crosses off buildings, leveling them. I read about it all the time. It is like Hitler and the Jews and the Second World War, isn't it? From a German point of view, it was illogical to go after the Jews, they were the scientists of

Germany, they were the economic backbone of Germany in many ways, they provided most of the middle trading systems of the German state and nonetheless the Nazis diverted massive resources to commit genocide. Somebody pointed out that they were diverting trains (which were needed to move military supplies to the German army) to take Jews to Auschwitz. They were completely insane. I think China is insane in the same way by the way. It is an eerie parallel. Thought control and all this is not intended just for the Uyghurs, the Uyghurs are being locked up and destroyed. But it covers all Chinese in one way or another and thanks to technology it is getting more pervasive.

Jerry Gordon: The troubling part about it is the example of the facial recognition and AI systems used in Xinjiang to control the Uyghurs and use of the systems to develop their measurement of social credit in China, there has been use of US technology to facilitate that.

Stephen Bryen: Yes. True.

Jerry Gordon: Why hasn't that been sanctioned?

Stephen Bryen: Because we do not have any effective export controls. That is the least of the problems we have because a lot of our technology and our companies are doing business in China giving out their technology directly and indirectly, willingly, and unwillingly. Moreover, what China does not get directly and "legally," they steal it through cyber-attacks, cyber intrusions or by using old fashioned spies. They collect all the names of all the US scientists and engineers involved. They know who they are and then they go after their computers. Pretty soon they are in their companies taking everything out of it, both commercial and military. We do not have any good export controls. I used to run the export control program years ago. We are complete fools.

Jerry Gordon: They have also set up independent of our

government support for academics here in the United States doing what many consider as front-line research.

Stephen Bryen: You're right and now we are going after some scientists who failed to declare that they had contracts of one kind or another with the Chinese government or Chinese institutions, which they were obliged to declare when they got US government grants. What about all the scientists that do not use government grants but get grants from industries or get grants from research institutions and sell their souls to the Chinese? There is no legal recourse on that, nothing right now. Years ago, we tried to get controls on technology, it was exceedingly difficult. Nano technology, artificial intelligence, all those stuff, medical technologies, vaccines, exotic materials, coatings for metals and for plastics, all the stuff is going out the door to China. There are a lot of complicit persons – professors and researchers– who are taking money from the Chinese. Even if they do reveal their ties to Chinese institutions (as many do), there is no law nothing against it. Think about that. I am an American scientist and I get an invitation from some Wuhan Institute of Virology to do a project when I sign the form. By the way, plenty of Americans had deals with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. When I sign the form, declaring that I have a contract with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, it does not mean you are not going to get government money. If you did not declare, you can get in trouble but if you declare it, they are still giving me money. We need to clean this up. I mean, this is a mess.

Jerry Gordon: The other problem we have is US academic institutions, particularly under this pandemic have opened enrollments because of the Chinese funding involved. That has provided a predicate for some interesting espionage by of all people, PLA officers at US research centers and universities.

Stephen Bryen: Correct. If you give it away. It is there for

free. Or at least you can buy it so that is what espionage is for. It is a mess, and my fear is that even under the Trump Administration, which got going a little bit on this in terms of the people who signed that they did not lie on their forms, that these Confucius Institutes and Thousand Talents programs were funding many US universities and US universities were competing for China's money.

Jerry Gordon: Correct.

Stephen Bryen: This is going to continue until some people wise up and particularly Congress, which is useless, by the way, on this subject and deal with it. It is a national danger. It is very risky. The best brains of America at Harvard, Yale, Michigan, Berkeley, you name them; every university— are all compromised. Is this something we want? Is this good for us?

Jerry Gordon: We are amid the pandemic. You and I have talked about the problems of China's culpability for triggering this pandemic. A WHO team was recently in Wuhan trying to recreate what occurred. What do you think the practical realities of anything coming out of that?

Stephen Bryen: Zero. WHO is compromised anyway and secondly, the Chinese are not going to let them see anything that would help them figure out what really happened. I think we know enough now. Our intelligence agencies are starting to reveal what they knew before, this virus came out of the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Period. Whether it was on purpose, an accident or whether something happened I think there was work going on there on vaccines, particularly a vaccine for AIDS.

By the way so you know, my brother died from AIDS. It is something I care a lot about. Secondly, there was work on bioweapons. There is no doubt about that. The Wuhan Virology is owned by the Chinese government. It was the only fourth level laboratory in all of China so if you want to do this

work, you need to do it there. There is no one else that had the capability. Thirdly, there is an issue with the substances that are used to grow cells or viruses for experimental purposes that notoriously transfer cells between petri dishes. Unless you are extraordinarily isolating one thing from another, you are running a major technical risk. There were lots of problems with Wuhan from an operational point of view; they are well known. The US Embassy in Beijing sent two delegations to Wuhan Institute of Virology, complaining about problems at the lab and what they found was serious enough that they complained that the standards there were below par. That it was extremely dangerous. Those reports have been suppressed by our State Department. Why? We should know that, but they have been suppressed so as not to embarrass the Chinese. You don't send two delegations, not one, but two expert groups who come in and say, "This is dangerous. This is messy. You're not doing this right and you have problems here, problems there." And then when they were supposedly corrected, went back, and found even more problems.

Stephen Bryen: I think the US, for national security reasons, has resisted telling the truth about the Wuhan virus, even to the point now that the Biden administration has forbidden the US government from saying Wuhan virus or China virus. This is Washington thought control. The point here is that that I do not really know what happened there but there is enough information that says what happened was bad and that has caused a huge grief throughout the world. We are not out of it by a long shot. They are going to do it again unless we really put pressure on them; that China was suppressing the information. We are not even allowed to discuss it now. No more Wuhan virus. No more China virus.

Jerry Gordon: Steve, this has been a wonderful, wide-ranging, serious conversation about China, its threats to not only the Indo-Pacific region and Taiwan directly but also the relationship between China, the US, and other interests as

well, including the subjects that we have addressed. I think this will be an important document to get out to the world and policy makers, not only in this administration but others, including Congress. Thank you for this opportunity and hope to have you back again.

Stephen Bryen: Thank you for having me, Jerry. Have a great day and a great week.

Jerry Gordon: You too.

[Watch](#) this YouTube video of our interview with Dr. Stephen Bryen.

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