Classified/Top Secret (No Just Kidding)

January 17, 2023

Presidential Review Directive 18

To: The Secretary of State

The Secretary of Defense

The Secretary of Energy

The Secretary of the Treasury

Attorney General

National Security Advisor

White House Chief of Staff

CC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Director of National Intelligence

Subject: Potential Chinese Action against Taiwan

The President has directed that the National Security Council undertake a review of US options in the event of aggressive Chinese action against Taiwan.

The review should focus on the following concerns:

1. What are the types of economic, diplomatic, and military actions China could take to coerce Taiwan?
2. What are the ways Taiwan can defend itself economically, diplomatically, and militarily?
3. Is the likelihood of Chinese action against Taiwan increasing?
4. If China takes action against Taiwan, what will be the response of key US allies, in particular Japan, and South Korea?
5. If China takes action against Taiwan, what will be the response of key Chinese allies, in particular Russia, and North Korea.
6. If China takes action against Taiwan, what will be the response of key multilateral bodies, such as the United Nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad – US, Japan, India, Australia)?
7. What are the legal responsibilities of the US toward Taiwan under international law and US domestic law?
8. What are the economic consequences of the potential conflict in the East Asia and South China Sea region? Special attention should be given to energy and technology (semiconductors) sectors.
9. What are the range of options the US has in responding to economic coercion, diplomatic isolation, maritime blockade, or direct military action by China against Taiwan?
10. Options considered might include: multilateral diplomacy through the United Nations, actions taken through multilateral alliances (the Quad or AUKUS – Australia, United Kingdom, United States or the ASEAN regional Forum), and/or through bilateral diplomacy (US-Japan); economic responses such as embargoes or tariffs; immediate and longer-term military assistance to Taiwan (similar to what the US has done for Ukraine); and/or direct US military intervention at some level.
11. US responses to even potential Chinese aggression will have long term consequences regarding overall deterrence of China in East Asia, China’s emergence as a global peer competitor to the US, the balance of power in East Asia, and US and Chinese relationships with other powers in the region (Russia, Japan, the Koreas, and ASEAN). What are the longer-term implications of an assertive US response to Chinese threats vs. a less assertive response? In short, how will different types of US responses to threats against Taiwan be seen by US allies and opponents in the region? How will different types of responses reflect on the US reputation as a reliable ally or a formidable foe?

**Tasking (These are the research questions assigned for your role)**

The following officials will be responsible for background papers that will support the drafting of a Presidential Review Directive.

***State Department***

Secretary of State: How will US global reputation be shaped by the potential range of US responses? If the US refrains from acting forcefully, will this be perceived as an invitation for China to become the regional hegemon and a signal that the US is no longer a reliable ally to the democratic nations in the region? Can a forceful US response be seen as a reassertion of US leadership in the region? Should the US formally abandon strategic ambiguity?

Deputy Secretary of State: What are the possible responses of regional powers to Chinese aggression? How much will they rely on US leadership in crafting their responses (consider key players such as Japan, and Russia)?

Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs: What are balance of power implications of more assertive China? If China increases its pressure on Taiwan, how will that reshape the emergence of China as a rival to the US in East Asia?

US Ambassador to the United Nations: What are the global diplomatic implications of a potential intervention? How likely is it that the UN Security Council will be able to mount a response to Chinese actions? What will be the response of other Perm 5 members (Russia, UK, and France)? Will China’s presence on the UN Security Council require the use of the UN General Assembly to deal with these issues?

Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security: Given the alliance relationships the US has in the region, what are the likely political-military responses of Japan and India to Chinese coercion of Taiwan?

Counselor of the State Department: What are the global diplomatic implications of a potential intervention? How likely is it that the UN Security Council will be able to mount a response to Chinese actions? What will be the response of other Perm 5 members (Russia, UK, and France)? Will China’s presence on the UN Security Council require the use of the UN General Assembly to deal with these issues?

Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (IO): What are the options for the US to use the Quadrilateral Security Alliance, AUKUS, or the ASEAN Regional Forum as tools for deterring China or reducing the potential for conflict?

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP): Given the alliance relationships the US has in the region, what are the likely political-military responses of Japan and South Korea to Chinese coercion of Taiwan?

***Department of Defense***

Secretary of Defense: Given the defense relationships the US has in the region, what are the likely political-military responses of Japan and South Korea to Chinese coercion of Taiwan? In short, if the US decides to use military assets in the region (from increases in military assistance to Taiwan to redeploying forces or moving another aircraft carrier to placement of US military forces on Taiwan), what is the likelihood that Japan and South Korea will assist the US?

Deputy Secretary of Defense: If the US should decide to use force, what options are available given current US capabilities in the region?

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy: What are Taiwan’s military capabilities to defend itself, and how much of that depends on assistance from the US?

Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs: What are balance of power implications of more assertive China? If China increases its pressure on Taiwan, how will that reshape the emergence of China as a rival to the US in East Asia?

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs: Given the defense relationships the US has in the region, what are the likely political-military responses of India and ASEAN nations (particularly Vietnam and the Philippines) to Chinese coercion of Taiwan?

JCS Chair: If the US should decide to use force, what options are available given current US capabilities in the region?

Vice Chair JCS: What are Taiwan’s military capabilities to defend itself, and how much of that depends on assistance from the US?

CINC INDOPACOM: What are the likely ways China might use military force against Taiwan?

***Department of Energy*** (Meets with Treasury and Justice)

Secretary of Energy: What are the economic implications, particularly related to energy prices impacted by potential disruption of trade routes? What are the implications of potential disruption of the production of Taiwanese semiconductors in the event of Chinese actions across the Taiwan Strait?

Deputy Secretary of Energy: What are the economic implications, particularly related to energy prices impacted by potential disruption of trade routes? What are the implications of potential disruption of the production of Taiwanese semiconductors in the event of Chinese actions across the Taiwan Strait?

***Department of the Treasury*** (Meets with Energy and Justice)

Secretary of the Treasury: What are the economic implications of a disruption of trade between the US and China and an overall disruption of trade in East Asia?

Deputy Secretary of the Treasury: What kind of economic leverage can China use over Taiwan as a means of coercion?

***Department of Justice*** (Meets with Energy and Treasury)

Attorney General: Are there international legal measures the US can use to dissuade China from taking action against Taiwan? What are obligations of the US under domestic law related to legislation such as the Taiwan Relations Act?

Deputy Attorney General: Are there international legal measures the US can use to dissuade China from taking action against Taiwan? What are obligations of the US under domestic law related to legislation such as the Taiwan Relations Act?

***National Security Council Staff*** (Meets with White House Staff)

National Security Advisor: In the long term, what can prevent the US and China from becoming antagonistic rivals? Is great power rivalry inevitable or can the US and China find some way to accommodate the changes in the balance of power signaled by the emergence of China?

Principal Deputy National Security Advisor: What is the end game here? How does the US deter Chinese coercion of Taiwan and return the situation to the status quo or use the crisis as a way to reset relations to a less antagonistic tone? Is that even possible?

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning: In the long term, what can prevent the US and China from becoming antagonistic rivals? Is great power rivalry inevitable or can the US and China find some way to accommodate the changes in the balance of power signaled by the emergence of China?

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania: What kind of economic leverage can China use over nations in East Asia and Oceania as a means of coercion?

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for China: What are the domestic political implications of a Chinese coercion against Taiwan? Would a new aggressive posture be an attempt by Communist party leaders to move domestic audience’s attention away from economic problems at home? Would a lack of success in coercing Taiwan endanger Communist party rule or simply the rule of Xi Jinping?

***White House Staff*** (Meets with NSC Staff)

White House Chief of Staff: What are the likely reactions of members of Congress – Democratic and Republican leaders -- to US assertive or less than assertive US responses to Chinese aggression?

Director of White House Office of Legislative Affairs: What are obligations of the US under domestic law related to legislation such as the Taiwan Relations Act? Will Chinese aggression lead to the passage of the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 (legislation that is pending in the US Congress)?

***Intelligence Community***

Director of National Intelligence: What are the likely actions China might take against Taiwan? Consider economic, diplomatic, and military actions.

Deputy Director of National Intelligence: Given the relationships the US has in the region, what are the likely political-military responses of Japan and Russia to Chinese coercion of Taiwan?

Director of Central Intelligence: What are the likely actions China might take against Taiwan? Consider economic, diplomatic, and military actions.

Director of CIA China Mission Center: What are the domestic political implications of a Chinese coercion against Taiwan? Would a new aggressive posture be an attempt by Communist party leaders to move domestic audience’s attention away from economic problems at home? Would a lack of success in coercing Taiwan endanger Communist party rule or simply the rule of Xi Jinping?

***Meetings***

During interagency meetings later in the year, the NSC will assess the following options and provide a recommendation to the President in the form of a draft Presidential Review Directive. The study papers assigned above form the background work for the NSC interagency process. As per PD-1 Organization of the National Security Council Process (imaginary document from the Newmann Administration), membership in the key interagency groups is as follows:

**National Security Council Principals Committee (NSC/PC)**

1. Chair: National Security Advisor
2. Secretary of State
3. Secretary of Defense
4. Secretary of Energy
5. Secretary of Treasury
6. Attorney General
7. Director of National Intelligence
8. Chair Joint Chiefs of Staff
9. US Trade Representative
10. CINC INDOPACOM
11. White House Chief of Staff

**National Security Council Deputies Committee NSC/DC**

1. Chair: Principal Deputy National Security Advisor
2. Deputy Secretary of State
3. Deputy Secretary of Defense
4. Deputy Secretary of Energy
5. Deputy Secretary of Treasury
6. Deputy Attorney General
7. Deputy Director of National Intelligence
8. Vice Chair JCS
9. Director of Central Intelligence
10. Director of WH Office of Legislative Affairs
11. Counselor of the State Department

**National Security Council Policy Coordinating Committees (NSC/PCCs)**

China PCC

1. Chair, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for China
2. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
3. Director of CIA China Mission Center

East Asia PCC

1. Chair, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for East Asia and Oceania
2. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
3. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs
4. Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (IO)

Strategic Affairs PCC

1. Chair, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning
2. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs
3. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security
4. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy