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Taiwan Is Indefensible

Guests:

For the motion: Lyle J. Goldstein, Charlie Glaser
Against the motion: Elbridge Colby, Elizabeth Larus
Moderator: John Donovan

FINAL VOTING RESULTS AVAILABLE FRIDAY, May 28th 2021

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John Donovan:

If war were to break out between the U.S. and China, Taiwan is the likely flashpoint. Imagine a ravenous Chinese military amassing near Taiwan, the White House warning against an invasion. All it would take is one misunderstanding. Though the U.S. does not officially recognize Taiwan's government, it does remain its strongest backer, while China views the island as lost territory which it must take back. Some argue that the scale of China's military in the region has already surpassed anything the U.S. or Taiwan militaries could stop. Others say American credibility is on the line, and the U.S. could indeed defend Taiwan if pushed. So, in the context of these mounting tensions, here is our question. Is Taiwan indefensible?

Now, to be clear, indefensible can cut several ways. The side-by-side military comparison is an obvious one. Could an attack from China be repulsed? But that is not the only question. Does America have the political will to confront China so far from its shores?

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Should the U.S. risk the economic and diplomatic fallout that would likely occur? And what should America be willing to promise Taiwan? We may be entering an inflection point in the geopolitics of this region as China's power and influence continue to grow, and so these questions collectively are what we are here to debate. I'm John Donovan, and this is Intelligence Squared.

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John Donovan:

You are going to decide who wins this debate, and you're going to do that by casting two votes. One in just a few seconds from now, and the other one after you have heard all of the arguments.

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That's two votes, because that's how we figure out our winning team. It's the team that changes the most minds between the first and the second vote. So okay, it is time to cast that first vote. You're going to do that by clicking on the button located on the right of your screen that says

"overview and voting." Overview and voting. And then, scroll downward. Or, you can do it by going to IQ2vote.org. You can do it right here on this webpage by clicking the "overview and vote" button, or again, from any browser, or on your cell phone. IQ2vote.org. Just take a second or two to get yourself set up for that.

Okay, now, when you're there, you will be able to cast your first vote. You will be voting for the resolution, against the resolution, or undecided. Again, it's IQ2vote.org, and I'm going to give you one more second, just to get that first vote in. And one more thing while you're doing that. I want to let you know. We're going to be opening this vote up to a broader audience for seven days, essentially so that we can take the temperature of the nation on this issue.

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All right. It is now time for our second vote. Remember, it's the side that sways the most minds between the first and the second vote that will be declared our winner, same way as before.

All right, time to meet our debaters. Arguing for the motion, Taiwan is Indefensible, is Lyle J. Goldstein, a Research Professor of China Maritime Studies Institute at the U.S. Naval War College. His debating partner, Charlie Glaser, professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University. Opposing them, Elizabeth Larus, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at University of Mary Washington and the author of three books on China. Her debating partner, Eldridge Colby, a former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, and author of *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*. This upcoming Intelligence Squared debate is produced in tandem with *Foreign Affairs*, a leading magazine for in-depth analysis of foreign policy.

So, let's move on to the first of our three rounds.

00:14:01

Round One is comprised of opening statements, uninterrupted, by each debater in turn. They will be four minutes each. Again, our motion is "Taiwan is Indefensible." First up to speak in support of that Motion, Charlie Glaser. The screen is all yours.

Charlie Glaser:

Thank you for inviting us to debate this important topic. We're going to argue today that the United States should break its commitment to Taiwan. This is a broader argument than the question of whether it's defensible. In my opening statement, I'm going to lay out the broad strategic arguments. My partner, Lyle, will elaborate the arguments about the depth of China's commitment to regaining Taiwan, and also talk about the military balance. Our argument, in a nutshell, is that U.S. interests -- given U.S. interests, which are limited, the risks of defending Taiwan are far too large. So, what are the risks? First, a large conventional war is not unlikely over the next two or three decades.

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And this conventional war would be very costly for the United States and even more costly for Taiwan. Second, a large conventional war is not unlikely to escalate. And this will obviously be extremely costly if it became nuclear. In comparison, U.S. interests are much smaller. Taiwan is not a vital U.S. interest, and is not a key security partner. Okay, then, in more detail. Why is the probability of conventional war significant? First, China considers Taiwan to be part of China, and unification is a top national priority and is longstanding. And it appears that China is becoming more determined, not less, to achieve unification. President Xi has made unification a pressing priority, saying this problem should be not passed along to the next generation. In addition, China has greatly increased its ability to win a war with the United States over Taiwan.

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And this is not only our view, but in recent reports about war games between Taiwan and China, which the United States joined, the United States loses consistently. Importantly, it's not only my view and Lyle's view that war -- the probability of conventional war is becoming much more likely. In March of this year, Admiral Davidson, who was then Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific commands, stated in Congressional testimony, "Taiwan is clearly one of their ambitions. I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact in the next six years."

Okay, so second, now why might a conventional war escalate to nuclear war? First, and I think most important, China would have incentives to escalate to convince the United States to back off. In traditional nuclear bargaining theory, the country with greater resolve can expect to win in nuclear bargaining. And China clearly has the greater resolve. The United States might also escalate.

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It might fear that losing a war against Taiwan would result in dissolution of its alliances, as countries started to doubt U.S. credibility. And finally, once we're in a large conventional war, both the United States and China will have their forces on high nuclear alert, preparing for war, which increases the probability of both accidents and the possibility of creating new incentives for escalation.

We think our argument is very strong, but we do anticipate counter arguments. I will mention two. First, that it is immoral or at least irresponsible to break our commitment to Taiwan. Taiwan is a democracy of 23 million people. We agree that Taiwan, the people of Taiwan would very likely be better off without being under Chinese control. But the risks to the United States are much greater than these potential costs to Taiwan. Second, and the most common counter argument I hear is that U.S. credibility for protecting its allies will be severely damaged if we don't protect Taiwan.

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We think that this is probably wrong for three reasons. First, our allies should understand that we have a very different relationship to them than China because China does not consider them

to be part of China, so defending them is much less risky. Second, we can pursue a variety of measures to make clear that we plan to defend Taiwan, including increasing force structure. And third, we don't think Japan has a good option besides the United States. So in short, the risks of defending Taiwan are large compared to both the cost to Taiwan and the risk to U.S. security. Thus, you should vote to end the U.S. commitment to Taiwan. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Charlie Glaser. And next up on screen arguing against the resolution that Taiwan is indefensible, here is Elizabeth Larus. Elizabeth, the screen is yours.

Elizabeth Larus:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain why you should vote No on the proposal.

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That is, that Taiwan is in fact defensible. And I'm going to give you four reasons, four strategic reasons, why Taiwan is defensible, and then my team partner, Bridge, will consider the military calculus. So the first reason is, defending Taiwan is vital to U.S. credibility and standing in the region and worldwide. U.S. defense of Taiwan is an important indicator of U.S. commitment to our alliances, not just in the Asia-Pacific, but worldwide. Not just will China be watching if we break this commitment, but so will the rest of the world. What will United States commitment and its word be worth if we break it if we are intimidated by China? The United States, since the end of World War II, has been the bulwark of peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, and if we cut and run because we are intimidated by China, then our standing in the region and worldwide will be diminished.

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The U.S. is an important player in the Asia-Pacific. We have friends and allies there and we have defense agreements. If we cut and run from Taiwan, then the other allies will wonder are we going to, when pressured by China or when the situation gets tough, are we going to break our alliances with them. And, if our allies and friends in the region are not convinced about U.S. commitment to the region, they might just bandwagon with China or they will decide to build up their own forces. They will expand their military, maybe go nuclear, and also you might see a re-militarized Japan, which might be destabilizing to the region, as well. The second reason is Taiwan's geostrategic significance.

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Taiwan is an important element, not a pawn in the game of competition with China. It is located on the first island chain that is China's defensive perimeter. Whoever controls Taiwan controls in the Asian seaboard as well as the western Pacific. This is exactly what China wants so that it could have its way in the Asia-Pacific. By most indicators, the U.S. is still more powerful than China in the region and we do not want to indicate to our allies that we are intimidated.

Third, the alternative to the U.S. being the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific is not good.

China in charge of the Asia-Pacific would not be pretty. We already see Chinese use of wolf warrior tactics. Do not think that China would not use the same tactics against small, medium, and larger entities in the region. The world without U.S. leadership would not merely be an alternate to the past 75 years in which the U.S. has been the dominant power.

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It would be dominated by China. It would be a very, very different world. Do not think that China will be benevolent and gracious in the Asia-Pacific. It will not live and let live, let's just co-exist. Right? It will call shots for large and the small in the region, even for the United States in the Asia-Pacific. The fourth reason why they United States should continue to defend Taiwan is, we have defended the ROC for the past 90 years. Think of Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers. When the ROC was on the mainland in the 1930's. We have sold Taiwan billions of dollars in arms. If we cut and run now, our allies, friends, partners in the region and in Europe will look and say, who's next? Who is next? We supported this ally for so many years, 90, almost 100 years, and now we're just going to leave them high and dry.

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Okay, so what do we finally do? How do we best defend Taiwan? Strategically. I'm going to borrow from the Austrian strategist, Clausewitz, and argue that to deter is to make oneself strong at the decisive place at the right time. So we need to defend Taiwan with arms sales and also with a commitment so we deter Chinese action against Taiwan.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Elizabeth Larus. And that brings us to the half-way mark in our opening round. You have heard from the first two debaters, and now on to the third. Lyle J. Goldstein is going to be arguing for the resolution that Taiwan is indefensible. Lyle, the screen is yours.

Lyle Goldstein:

Hi, everyone. So glad to be here. Let me begin by saying that these are my own opinions. They don't in any way reflect the, any official assessments of the U.S. government. I've been studying Chinese military modernization for now more than two decades and looking at it at a very granular level.

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I watch Chinese military TV, [speaks Chinese], basically every day. I read [speaks Chinese], these are the most prominent military newspapers. I look at satellite photos very frequently of Huludao [spelled phonetically], of Yalungwan [spelled phonetically]. These are the major submarine fabrications, submarine building areas in China. And I can tell you that by focusing on Taiwan as a -- as a major point of our strategy, we're not only putting aside issues that we should work on with China, like global warming, nonproliferation, the pandemic. We're not only engaging in a major arms race with China, but there is a real risk of catastrophic war, even nuclear war. Look at -- look at the cover of The Economist if you didn't see it saying Taiwan is the most dangerous place in the world.

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I emphatically agree, why? You don't have to have a Ph.D. in strategy, folks. Just look at a map. The geography tells you what you need to know. Taiwan is 100 miles off Chinese shores. It's 5,000 miles from Hawaii, not the mainland U.S., Hawaii, okay? A Chinese attack would be shock and awe with Chinese characteristics, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, rocket artillery, drones, and probably thousands of aircraft. There would be decapitation, disruption of Taiwan's air force and navy in their bases, targeting of U.S. bases in Guam and Okinawa. As been any ship ballistic missiles, submarines, bombers would all be used to keep U.S. surface forces back. The submarine force is there, but there are major problems with that. It's certainly no silver bullet. And Taiwan forces are rather pathetic, to be honest. Their spending is below two percent, they're in a manpower crisis, and they have an awful record of accidents just over the last year, very sad but true.

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Look, there's some critical history you need to understand. China was incorporated into the -- into China in 1683. Folks, that's almost 100 years before the American Revolution, okay? And by the way, the Kangxi emperor wasn't so sure they should do this, but they did, okay? Then it was 200 years later was stolen away by Japan. Now we all know that Hong Kong is a major lightning rod for Chinese nationalism because it was taken from China in the Opium War. Well, Taiwan in the same way was taken away by Japan, so all the atrocities and the aggression that Japan perpetrated against China is kind of comes together in the Taiwan issue. And that's why it's a major focal point of Chinese nationalism and why China is fully ready to go to the mat on this, and this is a major problem. So the bottom line is that China has both the will and the requisite capabilities to conquer Taiwan, even in the near term.

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It could happen tomorrow. We, by contrast, don't have the will and don't have the capabilities. Let's face it, 90 percent of Americans couldn't find Taiwan on a map. And there's little prospect of these factors changing. So I think, you know, we should be smart, think strategically, and realize that this is simply beyond the reach of our power and that if we're to draw red lines, we should draw them elsewhere in the Pacific, not over Taiwan. Thank you very much.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Lyle Goldstein. And our final speaker will be speaking against the resolution that Taiwan is indefensible, in other words, that Taiwan is defensible. Here is Elbridge Colby. Elbridge, the screen is yours.

Elbridge Colby:

Great, thank you very much, John. It's a pleasure to be here to debate this critical issue and to build on my partner's superb presentation. The resolution is Taiwan is indefensible. This is wrong. Taiwan is defensible. Let me be clear, defending Taiwan would be hard, costly, and risky, but it is possible if we make the required effort.

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And this is what we must do. Let's begin by defining the term. Taiwan, I take to mean the main island of Taiwan, and especially it's political autonomy. Next, indefensible. Now almost nothing is genuinely impossible to strike at, but that doesn't mean it's indefensible. What we really mean here is something -- is that something can't be defended from a successful attack. A successful attack, I propose, is one that allows the attacker to get what it wants. If the attacker wants to take a piece of land, then being able to do that is success. If an attacker wants full submission, then that's the standard of success. To give an example, the Germans could blitz England but couldn't bring it to heel. England was strikable then, but defensible.

A final part, indefensible by whom? As Taiwan is almost certainly indefensible by its own efforts alone, here I think we mean Taiwan's own efforts along with those of the United States. With that in mind, what is it that we would be trying to defend?

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We'd be trying to defend Taiwan from being subjugated by China. Beijing regards Taiwan is part of China, a renegade province. Beijing has committed to unifying with the island, including by force if it judges that to be necessary. America's interest, on the other hand, is in avoiding Taiwan's subordination to Beijing, in effect maintaining its autonomy, not its independence, mind you. From this, we can establish a couple of things. Beijing's is actually a very high goal by the standard of war games, full subordination and presumably annexation. An effective defense for the United States in Taiwan, then, would be denial of this very high objective. If Beijing fell short of subordinating Taiwan, America and Taiwan would succeed. Beijing's bar for success, therefore, is much higher than ours.

Based on these criteria, an effective defense of Taiwan is possible, but with the proviso that America and Taiwan laser focus on a problem, prioritizing it over all other challenges, and allocating the resources necessary to address the threat.

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The most important reason why it's possible to defend Taiwan is this. It remains really, really difficult to mount and sustain an amphibious invasion in the face of a capable and prepared defense. This is for a number of reasons. To mount a major invasion across the 100-mile-wide Taiwan Strait, China would need to bring over a lot of troops and heavy equipment. The often big, bulky, and slow ships and aircraft needed for such an armada are inherently vulnerable, especially when they cross open water and air space into the teeth of an opponent's defense. If that armada is weakened enough so it can't ferry the forces across needed to bring Taiwan to heel, the invasion fails, even if the invader remains really strong. It's worth bearing in mind that Napoleon gave up on his planned invasion of England before his great defeats, and Hitler on his at the peak of his power. This reality gives abundant opportunity for a capable and prepared defense to defeat an invasion. In the case of Taiwan, U.S. and Taiwanese defenses can use

everything from sea mines and shore-based cruise missiles to long-range bombers and cyber strikes.

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Critically, the operational standard here is not perfection. America doesn't need to dominate or even decisively defeat China. Rather, we only need to resist China's attack enough to defeat the invasion. America and Taiwan together should be able to meet this standard. Charlie, I believe, mentioned the war games report. That's actually not correct. A recent news story from the U.S. Air Force reported the U.S. is now winning war games to defend Taiwan based on their recommended future force. It is possible, and war gaming is showing it. This is a big change from a couple of years ago when U.S. teams would routinely lose in such games. We increasingly know what we need to do.

Based on this, Taiwan, for its part, can prepare to become what's often termed a porcupine, a militarian society ready for a tenacious defense. The United States, meantime, can focus the might and unparalleled resources of its military on preparing for this critical battle, precisely, as Liz rightly put it, to deter it.

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Now don't get me wrong. A defensive Taiwan would still be very costly and risky, but with the right focus and effort, it can be done, and it's worth it. For these reasons, I therefore urge you to vote no on this resolution.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Elbridge Colby, and that concludes round one of this Intelligence Squared U.S. Debate where our resolution is Taiwan is Indefensible.

So now we move on to round two, and round two is where the debaters can address one another directly and also take questions from me and also some questions that our team has been thinking about and curating. So I want to point out that what I heard in the opening statements on our resolution, Taiwan is Indefensible, I kind of heard a note of arguments that we -- there's a -- there's some -- there was some argument that we should or should not defend Taiwan as opposed to we can and we can't defend Taiwan. And those are not exactly the same thing, although there's significant overlap, but I want to start by going more literally to what the resolution itself was saying, that the U.S. can defend Taiwan, and see where the should part works into it in terms of consequences of what -- which way that choice would ever go.

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And I want to take a question to you, Bridge Colby. You were the last to speak, but I want to give you the first crack in this because we heard Lyle Goldstein saying that China will go to the mat, that China has every reason to go to the mat, that China's connections, motivations -- connections to Taiwan, its historical motivations, the political stakes for China, the cultural stakes for China, even in having, possessing, and being willing to go to war for Taiwan, puts

China in a position that they will go all, all out. And I recognized you're saying that to win the motion, all we would have to do is frustrate China's ability, ultimately, to annex -- to annex the island.

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But I wanted you to take on this notion that would the U.S. ever have the requisite -- and that -- this makes it a can -- the requisite will to go up against a superpower that was willing to go all out?

Elbridge Colby:

Yeah, absolutely. In fact, we know from 75 years of history and, you know, Charlie, I think, touched on the issue but didn't get it quite right. I mean, he's a master scholar, but I don't think that's the way the U.S. government has seen it or behaved. I mean, look, for 75 years we've extended nuclear deterrents over 30 plus allies in Europe and Asia. And in all those cases, I mean, Lyle put a lot on the distance point, but you know what? South Korea is much closer, is about 200 miles from China and about 5,000 miles, probably, from Hawaii. Japan's not that much farther away from China, it's equidistant. Philippines, same deal. These are all relevant, and so the point here, though, is that a fight over Taiwan would not be about Taiwan itself. And Lyle touched on it, he said they would attack American bases. They'd undoubtedly attack Japan. It would become about something much larger.

Lyle Goldstein:

Yeah, like I said, I -- you know, I'm watching Chinese military TV every night. I'm watching all their tests. I'm fully aware of their capabilities and, you know, I'm shocked to say -- I'm shocked to hear that, from Bridge, that the invasion is unlikely to succeed. That's far from the truth. I mean, the truth is, if you look at each component of China's armed forces, that is the Navy, probably on its own, could win this fight.

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The Army on its own without any support, that is the ground forces, could probably have sufficient fire power and the means to win the fight. Even the Air Force, the strategic rocket forces on their own could probably win. Even the People's Armed Police, I dare say, that is the half a million strong police force, now being fully equipped with mobile regiments and all the requisite helicopters and lifts. So every one of those five components could probably win. And Mr. Colby is very wrong, this isn't about heavy lift. You know, a lot of people may say, well, you know, there's only 10 heavy lift ships and some row-rows [spelled phonetically], and if we sank those that -- it would all be over. No, no, no, that's absolutely wrong. The -- what will hit Taiwan first are not only all the rockets, which will, you know, frankly, level the place to rubble, sadly, but is the special forces, the heliborne force, that is probably 1,000 helicopters ferrying troops to Taiwan going to places that, you know, aren't expected, and then a massive parachute drop.

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And by the way, yes, they've studied Normandy thoroughly. I've been through all their documents on that. And but slowly realize that, you know, the best thing about Normandy was that it -- we mostly, besides Omaha Beach, mostly just strolled up the beach. Why? Because we -- our airborne forces had dropped in behind. The Chinese understand that. They've got all that ready.

John Donovan:

Right. But let me -- let me --

Lyle Goldstein:

And then they will be going in to there, so --

John Donovan:

Let me break in, then, because you're -- you've actually painted quite a vivid picture of --

Lyle Goldstein:

There's a lot more --

John Donovan:

-- overwhelming Chinese success. No, I know there is, and I -- but I think that you made the point. I just want to bring some of what you said to Elizabeth Larus. And Elizabeth, you made the should argument in that if the consequences for the U.S. not even trying to defend Taiwan would be catastrophic for the U.S., starting with loss in credibility.

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But I'd like you to respond to Lyle's depiction of very, very likely success for China in launching and invasion, and also to weigh into this conversation in against the notion of the challenge of a loss of credibility, how do you make the case to the American body of politic that they should be sending their sons to defend Taiwan as part -- because that's part of defensibility as well is having the political will.

Elizabeth Larus:

Sure. Okay, so first about the invasion and the success calculus. The -- a lot has to go right. A lot has to go right for the invasion to be successful, you know, as Lyle mentioned, the various components. It's not like Taiwan doesn't have any defensive capabilities, right. I mean, it does have defensive capabilities: the beaches are armed, the air is armed, it does have early warnings, they've got spies that have spies in China. So, it's not like this would be, "Ooh, here they come. It's a big surprise," right? Generally, you know, the mobilization will be detected in advance because of its very good, excellent intelligence gathering and its spy apparatus.

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And so, Taiwan would not be completely off-guard, and then when would have to bring -- then, of course, we would share that intelligence with the United States; that would bring the United States into play. What the United States needs to do is raise the cost to China so high that China

thinks twice about unifying Taiwan with China by force. It has always been U.S. policy that United States seeks a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Strait issue to be decided by both sides of the Taiwan Strait. And so -- and, you know, Beijing, if it had its preference would like a peaceful resolution, as well. It doesn't want to lose, you know, how many thousands -- more than thousands, of its, you know, sole male children in taking over Taiwan for its territorial integrity. And so, the United States needs to signal, not just in words but in actions, that we are serious about defending Taiwan.

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If China senses weakness like sharks in the water, and, you know, as Lyle's pointing out, if the Chinese think that they are going to win these war games -- and they already win the war games and then they're going to win the invasion, well, then they might not think twice. So, we really have to make them think twice.

Lyle Goldstein:

Well, again, my assessment is there's not some prospect; it's extremely likely that the invasion would succeed, and the Chinese know that. Moreover, you know, in the U.S. you have this strange idea that you can fight wars with only losing a dozen people or something; they don't have such illusion in China at all. In fact, quite the opposite: they want to lose people, they want actual martyrs, they want a, you know, a new generation of people to believe in the CCP, and that it needs heroes. In fact, they're a little bit embarrassed that they haven't fought a war in, you know, a big war in 50 years or so, and that means they don't have these people. They're looking for them; they're actually, I would say, there's almost a cult of the Korean War right now, and that cult of partly surrounding the fact that they haven't fought such a big war, so believe me, many people would die.

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And that's many Chinese, many Taiwanese, and many Americans. I would say Charlie's assessment that maybe 10,000 Americans might lose their lives; sadly, I fear much worse. That is the casualties.

John Donovan:

But I wanted to bring into the conversation is just the recognition that China's aspirations have become more and more clear. The whole notion of engagement with China, that they would ultimately, through their experience of capitalism, move towards democracy, and its hegemonic ambitions would be tempered has not turned out to be true, and quite the opposite, that China is expanding, essentially, its power perimeter. They have been building islands out in the South China Sea, claiming it as territory, they are floating sensors out into the South China Sea that can see U.S. aircraft carriers and submarines from coming a long way off.

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They're developing missiles on the backs of trucks that are ballistic that, nevertheless, could now come down and actually take out a U.S. aircraft carrier. Does that not -- those facts not really change the calculus, here, of what we would be up against with China in terms of being able to

do the thing that we've been accustomed to doing, which is to project power into the theater. Are we not in a situation where they can now keep us at a distance, and does that change the calculus? So, I want to bring that all to you, Bridge.

Elbridge Colby:

Sure. Well, look, I mean, I think Dr. Goldstein makes excellent points; this is really hard. The U.S. Military shouldn't be sanguine, but that's not a reason for defeatism. I mean, he's calling for throwing up his hands; that's not right. We do have the best air-sea team in the world, and we can focus on this problem. And John, you're absolutely right: they've been working heavily on anti-access area denial to deny us. Moreover, they're now working on power projection: they are building a military to dominate well beyond Taiwan, and I think we get that later. But I think this is not a reason for giving up; this is a reason for narrowly focusing on the problem, and this is where the department is going.

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You mentioned Admiral Davidson or Charlie did, I think. He was a clarion call. Look, making investments like the Pacific Deterrence Initiative over the next few years to build up our forward posture. This is a feasible problem. And again, these are the kind of investments that are going to be critical for the defense of South Korea, Japan, Philippines. Look, if China takes over Taiwan, you know how far Luzon is from Taiwan? About 100 miles. Do you think Philippines has an autonomous capability? Now you can think, as I think maybe Charlie does, that China is going to be sated. But I mean, just this month, Foreign Policy's reporting that their building a village in Bhutanese territory that they've --

[talking simultaneously]

Lyle Goldstein:

We've heard this argument before back in the 1950s.

Elbridge Colby:

Well, I mean, they've militarized islands. They've directly lied to President Obama about that point. I mean, there's --

Charlie Goldstein:

So I think the big difference -- first of all, I think distance does matter. And so people really think who've looked at this carefully, that when you look at the sensor capabilities that China will have, it doesn't quite have them now. Lyle and Bridge can speak to this more authoritatively, but the difference in distance between Taiwan and the mainland and Japan and the mainland is actually significant.

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It's very hard to hit ships on the eastern side of Japan. Much easier to hit ships on the eastern side of Taiwan because of the difference between a hundred and 200 miles. Putting that aside, I think the much bigger difference, and I know it's not quite how you framed the debate, which is,

is it defensible? But on the issue of should we defend it? I agree with you. China is becoming more assertive. But the point is that it's not nearly as determined to conquer or control Japan or the Philippines as it is Taiwan. So the --

Lyle Goldstein:

Hold on, Charlie. There's no evidence suggesting they want to control or conquer Japan or the Philippines. There is zero evidence.

Charlie Glaser:

Well then might not want --

[talking simultaneously]

Charlie Glaser:

May not want to conquer Japan at all. But if you take a sort of worst case assumption --

Lyle Goldstein:

There's no evidence of that.

Charlie Glaser:

They might want to some, but they don't want to very much. I mean, Lyle's taking the extreme position of not at all.

00:45:00

Lyle Goldstein:

Well show me some evidence.

[talking simultaneously]

Charlie Glaser:

you look at the risk, the risk with respect to Taiwan are much, much greater than the risk with respect to Japan, all else being equal, which is to say equally defensible.

Elbridge Colby:

Look, I do think China's ambitions go far beyond Taiwan. China has specific irredentist ambitions towards Taiwan. It wants to incorporate it into the People's Republic. However, it also has broad ambitions. And I mean, I think it's ridiculous on its face for Dr. Goldstein to say there's no evidence of broader Chinese ambitions. Look at their nine-dash line in the South China Sea, which equates to a central control of one of the world's richest areas. And it's literal. We know they've got --

Lyle Goldstein:

Well you must hear a lot about rocks and --

[talking simultaneously]

John Donovan:

Hang on, Lyle. Hang on. Go ahead, Bridge.

Elbridge Colby:

And they're also clearly building a military, and this is contrary, I think, to some of what Charlie's claim in the press that it's not just an [unintelligible] or a defensive military, it's a power projection. They're building aircraft carriers. They're building nuclear attack submarines, they're building satellites.

00:46:00

And we can see them. This is what they're going to do. And the threat to the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, et cetera, Vietnam, Australia, et cetera is not territorial acquisition, but is under the thumb. And you can see it happening with the Australians right now where the Chinese are using economic coercion, demanding that the Australians change their internal laws. That is just a small taste of the future of what Chinese hegemony in the region looks like. And frankly, they're saying it out loud these days. So we don't need to read a lot into it.

Lyle Goldstein:

Well, I think Bridge just said it, they're not claiming territory, so apparently this is about coercion and not being nice. But the fact is, you know, you ask the Mexicans how nice the gringos up north are. I mean, the point is neighbors have disagreements a lot and we shouldn't have the U.S. get stuck in all these agreements. And that includes, you know, Bridge is very worked up about the nine-dash line. I'm less so. Those are a bunch of rocks and reefs. It's a bunch of fish. By the way, France and Britain just sortied frigates over a fishing dispute in the English Channel. We don't seem to be too upset about it.

00:47:00

The point is, everywhere people disagree about fish and getting oil extraction out of the sea. Look, this is China's Caribbean. Last I checked, you know, for a period of a long time, we intervened about once every year in the Caribbean. I mean we're going to expect to throw its weight around. It's not going to invade the Philippines or Japan.

John Donovan:

I want to move on to a fact again, that might be surprising to some of our audience and others are well familiar with this. And that's the fact of Taiwan and the story of semiconductors. Right now, we're going through a period in the world where there's a shortage of semiconductors due to supply line interruptions stemming from the pandemic and other issues, including weather, et cetera. It's why what used to be called Detroit, the automotive industry is having a hard time turning out cars because there's a shortage of these semiconductor chips.

The main place in the world for the production of the highest quality semiconductor chips is Taiwan. They're fantastic at it. They're pretty much unrivaled. They make more than half the semiconductor chips in the world.

00:48:01

The United States has an enormous amount of investment in some of those factories and some of those -- they're called foundries. One company in particular is enormously influential, and it's headquartered on Taiwan. And my question about the presence of the semiconductor is there like -- semiconductors are like oil in that the machinery of artificial intelligence and other sorts of things need it to run and there's a shortage of them. Taiwan is the epicenter in a certain important sense. My question is that fact about Taiwan, does that make China, which needs -- is trying to build its military and frankly, its industry around artificial intelligence in the same way that we are, they need these chips as well. They have to import most of the chips that they use. They're importing them from Taiwan. Does that fact mean that Taiwan is -- does that cause them to pause on an attack on Taiwan in its coveting or does it cause them to want it in addition to the historical and psychological reasons that they want to possess Taiwan, does that make them want to possess Taiwan more?

00:49:00

Which way does that break? I'll go to you first on that, Bridge.

Elbridge Colby:

I don't think it's fundamental, I mean, I think it gets at one of the attributes of the assets that Taiwan offers, which is incredible human capital, it's one of the most advanced dynamic economies in the world. Again, I think the primary reasons China's interest is irredentism the military significance in undermining U.S. credibility. But look, to boot, you have one of the world's most advanced economies. And frankly, we know we're -- if we're lucky, will be in a long term strategic competition with China that's about this high tech. And having that on China's side would be, for Beijing, would be attractive.

John Donovan:

What about you, Charlie, on that question?

Charlie Glaser:

I don't disagree with the weighting that Bridge gave it. I mean, to be glib, I would say that it wouldn't be worth risking a nuclear war to have the -- Taiwan's semiconductor capability. But more seriously, I would say -- well, I think that's a serious point, because that's really still what we're talking about is a large conventional war, a nuclear war is that, first of all, unless there's a war.

00:50:01

But if, for instance, if China just took over Taiwan, I mean, Taiwan would still continue to sell those chips to the United States and to China, but also the United States given to this extent, this is an important vulnerability. And we're increasingly seeing as such, we just need to produce these at home. We can do this. We just need to make the investment. So we should see this as a transition plan anyway. We can't afford to be in a situation where we are so vulnerable to supply chains that can be interrupted. And the Biden administration is moving in this direction. The

United States is moving in that direction before. So I think it's sort of a small, small asterisk on the overall Taiwan question.

John Donovan:

I want to go back, Liz, to something I asked you at the beginning. It was the second part of a two part question, the answer to which you didn't really get. And that's to the notion of selling a defense of Taiwan here in the United States. Americans are tired of war.

00:51:00

We've been in a lot of war over the last 20 years. If there's any desire or impulse, it's to wind down. And part of the reason is just -- not just the cost in treasure, but the cost in blood of American men and women. And I want to ask you, what would be the pitch that, let's say, a president would have to make to the American public to explain why we are defending Taiwan? Is there such a pitch? Can it be made? Is Taiwan defensible in the sense -- in that sense of it?

Elizabeth Larus:

I think the pitch would have to come in a very large picture, and that is if we don't defend Taiwan and China takes it over, then the U.S. -- let me phrase it this way. Are U.S. values worth fighting for? Okay, so if China takes Taiwan and China does not share most U.S. values, right, it does not share the values of Western civilization, democracy, rule of law, freedom of religion, those things that we have been born and bred with and that are shared on Taiwan.

00:52:05

If the United States is not ready to defend those values, what are those values worth? Do we even share those values? Now, the United States does have a volunteer force, and it's not that we want to use those as men and women as cannon fodder, but they will go where they will hold. And they will and they will fight, certainly the good fight. But certainly, in the United States, domestically, it has to be over. Do you want to live in a world where China is the dominant power? We're already seeing, you know, China having tremendous influence, for example, in the World Health Organization. And we saw how the World Health Organization really didn't push initially for an investigation on the origins of COVID and why China dragged its feet on saying, yeah, it has human to human transmission. And now look at where we're at. Right. And so, we have seen China's influence in international organizations increase tremendously and has tremendous, tremendous power. Do we want to take that to the ninth degree where China is essentially calling the shots? I don't think a lot of Americans want to go there. It's not an issue of China ruling the world. It is having outsized influence in international organizations and not abiding by international law. That's a real problem.

Lyle Goldstein:

For that we should risk nuclear war?

John Donovan:

But Liz, let me just throw in -- Elizabeth, if that were the case, you know, right now China is involved in what is apparently very, very large-scale set of human rights violations in regard to the Uyghurs putting a million people into camps.

00:53:03

And we're and we're sort of rolling with it. We're not, you know, not diplomatically, we may not be, but we're not going to war over it. So what's the difference there?

Elizabeth Larus:

The difference is that China, if we don't take our stand, then all the countries will kowtow to China, all of the international organizations. This is just the beginning. This is just the beginning.

John Donovan:

But we're not taking a military stand on protecting the Uyghurs.

Lyle Goldstein:

And we're pulling out of Afghanistan.

Charlie Glaser:

So in terms of convincing the, you know, the United States population to fight. I think the issue is going to -- is going to hedge on the discussion we're having about credibility. If you convince people that Taiwan is the linchpin to preserving our alliances with Japan and South Korea and Philippines and maybe Australia, then they'll say, well, of course we should fight for Taiwan.

00:53:58

I think that argument is wrong, though, until I -- and I think it's very important to adjudicate it. It's very hard to adjudicate. But that's why I think the credibility argument is key.

John Donovan:

That concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is "Taiwan is Indefensible." So here's where we are. We're about to hear brief closing statements from each debater. In turn, they will be uninterrupted. They'll be two minutes each. And it's their last chance to try to change your minds to their position. Remember, after this round, we're going to ask you to vote for a second time, and it's your vote that will decide who is the winner of the debate. So let's move on to round three closing statements and here making his final argument in support of the motion that Taiwan is indefensible is Charlie Glaser.

Charlie Glaser:

Thank you. I'm going to make two quick points. First, as I want to share with you, I don't really like the conclusion that I reached about Taiwan. It doesn't feel good about ending a commitment. It doesn't feel good about possibly putting the people of Taiwan at greater risk or oppression from China.

00:55:05

But I've come back to this issue time and again. I've looked at it carefully now over the past 15 years, and I end up with the same conclusion. And the important way I understand this is that in international relations, you don't always get to choose between the good outcome and the bad outcome. Sometimes you're choosing between two bad outcomes. And in this case, I think the much worse outcome is for the United States to continue to protect Taiwan. Second of all, the overriding point about our argument has been about the risk. And I think one way to understand the degree of nuclear risk that we -- that I believe we face in protecting Taiwan is I sincerely believe that the risk is greater over Taiwan than it was during the Cold War. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union, even though it was lined the line with the United -- NATO and the Warsaw Pact were on the same border with each other, the Soviet Union didn't have any great interest in conquering Western Europe.

00:56:02

China is determined to regain Taiwan. During the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union could afford and accept not placing missiles in Cuba. It could live with a division of Berlin, even though it didn't like it. I'm concerned that over the next 20 to 30 years, China will consider to find it increasingly unacceptable to live without possessing Taiwan. I don't think it's going to start a nuclear war, I don't think it would start a conventional war if I thought it was likely to go nuclear. But for the reasons we've laid out, I think it's not unlikely. In fact, I think it's somewhat likely over the next few decades that China will start a conventional war to reclaim Taiwan either by blockade or invasion or some combination of the two with coercive attacks against Taiwan. And that war has a reasonably large prospect, reasonably high probability of going nuclear.

00:57:02

Therefore, as much as I don't like it, I think the United States should end its commitment to Taiwan and I encourage you to vote that way on the resolution. Thank you.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Charlie Glaser. Our next statement, closing statement will be against the resolution, and it comes from Elizabeth Larus.

Elizabeth Larus:

In 2015, Taiwan ran a TV series called A Touch of Green. In 31 episodes, we watched Taiwan, I should say, ROC pilots fight against the communists on mainland China and then their retreat to the island of Taiwan. As you can guess, over time, the story did not end well. Most of the pilots do perish in their fight against communist China. Where am I going with this? Without a U.S. commitment, Taiwan is out there alone, like these pilots who crashed and burned.

00:58:05

Taiwan would be ripe for the picking. The pilots went down in flames. Let's not abandon Taiwan to just go down in flames as well. If we do, the U.S. will never recover. We have ebbed

and flowed over the years in our foreign policy. We will just be ebbing if we give up on Taiwan. China will rise in Asia and we will never recover our status. We will never recover our status with our allies and around the world, we will be seen as a party that just cut and run when we were put up against a tough situation. So not only would be letting down 24 million people on the island of Taiwan, but billions of others around the world. So that is why I am urging you to vote no on the proposition.

00:59:00

John Donovan:

Thank you, Elizabeth Larus. Our next debater will be speaking in favor in his closing statement of the resolution that Taiwan is indefensible. Here is Lyle J. Goldstein.

Lyle Goldstein:

Alright. The palace museum in Taipei, which is the capital of Taiwan, has 700,000 Chinese objects, Chinese artifacts, it's the biggest such repository in the world, bigger than Beijing, bigger than Shanghai, bigger than Shanghai or any place else in China. Among sinologist people who study China like me, it's well known that the best Chinese food is probably found in Taiwan. Look, folks, this is a civil war. The Chinese civil war continues. This is a family quarrel. But the United States has learned something about civil wars, right? Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq. We know better. We know to avoid civil wars like the plague.

01:00:00

Of course, this war, were it to happen would be orders of magnitude worse than any of those wars I mentioned, including Vietnam. It's true that China could develop in a dangerous way in the future, although it's unlikely, but it is possible. I don't rule it out. So we may have to draw red lines, but those red lines should be drawn over the main islands of our treaty partners, Japan and Philippines, not over Taiwan. Let me tell you a story of when I was a graduate student. I used to give battlefield tours at Gettysburg, an extraordinary place. If you know the history, a certain cavalry General John Buford, he arrived at the Battlefield Union Cavalry, he arrived at the battlefield on June 30th, the day before the battle, and he surveyed the ground and he knew right away he looked at the hills and said, this is good ground, you know, gosh darn it, Bobby Lee has beat us up in so many battles, but here we can make a stand.

01:01:03

This is good ground. The geography favors us. Well, I want to tell you folks, he saved our country that with that appreciation. But this is the opposite. This is bad ground. This is the worst possible place to confront China. We may have to fight China. I dearly hope not. But this is the worst possible place to try to fight China. They are likely to win, and we are likely to lose. And many Chinese, Taiwanese and Americans would die in such a war. So, we should avoid it. Thank you very much.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Lyle Goldstein. And our final statement, again, closing argument will be coming against the resolution that Taiwan is indefensible. Here is Elbridge Colby.

Elbridge Colby:

Thanks, John. As I hope we've demonstrated, this resolution is wrong. The United States and Taiwan, with enough focus and resolve, can together defend the island. Without question, doing so would be hard, costly and risky, but it would be worth it. For Americans, the basic reason why is this, China would not stop after swallowing Taiwan.

01:02:00

Instead, Beijing would keep going, pressing forward to try to become master of Asia, and from that position, the world's dominant power. And a Beijing that had subordinated Taiwan would be in a stronger position to do so. Washington's credibility in Asia and thus its ability to muster a coalition to stop China's domineering ambitions, would be gravely damaged by failing to effectively defend Taiwan. And China would now dominate Taiwan's critical geography and one of the world's most dynamic advanced economies. But don't take it from me that China's ambitions won't be sated by Taiwan. Take it from the Indian soldiers the PLA killed in [unintelligible], take it from the Vietnamese and Filipino sailors bullied in the South China Sea. Take it from the citizens of Hong Kong who've seen their treaty guaranteed rights trampled. Take it from Beijing's claim of a nine dash line that would mean dominating the rich South China Sea and its literal, take it from Beijing's demand that America, the only state that could plausibly match China and power, exit its Asian alliances, thereby, in effect, ceding the region to Chinese domination.

01:03:00

And take it from the military the Chinese are actually building decidedly not one limited to seizing Taiwan, but one that looks much more meant to dominate Asia and project power far and wide. So, we must be under no delusion. A China that dominates Asia, the world's largest market area, will mean grave harm to American self-interests, their livelihood, freedoms and security. Heck, they've already started showing us what it would look like. Look at how they demand Australia toe their line and change Australia's own laws to satisfy Beijing. Look how they bully Markey American companies. Look how they pushed around the Europeans just now when they piped up about what's happening in [unintelligible]. Now imagine how China will behave when it's dominant. Because of this, we're better off meeting them now. Now with the goal of war, but have a decent peace. But we won't get a decent peace if we won't stand firm. Better to stand now with Taiwan and our credibility strong then give up Taiwan and be weaker and discredit. For these reasons, Taiwan not only can be defended, it should be. Thank you very much and I urge you to vote no on the resolution.

01:04:00

John Donovan:

Thank you, Elbridge Colby, and that concludes round three and that concludes our debate. The competition is over, and this is an extremely important, timely topic. And I just want to say to

our debaters, Elizabeth in Virginia and Charlie in New Hampshire and Lyle in Rhode Island and Elbridge, you're in Brazil. I want to thank all of you for coming together this way and for debating with one another in the way that you did. Our goal at Intelligence Squared is to show that people can disagree with respect and doing so with logic and persuasiveness and civility. And all four of you did that. So may I say to all four of you, thank you very, very much, not only for participating, but for participating in the way that you did.

Multiple Speakers:

Thank you.

John Donovan:

And I also want to say to our audience, thank you for joining us, for appreciating what we do. At Intelligence Squared, we feel that the need for real and honest debate has become urgent in our country because, you know, there's a historic loss going on right now of trust in the media and other institutions.

01:05:06

And what we tried to do, and I think what we do is to bring you and the millions of listeners that we have around the world, argumentation, conversation, discourse that you can trust because it's real debate. We release them through our podcasts and television and public radio, we make them publicly available to the public for free. And we do it because it's something we care about a lot here at Intelligence Squared. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. And yes, this part's the commercial. We do need your support to sustain our work. So, we would love it if you could become a subscriber or a donor or even a potential partner in putting these debates on. If you're new to our series, you can start out by subscribing to our newsletter and signing up on our website at IQ2us.org. If you do that, you'll get our weekly newsletter. You'll get invitations to our upcoming events and access and be able to access even more than 200 -- 200 debates that we've produced to date since 2006.

01:06:01

And by the way, that includes a library of debates on the future of U.S. China relations. And if you can make a tax-deductible donation today, it would help us to continue our work and enable us to continue to grow. Every dollar counts towards restoring balanced and trusted debate to American civil discourse.

As for this one, I encourage you to check out our website at IQ2us.org in seven days to find out which side won. Again, I want to say thanks to all of our debaters, and I now want to say onto the live roundtable portion of the program, we're all going to be here together live. You can ask questions. You can hear more of this conversation going on. Please wait one moment for your screen to refresh and you'll have the opportunity to join us live with our team of debaters. Thanks so much. See you in a minute.

[music playing]

01:06:01

[end of transcript]

This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.