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UP CIDS DISCUSSION PAPER 2019-03

Stopping Asia's 'Crisis Slide:' An Australian Perspective on Asia's Flashpoints

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Stopping Asia's 'Crisis Slide:' An Australian Perspective on Asia's Flashpoints

BRENDAN TAYLOR

ABSTRACT

The concern of this discussion paper is understanding the points of conflict that Asia is most likely to face as a region. 'Flashpoint' is the central concept of analysis in looking at geographical areas where there is potential for sudden and violent conflict to erupt. This paper is guided by three main questions. First, how likely is a major power war to erupt in Asia today? Second, if conflict erupts, where is it most likely to originate? Third, and most importantly, what can be done to prevent major power conflict breaking out in Asia? It argues that different methods are needed for the management of these flashpoints. Yet while each of the flashpoints are distinct and different, it could also be argued that there must be efforts to try to anticipate how conflict might erupt in Asia, particularly among major powers. A necessity exists to understand the subtle differences and the interconnections between these flashpoints considering the risk for conflict.

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The concern of this discussion are the main flashpoints in Asia, the most likely points of conflict facing the region. The beginning is quite ominous, but the intentions are not. The three questions around which the inquiry revolves are mainly on (1) how likely is a major power war is to erupt in Asia today, (2) where conflict is most likely to originate, and most importantly, (3) what can be done to prevent major power conflict breaking out in Asia.

The central concept of the discussion is the concept of ‘flashpoints.’ That is a widely used term, but one which often lacks definite definition. The basic definition when talking about a flashpoint is a geographical area where there is potential for a sudden and violent conflict to erupt. Four geographical areas have generally been assumed to have that characteristic in recent decades. The potential locations where sudden and violent conflict in the region could erupt are (1) the Korean Peninsula, (2) the East China Sea, (3) the South China Sea, and (4) the Taiwan Strait.

In relation to the first question on how likely a major power war is to erupt in Asia today, it is arguable that this very daunting prospect is more likely than most individuals would think and academics would consider. This in itself is not a particularly new finding. There is a familiar cottage industry of books and articles that have been coming out in recent years on this subject in predicting a much darker and dangerous future for Asia. Most of those books have, of course, been the work of the Harvard Professor Graham Allison, who has written the book called *Destined for War* (2017). It tries to argue that Asia, at this moment, is experiencing or is in the throes of what we call the Thucydides trap, which likens the situation in Asia today to the great struggle that took place two thousand five hundred years ago between Athens and Sparta, wherein the dominant power in the form of the Greek city-state system was challenged by the rising power, and as a result of that challenge, a catastrophic war broke out. But Allison points out that throughout history, there have been numerous instances of this phenomenon, and that more often than not, the result is catastrophic conflict. He argues that the United States (US) and the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) are in danger of entering the Thucydides trap today.

One of the things about works that are being produced at the moment is that they focus very heavily on the structural causes of conflict. The application of that Thucydidean metaphor to contemporary Asia is a very good example, and there have been many other scholars that have taken a similar approach, including Professor Hugh White from the Australian National University, who

has been prominent in this school of thinking. This school of thought argues that the underlying shifts in the structure of the international system, particularly alterations in the military balance of power, are ultimately the factors which cause major power conflict to break out. The discussion here does not disagree with that fundamental assumption. It is tremendously important in terms of understanding why a particular conflict occurs. It is relevant to look at deeper underlying structural factors. But such an assumption is only capable of telling why a conflict occurs, with the benefit of hindsight. We can look back after a conflict—for instance, the First World War or the Second World War, or even going back to the Peloponnesian Wars—and point to those structural changes as the underlying cause. Yet those who were living in the midst of those changes were unaware of those changes. But certainly, we can tell, with the benefit of hindsight, that these were an important cause of the conflict.

Conversely, structural causes inform us far less about how a particular conflict unfolded and what were the immediate causes of a conflict. This was the point that Australian historian Christopher Clark has made very famous in his book *Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (2012), and this discussion draws plenty of inspiration from how Asians might go to war in the future. The field of strategic studies often gets a bad name, being described as amoral or, worse still, immoral because of the subject matter that strategists look to decipher. One of the purposes of strategic studies is to look at how to wage war more effectively. At points, criticism of the field is important, questioning the ethical dimension of strategic studies. In fact, when strategic studies formally emerged as a field of study in the wake of the Second World War, many of the people who were very influential in setting up the field largely aimed to try and prevent conflict, or to avoid conflict, particularly conflict during the nuclear age, understanding how devastating that conflict could be for the world. And certainly, one of the main motivations and concerns in opening this discussion is the prevention of a devastating conflict in Asia today. That is one of the reasons why the discussion focuses on the main flashpoints in themselves, rather than these big structural changes that are taking place in the region. It is, then, a question

of utility, on how useful it is for us to focus exclusively on those big structural issues. As most readers may readily know, Asia as a region and each of its flashpoints are equally unique, with very unique histories. The strategic geography of each flashpoint is different and there are various key players involved in each one. Definitely, the Korean Peninsula is distinct from the South China Sea.

Because of these root differences, the argument is that different methods are needed for the management of these flashpoints. Having said that, while each of the flashpoints are distinct and different, it could also be argued that there must be efforts to try and anticipate how conflict might erupt in Asia, particularly how major power conflict might erupt in the region. A necessity exists to understand the subtle differences between the four flashpoints, and more importantly, the connections between those four flashpoints, because these interconnections are intensifying and these are where the risk of conflict is emanating from.

Taiwan flashpoint

The second question deals with where conflict is most likely to erupt. The findings reveal that out of the four flashpoints at present, it is the Taiwan flashpoint that is the most likely to erupt into a major power conflict. This was not the finding that seemed the most logical to the casual observer. It is somewhat counter-intuitive given that looking at commentaries on the four flashpoints, it is probably the flashpoint that has been talked about the least. It is arguable that the status quo that has been very effective in maintaining an uneasy peace around Taiwan for several decades is now unravelling. What could be seen in Taiwan is a fundamental and gradually occurring change in the identity formation of the 24 million people who are living on the island at present. When formal polling began back in the early 1990s, the majority of the people in the island saw themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese. The trends are dramatically changing and today, there is only a very small proportion of people on the island who see themselves as Chinese. More and more of the island's inhabitants now

see themselves as being exclusively Taiwanese.¹ This phenomenon is more pronounced on the younger generation for very understandable reasons. They are people who have grown up on the island but have never had any experience living on the mainland. Observing some of the polls that were conducted, there is often a question raised on whether the the younger generation be willing to fight should there be a conflict across the Taiwan strait. And according to the polls, a large portion of the younger generation said that they would be willing to do so.

On the other hand, one could draw from these polls a conclusion that the population of Taiwan is fairly pragmatic and quite realistic. There is a large proportion—around 65 percent—of the population who are in favor of maintaining the status quo situation, but when you start to draw down a little bit further, there are some worrying signs on how the population understands the status quo. Seventy to eighty percent of the population thinks that Taiwan is already an independent country, and that is their understanding of the status quo. This is technically important for Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, because her party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is part of the independence-leaning parties on the island. An independent Taiwan is actually part of the DPP's party platform, even though their leaders have stopped short of declaring formal independence.

Then, there is the KMT or the Kuomintang Party, which retreated to the island during the Chinese civil war in the late 1940s. For domestic political reasons and to maintain support from her party, President Tsai has to be attuned to pro-independent sentiments within the party.

Most recently, there was a relatively large demonstration—about a hundred thousand people—in the capital city Taipei and many of them had come from the south of Taiwan to argue that there should be a referendum on Taiwanese independence. This could develop into an immensely volatile situation. One of the reasons for this is

¹ Brendan Taylor, *The Four Flashpoints: How Asia Goes to War* (Australia: La Trobe University, 2018).

that unlike his predecessors Mao Tse-tung and Deng Xiaoping, who suggested that the issue of Taiwan's status could wait a hundred or even a thousand years, China's current leader, President Xi Jinping, has displayed far less patience on the issue. In his speech that was addressed to the Party People's Congress in October 2017 and in his address to the National Congress in March 2018, President Xi came out with some headline statements regarding Taiwan and suggested that any degree of separatism or attempts to separate the island from the mainland will not be tolerated.

Most importantly, the balance of military power between the US and the PRC in relation to this flashpoint is also shifting in very important ways. In the recent history of this flashpoint, the US has held overwhelming military dominance over the mainland. Whether the US would actually intervene in a cross-strait contingency has been left as an open question and intentionally so, in part, to restrain Taiwanese inclinations for independence. But that balance is gradually beginning to shift in China's favor. At the moment, if it was a cross-strait contingency, it is very hard to predict exactly how a conflict would play out. It is fair to say that the US still has that dominance at present. But in seven or eight years, as China continues to develop its anti-access and area denial capabilities more accurately, the ability of the US to intervene in the Taiwan strait will be gone. What could be observed in the internal politics of the US, as with many other issues, is that the Trump administration has essentially thrown out the diplomatic playbook on Taiwan and is leaning in much more forcefully and assertively on this issue. Going back to the now infamous picture of President-elect Trump directly speaking to President Tsai, Trump the first US leader to directly talk with the leader of Taiwan since the normalization of US-China relations in the 1970s. In the aftermath of this meeting, President Trump and other members of his administration began engaging in visible action in favor of Taiwan. The most significant of these actions is the signing of the Taiwan Travel Act into law, which allows US and Taiwanese officials at all levels of government to meet with one another. Apart from this, a couple of arms sales have also been approved under Trump's watch. In addition, US Vice President Mike Pence's speech, which basically said that the US will continue to accept the One

China Policy, fails to actually say if it agrees with the policy but at the same time, respects the definition used by China. However, he also significantly said that the US would prefer that mainland China was more like Taiwan.

Korean Peninsula flashpoint

The news on the Korean Peninsula is slightly more reassuring. Certainly, if this discussion was being written the same time in 2017, it would probably have said that the Korean Peninsula was the flashpoint that has the highest potential of escalation. This is one of the difficulties of addressing the subject matter. The dangers associated with the combustibility of the four flashpoints do not remain static. The situation tends to change from year to year, and in particular, the year 2017 saw a very dangerous situation where the world came much closer to the conflict than what many assumed. The world is not out of the woods yet, and there remains a danger of miscalculation. The strategic geography of the Korean Peninsula is a much more influential factor in determining the combustibility of this flashpoint. The strategic geography here is much tighter and the distance for either side in taking military action against each another is much shorter. We have seen this in a number of occasions and, previously, both North and South Korea came close to taking military action, with one of the two responding by beginning military preparations. This is most notably seen in an earlier crisis in 1993 and 1994, when the Clinton administration came within hours of taking military action against North Korea's non-nuclear facilities. The diplomacy that occurred and is occurring between the two Koreas, as well as that between the US and North Korea—as seen in the Singapore Summit in early 2018—is particularly important in reducing prospects for such miscalculations to occur.

In terms of thinking of a resolution for this crisis, the history of diplomacy between the two parties suggests that it is less likely to result in a resolution. We have had a whole history of failed diplomatic agreements between the two sides, which has badly eroded trust between them. In relation to this flashpoint—and it

could be concluded rather pessimistically—the most likely option is a real beefing up of the US's deterrence strategy in relation to North Korea. The US must try and deter the prospect of a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) strike against the US.

East China Sea flashpoint

There is also good news in the East China Sea, where the situation has also been stabilizing. Observers have to go back to the 2012–2014 period, when there was a heightened chance of conflict. Despite the rather glum look on the faces of Chinese and Japanese leaders when they met on the sidelines of the APEC meeting back in November 2014, the interaction led to an easing of tensions between the two major powers of East Asia who have had such a troubled history. But once again, the world is not out of the woods in relation to this flashpoint. There continues to be a real risk and a growing probability of an accidental clash occurring either on or under the waters of the East China Sea or in the skies above it. If you look at the most recent figures that have been released by the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, the country reportedly undertook a total of 851 scrambles against what they argue as Chinese incursions in their airspace in 2017 alone. If there was a clash at the moment of heightened tension in Sino-Japanese relations, there will still be a risk of escalation, especially given the strong national sentiment that could be seen in both of these countries.

South China Sea flashpoint

Despite all of the coverage that the South China Sea dispute receives, it is this flashpoint that is least likely to combust into a major power conflict. This may seem like a surprising finding, given the recent missed encounter between US and Chinese destroyers in the South China Sea, and the fact that these waters are also becoming more crowded and confrontational, as the British and French start to conduct operations there. There has even been a lot of pressure coming from Washington for Australia to conduct its own freedom

of navigation operations in the South China Sea. However, there is reason to be optimistic about this particular flashpoint. In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), John Mearsheimer talks about the phenomenon called “the stopping power of water” when talking about clashes that occur across vast maritime expanses, such as the South China Sea. This is, in part, because it takes longer to move vessels in such a geographical feature, unlike in the Korean Peninsula where the strategic geography is much tighter. The geographical realities of the South China Sea afford diplomats more time to try and find solutions or to develop frames to alleviate moments of tension, especially if we are looking at the South China Sea, where numerous clashes have occurred. This is seen, for instance, between Chinese and the Vietnamese vessels in the 1970s—which happened again in the 1980s—and more recently in the Scarborough Shoal standoff. It remains difficult to envision that the major powers, particularly the US, have vital interest at stake in this body of water that will compel them to wage war with China.

Asia's 'crisis slide'

As mentioned earlier, it is very important to look at each of the flashpoints individually and to understand their subtle differences. But what has been presented so far is that what is even more important is to understand the connections between these various flashpoints. Asia, at the moment, is in the midst of something called a ‘crisis slide.’ It is an idea that is borrowed from another prominent Australian scholar, the late Coral Bell, one of Australia's leading strategic thinkers. Bell wrote a book back in the 1970s talking about this phenomenon in which a series of international crises occurs over time. Gradually, the pressure begins to build from each crisis and this pushes an area towards conflict. In her 1971 book *The Conventions of Crisis: A Study in Diplomatic Management*, Bell argued that Europe during the period before the First World War and Second World War experienced a crisis slide, where it had a series of international crises and over time, the pressures built from these crises eventually pushed Europe towards war.

In her book, Bell argued that crisis slides are dangerous for three reasons. Firstly, they tend to make international relations more volatile, as animosities begin to spill over from one area to another. She likened this to something more sinister and ominous. Imagine boulders sliding down from a mountain, like a landslide that gradually increases in magnitude. With more of those boulders coming down and bouncing off one another, the eventual result is that the entire cliff's face comes down. Thus, international relations gradually become more volatile. Secondly, she argued that crisis slides are dangerous because with each passing crisis, the positions of those parties to these crises begin to harden because every crisis generates winners and losers, and definitely, no one wants to be a loser. Thirdly, but perhaps most dangerously, each crisis also tends to generate a great deal of complacency. This takes root because decision-makers think that when they managed to move away from a particular crisis, or somehow manage not to go to war, they assume that they will be able to survive the next time. With each passing crisis leader's belief that they could just muddle through these crises, this eventually leads decision-makers to get less worried should another crisis break out. The problem here is that the underlying issue, which is the actual cause of crisis, is left unresolved.

So, the question thus becomes, are we in a crisis slide now? An affirmative answer is arguably plausible. The crisis slide in Asia began around 2010. Many would remember that there were a couple of relatively serious moments of tension on the Korean Peninsula during this time. The sinking of the South Korean naval corvette Cheonan, which caused the deaths of 46 naval personnel, was followed by North Korea's bombardment of the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong that lies just off the coast of North Korea. By the end of the year, some Korean experts were suggesting that the chances of a major conflict on the Korean Peninsula were growing. Another situation to note was the Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012 between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China. There is also the nationalization of the disputed islands in the East China Sea around about the same time, which resulted in a series of crises between China and Japan. In 2014, when China parked an oil rig within Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it led to another period of tension. Further

crisis developments involved Chinese land reclamation efforts from 2015 onwards and the militarization of those features that we are seeing in the South China Sea today.

In 2017, tensions began to really escalate on the Korean Peninsula and the world waited for the statements coming out of the US and Pyongyang. Taking all of these situations under consideration, a crisis slide that Coral Bell theorized is not difficult to imagine, as international relations become much more tense and exhibits greater animosity. In Asia today, we are starting to see connections between the flashpoints, with Japan becoming much more actively involved in the South China Sea, because it is concerned that China is allowed to get away with its actions, which will set a precedence to what it is allowed to do in the future with regard to the East China Sea. Another instance is the Trump administration's increasing frustration with China's unwillingness to support its efforts to pressure North Korea into denuclearization. This is one of the reasons why the Trump administration has become much more hard-line on issues concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. Looking at the positions of the respective governments, the Trump administration has shown signs of hardening in recent times. Take the American insistence upon North Korea's denuclearization for instance. For Taiwan, given that President Tsai came from an independence-leaning party, the Chinese leadership has simply been unwilling to talk with her at least through formal channels. At the same time, we have also seen quite a dangerous complacency in the regions. Some efforts to put forth confidence-building measures to stop a clash from occurring were also made, but these efforts—be it the South China Sea Code of Conduct, efforts in the East China Sea or the Korean Peninsula, or even on Taiwan—have moved very slowly, if not at all.

One of the things that should also be considered is the role of luck and the role that serendipity has played in avoiding conflicts in the past. Drawing a lot of inspiration from a documentary, where the key figure was the former US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, called *The Fog of War* (2003). McNamara reflected upon his time back in the Kennedy administration and his central role in the Cuban missile crisis, and he recalled that the reason why the world did not end up

in a nuclear abyss was basically luck. He said that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, President Kennedy, and Cuban President Fidel Castro were all rational and that none of them wanted war, but the world would drive up to that brink of nuclear exchange.

What if we had a situation such as the one that occurred back in April of 2001, when there was a collision over the South China Sea between the US's spy plane and the Chinese jet fighter? What if it occurred today but involved a Chinese and a Japanese aircraft? What if a situation such as the one back in July first of 2016 occurred, when during the 95th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, a Taiwanese destroyer accidentally fired one of its anti-shiping missiles, but hit a Taiwanese fishing boat instead? What if an instance like that happens five years later, on the occasion of the Chinese Communist Party's 100th anniversary, but the missile hits a Chinese rather than a Taiwanese vessel? These are all hypothetical situations, but we can't help but ask, what if these accidents did not happen the way they did?

There are some modest and important risk reduction efforts that are being made, like the continued negotiations on the South China Sea Code of Conduct, the new Japan-China communication mechanism that has been agreed upon after 10 years of negotiations, and some confidence-building measures at the latest inter-Korean Summit. But it is arguable that these efforts are not proceeding quickly enough. The thing that really stands out as worrisome is the near complete absence of a formal crisis management mechanism for the Taiwan flashpoint. There was a hotline that was agreed upon back in September of 2015, when President Xi Jinping met with his Taiwanese counterpart, Former President Ma Ying-jeou in Singapore where they agreed to a new hotline. But now, unofficial sources have relayed that whenever the Taiwanese call that hotline, there is no answer from the other end because the Chinese refuse to speak with them.

President Xi has voiced a strong preference to reintegrate Taiwan back into the mainland using measures short of war in terms of collusion and inducements, and this is something that has long been a feature of China's Taiwan policy. One of the biggest challenges of this particular flashpoint is the possibility of an accident clash that might

escalate to a very tense moment. But what is more worrisome is the Anti-Secession Law that China passed back in the mid-2000s, basically legislating that if Taiwan does declare independence, China is legally required to use force to retake the island. Another part of this law that receives less attention is the clause that if progress towards unification slows or stops completely, it could also trigger conflict. One point of concern even in the far-off future, when China does have the capacity to take Taiwan by force, is whether we will have a situation where there are no signs of movement towards reunification. The concern is that if the clause of the Anti-Secession Law mentioning non-peaceful action if there is no progress towards reunification is triggered. This is the section of the law that becomes more relevant but receives less attention and one of the escalation dangers around this flashpoint.

The resolution of these flashpoints is not impossible, but it is highly unlikely. We can look to situations of the Cambodian peace process or the peace process in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, or in other locations. It is important to hold on to the hope that prospects of peace brings, but at the same time, it is not really a strategy in the end. We need to think more ambitiously in terms of practicality and develop crisis management mechanisms with a much greater sense of urgency.

In conclusion, we answer the question on how do we prevent conflict in the region. Some preliminary conditions are necessary: (1) a crisis management mechanism should be introduced, and (2) Asia's crisis slide that is arguably unfolding at the moment can be arrested. A plausible answer to this dilemma is to look at a more stable power balance in this part of the world. The examination of the four flashpoints, or by using them as a lens, actually offers us some guidance as to what a stable balance of power might look like. In Australia, at the moment, there is an ongoing intense debate about what this power balance might look like. It is a very polarized debate, and arguably unhelpfully so. On the one hand, a group of scholars, commentators, and policymakers argue that the US-led order, which has been in place in Asia since the 1970s, if not earlier, can be preserved. What is needed is for other like-minded countries, such as Australia, India, Singapore, the Philippines, and others, to really

get together and stare down the Chinese challenge and maintain what they call a favorable balance of power in this part of the world.

On the other side of the debate, there are those who argue that China is simply too strong and that its economic growth is growing too quickly. With the resulting dependence of Australia upon China becoming too great, sooner or later, some form of Chinese hegemony in Asia might be inevitable. Australia's first Ambassador to China, Stephen Fitzgerald, gave a widely publicized speech earlier last year, in which he suggested that we are already living in a Chinese world. Many of these commentators suggest that Australia and other countries just need to find ways of adapting to this new Chinese-led order that is coming and to learn to live with it.

A third way, or a middle ground, between two positions

Asia's most viable future lies somewhere between contesting China and accepting a new world order. Many people have been looking at US Vice President Pence's speech recently, comparing it to George Kennan's containment strategy during the early Cold War or even to Winston Churchill's speech in the late 1940s. Another very prominent American policymaker, former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson, introduced an idea during the 1950s which he referred to as 'situations of strength.' The point Acheson was making was if the US could find positions around the Soviet periphery, it could become so strong militarily that the Soviet Union would not even contemplate challenging the US in those particular areas. It is arguable that presently, the US enjoys situations of strength in the East China Sea and on the Korean Peninsula, as a result of its alliance with Japan in particular, and also with the still quite formidable force of South Korea. The US will be able to maintain situations of strength in relation to those two flashpoints. In addition, Japan in the foreseeable future will arguably be able to hold its own against China in the East China Sea. The US, at present, should try to double down on those situations of strength, and make sure that it is able to maintain those positions in the medium- and long-term.

On the other hand, the US' position in the South China Sea and around Taiwan are increasingly becoming situations of weakness. This is partly a product of militarization of China, but more importantly, it is a product of the strategic geography of these two flashpoints, as they are much closer to the Chinese mainland, making it much easier for China to project its military power. It is still arguable if China is at a point of being able to directly challenge the US, but it is gradually going that trajectory. But scholars and practitioners have to be careful about drawing straight line extrapolations that it is the likeliest trajectory. The US, therefore, needs to gradually ease its relations in those flashpoints, and certainly, to not make these the focus of their strategic competition.

Doubling down on the East China Sea and the Korean Peninsula, the US can still meet its longstanding strategic goal in Asia, which is the prevention of a hostile power being able to dominate this part of the world. Even if the US does ease off in the South China Sea and in Taiwan and does not make these areas a focus of its strategic competition with China, it is not inconsistent with what the US has been seen doing previously. Looking back at the history of the US' grand strategy in Asia, its defensive perimeter has changed throughout the history of its presence in the region. At times, the perimeter has receded as far back as Hawaii. With a president in the White House that has avowedly put 'America First,' that possibility cannot be discounted. It means that easing off from the South China Sea or Taiwan is not inconsistent with the US' strategic history. Optimistically, this gives the best chance of preserving the peace in Asia, if we can give China the strategic space it so craves.

Historically, there are counterarguments to this, and the most inevitable one is the Munich analogy. There are similarities between China today and Germany before the Second World War, and there are also similarities between China today and the US as an emerging great power. Great powers, when they rise, do behave in certain ways. But it is arguable if China is ultimately as hell-bent on military conflict as Germany under Hitler was during the period before the Second World War. Looking closely at the actions of President Xi as the leader of China, the country has been trying to increase all measures short

of conflict to try to increase China's influence in this region. Others would suggest that by drawing inspiration from Acheson, this author has failed to read history closely enough. Remembering the Korean War back in the 1950s, Acheson gave a speech at the National Press Club in the US, where he outlined and spelled out the US Defensive perimeter and gave the signal for Joseph Stalin to give Kim Il-sung the green light to launch an invasion into South Korea, because the southern part of Korea was not included within Acheson's defense perimeter. This misunderstanding only highlights the importance of strategic clarity, because subsequently, the Truman administration decided to move and neutralize the Taiwan strait, which it had not included in its strategic perimeter, and to intervene in Korea because it was concerned that US credibility was being called in to question and that China and the Soviet Union may use it as an opportunity to dominate Asia. This historical example highlights why it is important to be clear about areas where the US and its allies are willing to assert themselves.

The final historically-inspired counterargument is that it is during times in which the US has felt least secure when it has actually pushed its defense perimeter furthest out—mostly westward. However, looking at the Vietnam experience and the way the US increased its defense perimeter when it felt insecurity, it is clear that it will be diluting its strength by devoting so much energy to a particular quagmire.

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Dr. Taylor holds a Ph.D. and Masters degree from the Australian National University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) degree from Waikato University in New Zealand. With a longstanding association at the ANU, Dr. Taylor has also held the positions of Interim Director of the Coral Bell School (October 2016–January 2018) and Head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

With his current research focusing on flashpoints in Asia, to be published as a book by Black Ink in 2018, Dr. Taylor is often sought as an expert on Asia-Pacific security, including China and North Korea. His other areas of research interest and expertise include Taiwan and the East China Sea, Asian security architecture such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and East Asia Forum, as well as the US-Australia alliance.

Seeking to produce work both academically credible and accessible to broader audiences, Dr. Taylor has featured in leading international journals, including the *Washington Quarterly*, *Survival*, and *International Affairs*. He has authored or edited five books, including *Australia as an Asia-Pacific Regional Power* and *Sanctions as Grand Strategy* for the Adelphi Series. His book *Australia's American Alliance*, co-edited with Stephan Frühling and Peter Dean has become required reading at the Australian Department of Defence and the US Pentagon.

Dr. Taylor has previously taught courses for the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre and is a regular media commentator.

* Author profile from the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs' Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (<http://sdsc.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/experts/brendan-taylor>)

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Established in 1985 by UP President Edgardo Angara, the **UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)** is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

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