**The Taiwan Choice**

**Allan Behm**   
International & Security Affairs Program Director, The Australia Institute

*In conversation with*

**Hugh White AO**  
Emeritus Professor of Strategic Studies, Australian National University

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen**  
Assistant Research Professor, Academia Sinica

*and*

**Ebony Bennett**  
Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:04] Good day everyone. Ebony Bennett that deputy director at the Australia Institute at Welcome to our 2022 webinar series. As you could hear, I'm a little croaky today. I've been sick this week, but really looking forward to today's webinar. Thank you so much for joining us. I want to begin by acknowledging that Canberra is not one country. I pay my respects to elders past and present. Long time viewers of the webinars will die that days at times for webinars by Berry so head on over to Australia Institute. Okay you so you don't miss out on any upcoming webinars. Next week we have our regular poll position with Guardian Australia's Katharine Biffy and Peter Lewis for Bisexual Radio. Just a few tips before we begin today to help things read smoothly. If you hover over the bottom of your zooms grade, you should be able to see a Q&A function where you can type big questions for our panel for the second half of today's webinar. And you should also please keep things civil and a topic in the chat or will boot you out. And lastly, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and it will be posted on our website later today. Well, the 14th issue of Australian Foreign Affairs that I have a copy here is the Taiwan Choice Showdown in Asia, and it examines the rising tensions over the future of Taiwan as China's pursuit of unification pits it against the United States and US allies such as Australia. The issue explores the growing risk of war and the outlook for Australia as it faces a strategic choice that could reshape its future in Asia. I really highly recommend you to buy a copy, particularly if you're not a foreign policy wonk like me. I'm just a layperson. It's a really good issue and I think covers a lot of topics that are very easy, read even if you're not familiar with the topic. It's published by Schwartz Media, publisher of the Saturday paper The Monthly and Quarterly Essay and books under the Black Ink Imprint. So it should be available at all good bookshops at newsagents and in conversation today. We've got two of the contributors to the Taiwan Choice. Hugh White is an Emeritus Professor of Strategic Studies at Australian National University. His essay reveals why the war over Taiwan is a grave danger is the greatest danger Australia has faced. Yu-Jie Chen is sorry. Yu-Jie Chen is assistant research professor at Academia Sinica and an affiliated scholar at the U.S. Asia Law Institute of NYU. And her essay explores the Taiwanese view of autonomy. And Allan Behm is director of the Australia Institute's International and Security Affairs Program at the Australia Institute. Hugh, Yu-Jie and Allan, thank you so much for joining us today. And Linda Jacobson is an apology today. She is unwell a little bit like myself, but she's actually lost her voice. So her essay is about Xi Jinping views on Taiwan in an age of Chinese expansionism and is well worth checking out as well. Hugh White, I want to come to you. Firstly, thank you for joining us. Your essay it you describe the war not as inevitable in Taiwan, but really as a real and growing risk. Before we get to the implications for Australia, you talk about Taiwan being a test of resolve for the major powers, China and the United States. Could you outline for us to begin with how each of those major powers approaches Taiwan and what is at stake for each?

**Hugh White** [00:03:54] Yeah. Look, thanks, Ebony. It's a great pleasure to be here with you. And look, I think one of the things that makes the Taiwan issue so difficult and so complex and potentially so dangerous is that there is at stake, too, I think quite separate sets of issues. The first is, of course, the issue of Taiwan itself, which is enormously important to China for the historical reasons that the Chinese believe it was part of the old imperial China. And they see getting that back as being the last phase in their great historic ambition, the rejuvenation of the Chinese people, the writing of the wrongs of the century of humiliation. And so Taiwan has huge intrinsic significance to China and big intrinsic significance to the United States, too, because it is, particularly since the mid-nineties, a vibrant democracy. And the idea of defending democracies and autocracies is obviously a key issue for the United States. But on top of that, there's a whole separate set of issues, and that is that Taiwan has become thanks to choices made both in Washington and Beijing, the testing ground for that for the two countries respective claims to being the leading power in Asia. America has been the leading power in East Asia for 100 years or more. China, of course, was a leading power in East Asia for centuries. You might even say millennia before that. America wants to preserve its position as the leading power in Asia, and China fundamentally wants to, I believe, to drive it out, to take America's place as the leading power in East Asia. And one is the testing ground for that, because the way in which countries manage these leadership transitions, these sort of transitions as one power rises and other power falls, at least relatively, is that they look for issues over which they their relative power and result can be tested. And Taiwan has become that issue between the US and China. America wants to show that it's strong enough to continue to be the dominant power in Asia by forcing China to stand back from Taiwan as its dominant force for 50 years now, since 1972. And China wants to show that it is now the leading power in Asia. And America's ear is passed by proving that America can no longer compel China to stand back from Taiwan and cannot deter China from from from unification, if necessary, by force. And so it becomes a test of the pound resolve of the two sides. And because the stakes are so high, not just the Taiwan issue itself, but their respective positions as to which of them will be the leading power in the most dynamic and prosperous region on Earth. This is the kind this is the kind of issue over which great powers have throughout history been willing to go to war. That is not to say, as you say, there's not to say that war is inevitable. It does mean that it's a much bigger risk, I think, than most of us normally understand.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:06:41] Hmm. Thank you for that. And I think we'll come back to some of those issues that you've raised. E.J., I want to come to you next. Countries like Australia are obviously debating how they will respond to this issue and those issues of the major powers that he was just referring to. But of course, ultimately it's Taiwan's future that is at stake here. As you say, your essay, this, 23.4 million people, people there who all have a do this as well. What can you tell us about what the people of Taiwan want for their future?

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen** [00:07:19] So yes, I think Taiwanese people have been making choices for themselves, especially since democratisation in the 1980s. And we do this through speakers discussion in the politics and civil society and also through our votes. And the recent trends really clearly shows that Taiwanese people want at least the status quo. And what does the status quo mean in this context? It's de facto independence that Taiwan has enjoyed for decades and its de facto independence from China. It's our freedoms and the democratic way of life. And this is hugely important to Taiwanese people, as probably many know here, that Taiwan has gone through a terrible authoritarian regime and transited to democracy after so many efforts and struggles and bloodshed. And so Taiwanese people genuinely value this freedom. And especially there's a rising Taiwanese identity in Taiwan, understandably, because Taiwan has been separate from the PRC. Well, it's never been ruled by the PRC for one single moment, and it's kept its autonomy and independence for the past more than seven decades. And young generations here, especially people under 35, have never lived a single day under authoritarian rule. So it's natural that there's a rising identity that's deeply rooted in Taiwan and Taiwan itself, nothing to do with mainland China. And there's also a strong conviction about the democratic system that we currently enjoy.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:09:36] Hmm. Thank you. And we'll come back to some of those issues as well, particularly when to come back to your writings around Taiwanese identity. But Alan, I'll come to you next. Allan Behm, we're in the middle of an election campaign here in Australia, obviously. Where China's expansionism can we call it has just come to the fore. We have the Solomon Islands citing a security pact with China. Does that really throw the issue of Taiwan into a different light or what? What could Australia learn from this new security arrangement and what that might be for Australia in the future?

**Allan Behm** [00:10:18] Really good question, Ebony. I think I think of it in these sorts of terms that in order to see Taiwan in any light at all, you've got to have the light on. And I think a fair bit of our problem in Australia is that we don't really understand what we're talking about. We don't have the light on with respect to the issue and that I think obliquely is the point that that you made at the very opening that we tend to hyper inflate the Taiwanese issue as a domestic political issue, which it almost certainly is not, but it plays into our domestic conversation because it can have high levels of fear attached to it, and that's something to which I think our electorate is quite susceptible. Certainly in my lifetime I've seen the fear card played many times, but certainly virtually from the end of the Second World War through to the present. We've had this constant fear of some monstrous country looming over Australia to chew up and spit out our freedoms and to make us all slaves. That simply is not the case. I think the way to characterise the Taiwan problem for Australia is that it's really an artefact of our own relationship with the United States. We tend to look at the problem through the eyes of Washington. We don't really look at the problem through the eyes of Beijing at all. We rarely look at it through the eyes of people in Taipei, and we almost never look at it from a more realist point of view. That is the eyes of Canberra itself. So we're dealing with the problem that we don't understand. We're dealing with a problem which in a sense we've attached ourselves to and brought some of the consequences of that attachment and. I think that for Australia that's where the danger really lies going into what is a really major geo strategic problem. But with our eyes closed, with the lights off and on the basis of a whole lot of assumptions about how we're going to respond in support of putative American reactions to what might or might not happen. So I think that Hugh has an expression which he used quite a long time ago, which is sort of a country is sharing the same bed, but having quite different dreams. And I think that that's a fair bit of the problem here, that it's perceived differently in Washington, it's perceived differently in Beijing. The Americans use it as a way of keeping Beijing unbalanced. Beijing can't use it that way. And hence, a bit of Beijing's clamour is because of the way in which the issue is played is far from being equal. And for us, of course, we just like to go along as the acolyte of the United States, prepared to do whatever is necessary. As yet another investment in our strategic relationships with the United States. And I think that that's where a fair bit of the confusion lies for people in Australia.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:13:44] Hmm. Thank you. I can see we've got around 300 people on the line with us today. Thank you so much for joining us. Just to provide you could put questions for the panel in the Q&A box and will come to those in the second half. Hugh, coming back to you, Defence Minister Peter Dutton basically said that it would be inconceivable that Australia would support the US. It had action around the issue of Taiwan if the US chose to take that action. I feel like you've kind of walked that back a little bit, not a huge amount, but is that right? What is Australia's choice or Australia's? Is that Australia's only choice backing the United States now that we've joined Orcus, or are there other paths available to us going forward to manage this, I guess, dissonance between the two major powers?

**Hugh White** [00:14:40] Well I think it may well be inconceivable for Peter Dutton that we wouldn't. But that doesn't mean that it's inconceivable for the rest of us. Look, it's a really important question. EBONY Let's start with the treaty. The Answers Treaty is a short document, but quite complex because it's a little bit vague in some of its implications. I don't think the ends the treaty itself obliges Australia to go to war alongside the United States if the United States goes to war with China over Taiwan. The stronger argument for us to go to war would be a a state alongside the United States if there's a US-China war over Taiwan is, first of all, that if we didn't, it would enormously damage our standing as an ally in Washington. And secondly, so to speak more broadly, if we believe that our future security depends on America remaining the dominant power in East Asia, then our future security depends on America being able to win that war against China. And therefore, it would be in our strategic interests more broadly to support the United States in that kind of war. And if you were to sort of press Peter Dutton or many of the people who agree with him in Canberra as to why we should support the United States in such a war. That's the answer that I'd give you the other side of the coin though, and the reason why I would give the country answer is that I don't think we're going to win that war. I think the problem with the US-China war over Taiwan is that that is a war that the United States is not going to win. Even if they did win it, it would be, to paraphrase Churchill Little, speaking of the First World War, a victory bought at so high a price that it would be indistinguishable from defeat. And I therefore think there's a very strong argument that Australia should, rather than drifting into that war, which of course, as I was saying before, is not inevitable, but is I think a higher risk. And people understand we should be working very hard to try and avoid it happening because if it happens, then I think America's position in East Asia is likely to be destroyed anyway because I don't think it can win the war. And what's more, because of that happens if America no longer has a strong position in East Asia, it no longer needs Australia as an ally. And therefore the answer is alliance that we'd be going to war to protect would would would be destroyed as well. And so all the arguments in favour of us going to war to support the United States, the arguments that make it, in Peter Dutton's view, inconceivable, actually fall away when you look at the reality of what the war would be like and what it would mean to you.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:17:16] I want to come back to you now. Add to that issue of Taiwanese identity, perhaps, but also you kind of talk about the fact that a period has perhaps shifted recently in Taiwan, particularly in light of China's recent behaviour in terms of the crackdown in Hong Kong and other things that maybe have solidified public opinion in Taiwan. Can you just tell us a little bit about people's attitudes towards China and what Taiwan's future should be and how that connects with that that issue of identity that you were talking about, where it seems to be much more distinct that it perhaps was in the past, particularly amongst younger generations.

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen** [00:18:05] Yeah, good question. I like to trace this trend back to 2014 sunflower movement. That's when the KMT, the Nationalist Party, was in power. And at that time, our then president in July signed a lot of cross-strait agreements with China, and it provoked a lot of dissatisfaction in the civil society, which then led to the sunflower movement and large scale protest in Taipei in 2014. And I think since then you can see a steady change, a shift in the attitudes toward China, more cautious about closer ties with China. And then in 2019, you see Hong Kong's the crackdowns in Hong Kong and 2020, you see an imposition of a national security law in Hong Kong and undermining of Hong Kong's rule of law and human rights. And so we in Taiwan all have watched this very closely and very, very the sentiment here is very sympathetic with Hong Kong people's situation and also kind of take it as a lesson of Beijing's one country, two systems formula. And I have to say that this proposal of one country system has never been popular in Taiwan, and it's definitely unpalatable in Taiwan nowadays after Hong Kong happened. And also Xi Jinping's has himself to blame for this reaction in Taiwan, because in the past there was some room for manoeuvre to start negotiations, to start on cross-strait cooperation. But Xi Jinping has aggressively pushed one country, two systems for the solution of the Taiwan issue. So in Taiwan, there's this strong aversion to Xi Jinping's proposal. And absolutely it has helped Taiwan's and the Pan Green camp to win more votes. And we should see this trend going forward. And could I also add, John, to the previous discussion about the the foreign relations implications for Australia. This essay was written before Russia's invasion of Ukraine and we all see horribly what's happened in Ukraine. And I want to emphasise, as I do in many occasions, that Taiwanese people are pragmatic. We are not provocative, therefore we do not. When asked about future, you see most of the the majority of people reflect that they want status quo, meaning that they don't want to provoke China to invade Taiwan. So here the status quo is it will be interrupted. It will be interrupted mostly by China, at least in the near future. I don't see any provocation coming from Taiwan to declare independence or do anything harshly. So I think we need to understand the aggressive agenda of Beijing and where is it going to stop? Is it going to stop in Taiwan only? I think that's the question we need to bear in mind when we talk about implications for Australia and Japan and other countries in Asia.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:22:20] Alan Okay. To you. Dexter, before we go, I did want to come to that issue of what happens in there in the rest of Asia. But Yuji has just brought up that idea of obviously the Russian invasion of Ukraine has happened in the same time that this collection of essays were published. And we've said that very directly, that the United States has made hesitant to directly engage with Russia at the risk of escalating the conflict. But equally, I don't think Russia was necessarily anticipating the way much of the world was prepared to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and impose sanctions and said military aid and all the rest of it. I'm just curious there about the lessons for China from the Ukraine conflict.

**Allan Behm** [00:23:13] That's another really, really tricky question. EBONY Let me make just two points. The first is and it follows on from what you said, that automaticity in the management of international relationships is another way of defining stupidity, that you've always got to think about what the issues are, what your interests are, what the consequences are of acting. That's why war is never inevitable. Leaders have agency. It's the whole point of view. Sidered is history actually that nothing is predetermined. People make choices. And so for Australia we ought to look around a bit and see how many other countries in the world simply think that their strategic future is automatic. Canada doesn't, and we ought to pay attention to a country like Canada. It's got very deep interests, as we do in the stability of the Pacific. But equally, they have very deep interests in the long term management of their own strategic future. And so they don't automatically side with the United States in every adventure that the United States embarks upon. We prepared, as you know, in the Australia Institute, a fairly comprehensive paper on that last year, which the view as a welcome to go on our side and find. But we did argue that there are no sound theoretical reasons for Australia automatically joining a war in Taiwan. The second point I want to make is this it's all very well for strategic theorists to sit in their air conditioned offices and think about war in a transcendental kind of way, the the exchange of power in various dimensions, all of which is important to understand. But ultimately, war is down and dirty. And what we've been reminded of, again, in the Ukraine is that in war, soldiers kill each other and soldiers killed civilian populations. And as I look at the Taiwan issue, I look at the people of Taiwan as being caught in the middle of theoretical power plays between major powers, as though Taiwan really didn't matter much. But I think that the the 24 million people who live in Taiwan do matter. They don't want to be caught in the killing fields somewhere between Washington and Beijing. And that's one of the reasons that I think the people of Taiwan are very much more measured in the way in which they approach this problem than perhaps people in Australia are. We have higher levels of of concern in Australia than even the people in Taiwan do. And I think the reason for that is that the people in Taiwan are much more realistic about what the consequences of a war around independence or reunification would actually be. So my guess is that in Beijing at the moment, the leadership is looking at what's happening in the Ukraine with extreme interest. And my guess is that their interest is taking them down the path of increased caution rather than emboldening them to launch a similar kind of activity. With respect to Taiwan, which is part of the speculation two months ago. Oh, won't this release Beijing into a similar sort of action to its east? Well, I don't think so. And it's for the same reason that Putin, if he's smart and I think he is, is probably having a lot of second thoughts about the strategic and political wisdom of embarking upon a war against the Ukraine. I might just leave it there. It.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:27:21] Thank you very much Allan. Hugh, Allan there was talking very much about how dirty war is. It becomes what's it gets going and what are the things that you worried about in your essay? Is that ultimately any conflict between China and the United States over Taiwan could end up as a declared war? I feel like that often gets overlooked or just ignored as part of this debate, but I thought it was a really important issue that you raised. Why is it that it could end up as a nuclear conflict and how do you see that playing out? In the future if something were to happen.

**Hugh White** [00:28:07] Yeah. Look, thanks, Ebony. It's a really it's a really critical issue and just sort of bouncing back to the Ukraine situation. I mean, there's a million different aspects to the Ukraine story, but one is that neither the United States nor Nido has any intention of actually fighting for Ukraine, and that defines a lot of what has happened and what's going to happen. So they provided all sorts of support, but they have not gone to war. And the reason they haven't gone to war is that Russia has nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons really count. And it's it's very striking to me that when people like Peter Dutton talk about us trying to war over Taiwan or more broadly when they talk about the US and China as strategic rivals in East Asia, basically they overlook the fact that China is a nuclear power and they don't bring the fact that they this would be a war between nuclear power right to the to the forefront of their analysis. And that's very different from the Cold War and the Cold War. I was old enough to remember it. No issue in US Soviet relations was ever discussed without the fact that these two countries had nuclear weapons on head trigger alert, being right at the forefront of everyone's mind. But now people are talking about the idea of a US-China war as if nuclear weapons were something completely separate. Now, I think there's a there's a I the one of the reasons for that is that during the Cold War, of course, we had 40 years of it, and I didn't go to war and they didn't use nuclear weapons. And so I think people are going to be complacent about about this. I think that complacency is misplaced because I think the present contrast, the conflict between the contest between the US and China is very different from the Cold War in one really critical way. And that is that during the Cold War the two sides had and perceived one another to have symmetrical resolve. Both sides understood that the other side was willing to fight a nuclear war to make sure that neither side made any big advances at the at the expense of the other. And that made it in its own scary way, curiously stable. What's different about the US-China confrontation in East Asia at the moment and for that matter, the Soviet, the Russian, NATO's confrontation over Ukraine? Is it is that the sense of resolve? Is this the resolve is not is not symmetrical. China cares a lot more about Taiwan than the United States does. And that means that there's a real risk that China would be willing to use nuclear weapons. Believing that the United States could be deterred from a nuclear retaliation. Or, conversely, the United States cannot use its threat of using nuclear weapons to deter China from a conventional war because the Chinese might well believe that they could deter the United States from doing so. So that asymmetry of resolve creates a window for both sides to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in a way they wouldn't have during the they didn't during the Cold War. And I think what makes the risk of nuclear escalation in a US-China conflict over Taiwan so high is that neither side can win that war as a conventional battle. America can't defeat China with conventional forces. China can't defeat the United States with conventional forces. They can do one another a huge amount of damage. But if a war does break out, what's likely to happen is that after a week or two, America will have lost a few aircraft carriers. China will have had American bombing raids on its bases, on its mainline territory. Both will be really riled up. Neither side can win with their conventional forces. And that's the point at which both sides start asking, how can we push this to a successful conclusion? And there is a nuclear weapon sitting in their silos, ready to go. I think the risk is really quite high. And one of the reasons why I think stepping back, finding ways to avoid a nuclear war, finding a way to avoid any kind of war is a really high priority.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:32:04] Yeah, absolutely. Yu-Jie Coming back to the people of Taiwan, we've all talked about the fact that they seem to be more circumspect about the idea that China is evidently going to be about Taiwan. And you write that two thirds of people in Taiwan don't seem to agree that sooner or later the CCP will ultimately invade Taiwan. Obviously, Taiwan is hugely invested either in some kind of peaceful resolution. What are the alternatives that Taiwan is exploring for either a sub kind of accord or settlement or arrangement for for its future that, you know, takes us down the path of peace and not for conflict.

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen** [00:32:53] So our current president, Tsai Ing Wen, in office in 2016, has been saying that she remains open to dialogues with Beijing. And to this day, she still has this position. And I think this is a demonstration of the people's sentiment as well, that we don't want war. We we would like to resolve our differences through negotiations. So I think it's really if you ask any foreign relations expert, they all say they would all agree that President Taiwan has handled Taiwan China relations quite well, quite with quite composure and measure. The problem now is Beijing is not talking to us. Definitely Xi Jinping is not talking to Taiwan and is not willing to resume the semi of official channels that have been that had been used during 2008 and 2016. So that's worrying. And moreover, in recent years, we also see Beijing's increased penetration of Taiwan's air identification zone, air defence identification zone, and also increasing military drills around Taiwan. So this is what I call in the essays scare tactics. We really don't know Beijing's intention at this point. But I agree with Allan that after Ukraine, after Russia's attack of Ukraine and after Ukraine's fierce resistance, I think Beijing is watching closely. I don't see a war across the Taiwan Strait that will occurred in the next couple of years. But I wouldn't rule out that it will occur after the period after Ukraine settles down and Beijing will watch what the consequences are before before preparing itself to do anything about Taiwan. And I think there are also a lot of lesson that Taiwan and the United States can learn from the Ukraine situation. And maybe we can talk about that later. Hmm.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:35:45] Before I go, took questions from the audience. Excuse me, Hugh and Allan, I wanted to come back to you about Australia's other options here. At the end of your essay, you talk about that Australia should make clear that it would not join America in a war over Taiwan for various reasons. And I do encourage people to to buy the issue, if you haven't yet read all the essays in it, and it's fantastic. But I wanted to come back to that idea of what Australia's other options are and how other middle powers in Asia are managing China as a major power on their doorstep, essentially. Australia saves to inflate the risk of adventure. It's often discussed as a domestic political issue. How do other countries in Asia approach? At What might Australia lead from that?

**Hugh White** [00:36:43] Well, it's a really good question, EBONY, because one of the things it reflects is that, you know, right behind this whole question we're discussing is the broader question of how do we come to live with China's power and ambition as it as it now exists? And the rise of China is itself, of course, one of the great strategic transformations of history. And, you know, we tend to think that history, something happens to our parents or grandparents, but history is happening to us right now in a very big way. And it's a huge issue for Australia because we have never, ever since European settlement, we have never encountered an Asian power as strong as China is today. It's stronger even than Imperial Japan was at its heyday. And so this is a whole different kind of diplomatic foreign policy challenge for Australia of a kind we haven't faced before. And you're right, one of the things we should be doing is, is watching how our other how other countries in Asia respond to it. And I think that the but the key thing to make is that other countries are doing what we used to say we do for a long time. Australia say we don't have to choose between America and China and we kind of, you know, skated along saying that. Then a few years ago we we flipped quite quickly and we actually chose the United States and we're now sort of siding with the United States. Further US-China rivalry escalates the more strongly we cling to the United States. But if you look, for example, at countries like Singapore or South Korea or Vietnam or any of the Southeast Asians, they're all being very careful to avoid making those sorts of choices. They don't want to side with the United States. Of course, they want the United States to stay in Asia to balance China. But they're not going to support the United States in a military confrontation with China or a new Cold War with China because they don't think the United States can win. And I think that that kind of approach to to China is going to split the region or worse, end up with the United States being pushed out of the region altogether. And I think the secret for Australia is to start realising that we're not going to be able to preserve the old US led order in Asia, which is what we're trying to do at the moment. And I might say both sides of politics are trying to do what we what we should be trying to do is to recognise that China is going to end up being more powerful and influential in Asia, whether we like it or not. That's just, if I can put it this way, Newtonian geopolitics, the stronger China becomes, the more influence it's going to exercise. And we're going to have to learn to learn to live with that and manage it. And the best thing for us to do is to encourage the United States and China both to recognise one another as major powers in Asia and work together rather than to indulge in this kind of confrontation. The fear from our point of view is that we have left it too late, that China is already so powerful and so resolved that is going to raise the cost to the United States of preserving a position in Asia so high that the United States will just bug out, in which case we are going to have to learn to live in a region in which China is the most powerful state. And that's going to be a very difficult thing for us to do. But the starting point is to stop pretending that we can just by supporting the United States and everything we, the United States does, we can somehow make this problem go away. America is not going to solve that China problem for us.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:40:01] Yeah. Ballard, did you have anything to add to that?

**Allan Behm** [00:40:04] I do have one thing to add, EBONY A couple of months ago, I did publish a book in which I schematically look at how South East Asia in particular, has dealt with its China problem over about two millennia. That's quite an amount of history that we, if we were smart enough and humble enough, could learn from we. We like to have silly epigrams, like walk softly and carry a big stick. But that's not how Asia operates at all. What the Asians do is they walk softly and don't shout out, and we could learn quite a lot from that. We conduct our diplomacy at the moment in a rather boisterous, somewhat hysterical way. We just should calibrate the way in which we deal with China against the way in which our friends and neighbours in Asia, including Taiwan, deal with China much more deliberately, but in a much more nuanced way, in a way that manages the relationship not by drawing attention to differences, but by making the most of the things that actually work. And I think if we were to do that, that idea of automaticity, which, as I say, defined stupidity would would disappear, and we might be just a bit more smarter and a bit more adroit in the way in which we manage our long term interests. So I completely agree with what you said, but I've just put it in a somewhat. Different way.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:41:44] Mm hmm. Thank you. We might go to questions from the audience. Now, the first one that I've got is from the back door, and it picks up on that idea of lessons for Ukraine. And he asks, Is there any chance that China and the US will take a chill pill as a result of the Ukraine crisis and decide that potential conflict is in the far too hard basket for at least the next 50 years or more. You get back to you on that one. I think you've kind of touched on it. But do you think there are lessons for both China and the U.S. from the situation in Ukraine?

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen** [00:42:30] I do. I think that, as I mentioned, I think Alan's assessment is align with ours. The the the the believe in Taiwan. Although I have to add a cautious note that since since the war happened, I think the polls in Taiwan show that Taiwanese people's hope for American support has dropped quite dramatically because as everyone knows, the US did not want to be involved, has not wanted to be involved in the war, and therefore I think Taiwanese perception of the US support has been dampened quite a lot. But I think the lesson to take from the Ukraine situation, and I'll only speak about Taiwan because I'm more familiar with that, I think for us is to really and I agree with you on this point, you prevent any war, any conflict from taking place. And to prevent China's attack is not only to appease China, but also to increase deterrence, to increase costs for China's potential invasion. And I think there's a lesson to learn from Ukraine, which is that the US shared a lot of intelligence and continues to be transparent about the information that it has gathered. And I think that helps in a in a complex situation like this, especially for other countries to and Taiwan to coordinate with the United States about what is going to happen and do to also make preparations. And I think the second point is sanctions. Sanctions do matter. And as you can see in in this situation, but with China, I think the sanctions will have to be a lot more aggressive in order to deter China, because China obviously is economically, economically more powerful than Russia. So there has to be really, really good coordination in advance, talking about sanctions, whether it should be used as deterrence before the fact or use as punishment after the fact. And all of that is to prevent China from taking irresponsible action to provoke a conflict in the region. And lastly, I think it's important for Taiwanese to recognise our danger and to increase our resolve to resist before any other allies or democratic countries will make up their mind and come to aid. And I hope this discussion outside of Taiwan will happen soon before it's too late. But Taiwanese on the ground, we have been talking about increasing our civil defence, increasing our conscription period. So the resolve is really important in Taiwan and we have to do a better job defending ourselves before we can ask for international help.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:46:32] Hugh, the next question is for you. It's from Ivan Quail, who asks, Why is it that you think the United States and allies would not with such a a war were it to happen over Taiwan?

**Hugh White** [00:46:47] Yeah. Really good question. Thanks and thanks. Thanks for it. Look, we have a war with China over Taiwan would be a maritime war and it would be the first big maritime war since 1945. Maritime war. Big maritime wars are pretty, pretty rare. And when we look at what's been happening in maritime warfare over the last 1200 years or more, really, but particularly over the last few decades, there's been a very consistent pattern, and that is that it becomes harder and harder to project power by sea as ships become easier and easier to find and easier and easier to sink. And they the reason why that affects the outcome of the war over Taiwan is that in a war over Taiwan, it's the United States that has to project power by sea much further than China. Dutch. Of course, China has to do an invasion across the Taiwan Strait, but America has to has to project power right across the Pacific Ocean. And I think and this is a not really a controversial proposition, I think it's well understood, at least in some circles in the United States, that China can now find and sink the ships that America depends on for power projection. And and that means the United States cannot anymore concentrate enough combat power in and around Taiwan to defeat the forces that China can bring to bear. And of course, that that judgement issue is a reflection of something else, and that is that over the last 25 years, China has enormously expanded its military capabilities and in particular its air and maritime capabilities. You could say that for a quarter of a century, China has devoted a defence budget which has been growing on average something like eight or 9% per annum, almost entirely to enhancing its capacity to win that war, to win the war over Taiwan. And my judgement is as a defence planner I think they've done a pretty good job of it and and for that reason I do think it's going to be extraordinarily difficult for America to win this war. And one of the problems we have is that particularly after the end of the Cold War, people got used to saying, oh, well, the United States is the world's dominant military power and it can virtually win any war it likes. That's just not true. It's one of those things that people keep on saying, which just is not borne out by the facts. So I think there's a very I think there's a very sort of fundamental, if you like, operational reason why that should be the case. But it's also worth stepping back a couple of steps and thinking of it as sort of grand strategic terms and asking ourselves what is winning a war with China? I mean, what does it look like to win a war with China right on China's doorstep? Because in the old days, you know, if you go back to World War Two, for example, how did we win those wars? Well, we we occupied the country. We entered the capital. We destroyed the system of government in Germany and Japan, and we replaced it with one we like better. Now, I'm going to make a bold prediction here. Whatever else happens, we're never going to be able to win a war with China. That way, we're going to have to find some way to live with a powerful China, even if it does decide to invade Taiwan. And that's that, if you like. It's the tragedy of the present situation. It's the difficulties, the scale of the difficulty for Taiwan and for the people of Taiwan. At the moment. It's the scale of the issue for the rest of us. The fact is that this is not an issue that can be resolved by military means to our satisfaction. I think there are also lessons there. If you cry, I'm going to be very careful how we define how a wish to find victory in Ukraine, but that's another topic. I'll leave that for another time.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:50:18] Yeah, that's a good point to allude to. I want to come back to you. That's a question here from Ali Riddick, who says, why is it that Australians have an unrealistic view, he says, as compared to Taiwan, as you described it? Is it because we're so far away from Taiwan and hence have a more simplistic view? And if I might add to that, you're is it because. It, as he said, has become part of the domestic political debate. And therefore, there's reasons for people to kind of stoke fears about it.

**Allan Behm** [00:50:57] Well, Ali has asked a really big question. Some of it deals with what one might call our strategic psychology. We are fearful. It's part of our mindset in Australia. We we always have some kind of monstrous bogeyman against whom we feel we've got to do our defence planning. And Hugh and I have worked together over very long periods of time trying to fight back against the idea that certain enemies are inevitable. And sometimes we've been successful, at other times less so. I also think, though, apart from strategic psychology, again, I address that in the book that I've written and I'm not going to talk about it now. We have this tendency to play important global issues directly into domestic political landscape, and we don't get them right, but they're used by the major parties in Australia for much the same purposes, and that is to have a point on which the major parties can say we will keep you safer than the other people will keep you. Just follow us and we'll look after you. It is actually pretty stupid when you sort of give a bit of deeper thought to it because there are very few circumstances in which a population of a little bit over 25 million people can make a determinant outcome in matters of war. Neither of our major parties would be able to do that. And as Hugh has said, and I completely agree with the idea that we should go along and support the United States in a war against China would be the height of folly, because it's unwinnable in any sense. It's unwinnable. So to play those very, very important issues on the raw edge of fear, rather than playing them on the smarter edge of opportunity, because in fact, the rise of China creates massive opportunities. And I don't just mean economic ones. I mean opportunities for new ways of conducting our diplomacy, the new opportunities in in the language of diplomacy, the way in which we talk about problems so often, preconditions, the way in which we solve them. And, of course, one of the one of the things about problem solving is that if you don't understand the problem, you'll never get an answer to it. And so I look at Ashley's question as being one really about Australia playing to its strengths, which I think are very considerable and not playing to its weaknesses. Our strengths are that we are a continent, we are at the 13th slash 14th biggest economy in the world. We're a very, very cohesive society comparatively. So anyway, we have very high standards of education. We're a skilled society, we just like a population. And if we play to our strengths, we're going to look a bit more like the saner members of the global community, some of which live in the Pacific, I might say, and some live in the Scandinavian countries. We're going to look more like them than like a baroka who is sitting up in the bleachers screaming and shouting and saying how much we're looking forward to the contest without really giving anything like serious thought to the fact that it's not a contest we even want to watch or be in. So I hope that answers at least question anyway. At least give some comment on it.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:54:45] Thanks, Hugh. This fight is for you. And it goes back to that issue of that it could the threat of it becoming a nuclear conflict. Coloured Mitchell asks, Do you agree that Australia should urge the United States to declare a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, thus matching China's existing DEFENCES policy to reduce the risk that a military conflict between the United States and China would turn into a nuclear war.

**Hugh White** [00:55:19] Yeah. Look, really, really good question. I do think we should urge the United States to abandon no first use, but my argument for that is a little bit different from many other peoples. And that is, I think, the danger with with the US no first use policy is that it encourages American decision makers to think that that that threatening to use nuclear weapons first might work in the little scenario I sketched earlier and they suggested that one of the ways in which us China US-China war of which I was we go nuclear is the United States decides that having failed to win a conventional war it can it can use a threat of nuclear escalation to force the Chinese to back off. And this is part of American strategy. Serious people in Washington believe that this is what the United States could do. And they believe that would work because they believe the Chinese would not be willing to retaliate. Now, I think that's wrong. I think the delusion that Americans have that threatening a first strike could be effective against China is one of the things that makes it less unlikely that the United States would decide to go to war with China over Taiwan. And I think that is I think that is bad strategy because I don't think it works and it could make a war more likely and a nuclear one more likely. So I think it would be very much in Australia's interest for the United States to abandon the first use to make a no first use declaration, not because I have any great faith in China's no first use declaration. I don't think that's worth the paper it's printed on, but I think it would help to add realism and sobriety to us strategic decision making.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:56:57] E.J., I want to come to you. Just to finish up, we've really got a couple of minutes, but Grey Stafford has asked about you know, we've all been talking about the points of conflict, but what about the extensive cooperation on all sides that could be used to resolve issues? Obviously, Taiwan is made existing with China on its doorstep for a long time. Already there is extensive ties and cultural history there. What are some of those opportunities for us to embrace as an alternative to heading down the path to conflict?

**Dr Yu-Jie Chen** [00:57:36] Yeah, I totally agree. I think that's a great question. I think think back just a decade ago when the said my organisation, semi-official organisations used by the two governments were still in talking with each other. And some of the government agencies also through various channels were in talking with each other. And I think that's a good way to deflect tension and also to increase the trust and deepen cooperation across the straits so that, you know, whether it's Taiwan or it's China that is going to provoke conflict, either side will suffer consequences because they have so much invested in each other. Right. That's what we had hoped. But I think after Xi Jinping took office, especially in recent years, we are increasingly worried. As I mentioned earlier, Beijing has shut down communication with Taipei and that really increased the risks of misjudgement and misunderstanding. And so perhaps a good strategy here and I think Taiwan has been doing that, is to stay low and keeps open, keeps the dialogue possibilities open. But eventually, I think the ball is now in Beijing's court to take up this opportunity and say we don't also want a conflict and we would like to stay this cooperative mode that we used to keep. But I think that Chen's is getting really slim. I don't think that fits with Xi Jinping's agenda to unify Taiwan and use force at its discretion. By the way, I will have to say, whenever people say that Beijing has to use force to unify Taiwan when necessary, if necessary, I think it's misguided. There's never a war that's necessary. It's really use at its discretion. And I think here we require not the kind of fights Farrell is saying that we cannot we cannot prevent this or we cannot win this war. We cannot do much to prevent this war. I think we have to this is the time to muster all the resources and coordination and say maybe there's something that can be done to prevent the war from occurring, which is to make it really costly for Beijing to launch the first strike.

**Ebony Bennett** [01:00:45] Thank you so much, everybody. We're going to have to wrap it up there. Can I place the panel? Hugh White, Dr Yu-Jie Chen and Allan Behm, thank you so much. That was a wonderful conversation and I really would recommend that everyone goes out to get that copy of AFA. It's Issue 14, The Taiwan Choice. And please do also check out the Jacobson's essay as well. And again, her apologies for not being able to make it today. Thank you, everyone, for your great questions. I'm so sorry that we couldn't get to all of them. Please join us next week for our fortnightly poll position webinar at Don't Forget to subscribe to the Australia Institute's Follow the Buddy Podcast available wherever you don't believe it's a podcast. Thank you so much. Stay safe out there. Stay healthy like me and we'll see you say. Thanks very much, everyone.