

Andrew Chubb* : Kịch bản Eo biển Đài Loan

Andrew Chubb - Taiwan Strait Scenarios

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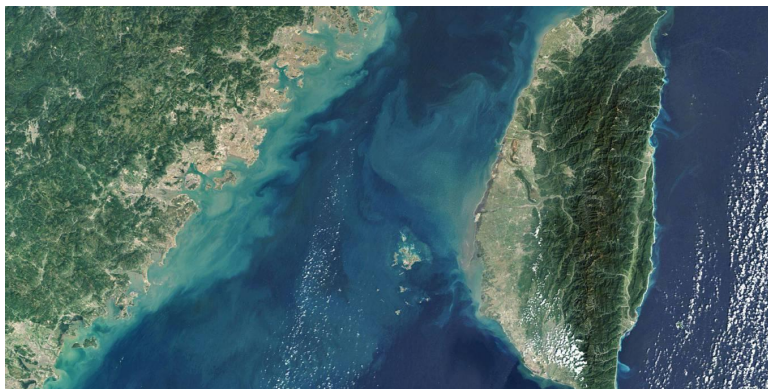
Tác giả thảo luận về các kịch bản có thể xảy ra ở Eo biển Đài Loan và nhấn mạnh tính dễ bị tổn thương của các tiền đồn của Đài Loan ở eo biển này, chẳng hạn như quần đảo Matsu. Trong khi các quan chức Hoa Kỳ và Úc đưa ra cảnh báo về khả năng Trung Quốc xâm lược Đài Loan, báo cáo lập luận rằng một cuộc xâm lược hoặc phong tỏa hoàn toàn sẽ có thể dẫn đến xung đột trực tiếp với Hoa Kỳ. Thay vào đó, Trung Quốc có thể khám phá các lựa chọn ít có tính đổ vỡ hơn, dưới ngưỡng chiến tranh, chẳng hạn như chiếm giữ các đảo do Đài Loan chiếm đóng ở eo biển.

Những chiến thuật "vùng xám" này đã được Trung Quốc sử dụng ở Biển Đông và Biển Hoa Đông mà không cần dùng đến hành động quân sự. Bài viết giải thích lý do tại sao một số hòn đảo trong eo biển sẽ hấp dẫn Trung Quốc, bao gồm cả vị trí địa lý gần với đất liền và khả năng chiếm đóng chúng mà không đổ máu. Bài viết nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc xem xét các khả năng có thể xảy ra cũng như tìm kiếm sự cân bằng mong manh trong việc đối phó với các động thái của Trung Quốc mà không phải là xâm lược hoặc phong tỏa.

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Taiwan and its supporters in East Asia should be considering scenarios other than a Chinese invasion or blockade of the island. China's most obvious next step toward unification lies much closer to the mainland.

LANCASTER – The Matsu Islands are a little-known Taiwanese outpost just ten kilometers (6.2 miles) off the coast of China. For their connection to the rest of the world, they rely on two hosepipe-sized submarine cables stretching 200 kilometers back to Taiwan. In February, Chinese ships [severed](#) both lines.

Taiwanese authorities downplayed the significance of these incidents: one involved a bottom-dragging fishing trawler, and the other a freighter's anchor. But whether intentional or not, the episode vividly illustrated the vulnerability of Taiwan's outposts in the strait.

Meanwhile, US and Australian [officials](#) have been issuing increasingly strident [warnings](#) that China may soon invade Taiwan. Last fall, the head of US naval operations [warned](#) that China could make its move as soon as this year. And in military drills last August, and again in April, China telegraphed the threat of a blockade to cut off the island. Yet an outright invasion or blockade would be massively disruptive to the East Asian economies upon which China's own growth depends, and it would likely bring China into direct conflict with the United States.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) understands that such a move could be disastrous for its long-term hold on power. Given this, Chinese President Xi Jinping is doubtless exploring opportunities for moving against Taiwan in ways that are less disruptive and more difficult to counter. In this context, seizing one or more of the Taiwan-occupied islands in the strait is an obvious starting point. These less-discussed contingencies lie in the "gray zone" of conflict below the threshold of lethal force. Yet this is precisely where China has proved most adept in [advancing](#) its position in the South and East China Seas over the last 15 years – all without firing a shot. There are many reasons why some of Taiwan's offshore islands will be tempting to China in the coming years. The first is geographical: The Matsus – like the even smaller and more vulnerable Wuchiu Islands 100 kilometers to the south – are much closer to the

mainland than to Taiwan itself, implying fewer logistical challenges for Chinese amphibious operations.

Moreover, since many of the Taiwan-controlled islands in the strait are either sparsely populated or uninhabited, China could potentially occupy them without bloodshed, creating a fait accompli. This would not only offer China's inexperienced military an invaluable chance to practice amphibious operations; it also would give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a new foothold from which to ratchet up pressure on Taiwanese forces, testing their responses to various behaviors. Xi may also believe that such an operation would boost the credibility of China's threat to unify Taiwan with mainland China by force, if necessary. As matters stand, surveys [indicate](#) that very few Taiwanese believe that the PLA is ready to invade. New "facts on the ground" in the Taiwan Strait could change that. Perhaps most important, with China facing unprecedented economic challenges in the coming years, seizing an island from Taiwan would enable Xi to divert domestic attention, rally popular nationalist sentiment, and demonstrate progress toward unification – all at a fraction of the cost, and with much lower risk, than attempting an invasion. Operationally, China has a wide array of options in the "gray zone" below the threshold of lethal force. Aside from conventional special forces, it could send in a fleet of fishing trawlers from its maritime militia, or even deploy civilian patriotic activists to set up "shelters" on an unoccupied island. China has [used](#) such [tactics](#) in the South and East China Seas several times since the 1970s.

It would be quite difficult for Taiwan or the US to counter such moves. After all, if Taiwan were to try to use force to evict Chinese "non-combatant" intruders from a small island near the mainland coast, it would be at a tactical disadvantage, given the proximity to China, and it would risk being portrayed as the side that escalated the conflict militarily. Taiwan's forward positions in the strait are a legacy of the twentieth-century Kuomintang (KMT) dictator Chiang Kai-shek's plans to retake the mainland. To this day, Taipei administers these outposts as part of its nominal Fuchien (Fujian) Province, which means that even it does not regard them as a formal part of Taiwan.

After the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai saw the KMT presence on the islands as [beneficial](#) for preventing the permanent separation of Taiwan from the mainland. Hence, during the Cold War, the PLA shelled Kinmen and Matsu only on alternate days, deliberately providing windows of respite through which Chiang's KMT forces could sustain and resupply the outposts. Many ordinary Taiwanese today have little awareness of these territories, let alone an appetite for defending them. The KMT-led "blue" side of Taiwan's political spectrum tends to favor cooperation with the mainland, and thus would balk at an escalatory response that could worsen ties with Beijing. At the same time, many on the independence-leaning "green" side view the islands as a symbol of the KMT dictatorship, and as an obstacle to eventual formal independence. The ruling (pro-independence) Democratic Progressive Party has [hardly even bothered](#) to field candidates in elections there. The bottom line is that invasions and blockades are not the only – or even the most likely – scenarios that Taiwan, the US, and everyone else in the region should be considering. What risks of escalation would officials in Taipei (and Washington) be willing to run to regain control of a small island next to the mainland? What credible costs could Taiwan and its partners impose on Beijing for seizing territory? How would the rest of the region respond? Policymakers must carefully consider such contingencies and credibly communicate their intentions to their Chinese counterparts. The response to a surprise move by China in the Taiwan Strait short of an invasion or blockade will need to strike a delicate balance that avoids being seen as either weak or escalatory.

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