

# ‘No need to exaggerate’: risk of imminent Taiwan conflict is overhyped, says cross-strait affairs expert

- Beijing should seek reunification according to its ‘own rhythm’ as threat of a clash remains low in the near term, according to heavyweight scholar
- Mainland China could take advantage of ‘extreme pressure’ from the US to gain military advantage against the island, says former think tank dean

by Amber Wang in Beijing

Published: 12:00pm, 27 May, 2023

The risk of conflict in the Taiwan Strait in the near term has been overhyped, according to a heavyweight scholar of Beijing’s Taiwan policy.

“The urgency of [resolving] the Taiwan issue should not be deliberately exaggerated,” said Liu Guoshen, a professor at the Taiwan research institute of Xiamen University in the southeastern province of Fujian, located across the strait from the island.

Liu is a former dean of the institute, which is one of the mainland’s most prominent think tanks on Taiwan issues.

“There’s no need to exaggerate the imminence of the Taiwan issue,” he said. “After 74 years of division, has it been easier for Taiwan to seek independence? The fact is, it is even more impossible for Taiwan to pursue independence.”

He added that Beijing should seek reunification according to its “own rhythm”, dealing with challenges calmly and without “rushing for success”.

Liu’s assessment came amid heated tensions in the strait as Beijing and Washington have ramped up military signalling around the island. Senior US officials have said Beijing could be ready to take the island by force as early as 2027.

Cross-strait ties are likely to be complicated further by Taiwan’s presidential election early next year, with many watching to see how independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party candidate William Lai Ching-te fares at the polls.

Another leading Taiwan specialist based in Beijing, who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, agreed that the mainland was biding its time for reunification, saying the situation would not become “out of control” in the next few years.

In a summit with US President Joe Biden last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Beijing was “patient” and sought peaceful reunification. However, “if Taiwanese independence separatist forces provoke or even break through the ‘red line’, we will have no alternative but to take drastic measures”, Xi warned.

What PLA spy drone flights around Taiwan could mean for cross-strait conflict

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3221975/no-need-exaggerate-risk-imminent-taiwan-conflict-overhyped-says-cross-strait-affairs-expert>

Liu said he was supportive of Beijing's military pressure on the island, including its drills following former US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August and after Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen travelled to the US in April.

Beijing could take advantage of the "extreme pressure" Washington had put on Taiwan to gain a military advantage against the island, he said.

"In the future, we will respond appropriately based on the degree of US-Taiwan ties, and make the provocateurs pay the price," Liu said.

Mainland China and Taiwan split in 1949 at the end of a civil war in which the Nationalists, or Kuomintang, were defeated by the Communists and fled to Taiwan, where they set up a government. Beijing sees the island as part of China and has never ruled out the use of force to take it back.

Most countries, including the United States, do not see Taiwan as an independent state, but are opposed to a change of status quo by force.

Washington has recently sought closer coordination on Taiwan among its allies. In a communique on May 20, the Group of Seven united in reaffirming the "importance of peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait.

The US has also stepped up military support for the self-ruled island in recent years. Washington is in talks with Taiwan to provide US\$500 million in free weapons, as well as weapons stockpiles on or near the island.

But Liu said Beijing should remain calm despite the growing military pressure from Washington.

"The decision about whether the two sides are at war or at peace rests with Beijing," he said.

Liu added that Beijing would not let the Taiwan issue interrupt its development.

"The great rejuvenation of China cannot give way to the temporary issue of Taiwan, and efforts must be made to make the Taiwan issue a plus for the great rejuvenation of China," Liu said.