



CHINA'S PLAN FOR A PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION WITH TAIWAN

by Captain Hemaloto Tatafu

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Introduction

China is currently executing a strategy to displace the United States from East Asia and replace it as the world's most dominant power. If successful, this strategy will also result in China's peaceful reunification with Taiwan. At the core of the strategy is deception, and it would appear to be working. So far, the United States seems unable to correctly decipher the People's Republic of China's (PRC) closely held plan. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 80 percent of the leading experts on China within the United States do not believe China has a coherent strategy for peaceful reunification with Taiwan.¹ This is very alarming because it could not be further from the truth. High-level government officials and experts not recognizing the existence of a PRC plan for peaceful reunification with Taiwan is a genuine problem. In my opinion, the United States government should reevaluate this assessment before we miss the window of opportunity to peacefully reverse China's progress.

The United States must have a firm understanding of the PRC's goals and plans to develop an effective strategy for countering China. Based on analysis of official Chinese Communist Party (CCP) speeches and writings, Dr. Rush Doshi argues in his book, *The Long Game*, that since 2017 China has engaged in efforts to secure both regional and global hegemony. China's regional goal is for an Asia that is dependent on China economically and divorced from United States alliances militarily.² Globally, China intends to "displace the United States as the world leading power by 2049."³

Michael Pillsbury, author of *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, convincingly argues that Chinese leaders derive modern-day strategy from lessons learned during the Warring States Period.⁴ Based on PRC activities to date, it is highly likely the main strategy for regional and global hegemony evolved from two approaches of that era: Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao and Deceive Heaven to Cross the Sea.

The Warring States Period (481/403 BCE – 221 BCE)

The Warring States Period is a roughly three century period when various rival Chinese states battled for territorial advantage. Eventually, the Qin state was victorious and established the first unified Chinese state. Likely because of the constant warfare, the period saw significant development in society, commerce, agriculture, philosophy, and arts. These developments set the foundation for the prosperity of Imperial China beginning with the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE.⁵

Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao

The strategy Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao is likely how China intends to peacefully reunite with Taiwan and displace the United States military from East Asia. During China's Warring States Period, the State of Wei attacked the State of Zhao.⁶ Zhao asked the neighboring State of Qi for help. Qi sent General Tian Ji and 8000 men to help Zhao. General Tian Ji wanted to attack Wei's superior army head-on, but his advisor recommended he instead attack Wei's vulnerable capital. When the Wei army heard of the attack on its capital, they rushed home. General Tian Ji and his men ambushed the superior Wei army who were exhausted by the forced march home, which freed Zhao.

In today's context, the United States is Wei, Taiwan and East Asia are Zhao, and Qi is China. The United States will continue to dominate East Asia as long as the status quo remains. To influence a change in the status quo, China must militarily threaten the bottom line of the United States: the security of the United States homeland. This will create discord in the United States and cause the populace to demand that political leaders bring forces and equipment back to protect the homeland, giving China military control over East Asia.

Imagine, for example, the public reaction in the United States if the Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, and Cuba simultaneously announced the permanent stationing of a People's

Liberation Army (PLA) Navy aircraft carrier strike group at their ports leading up to the 2036 United States elections. The PLA Navy carrier strike group could then patrol the Strait of Florida and the Yucatan Channel every time the United States Navy transits the Taiwan Strait, threatening commerce coming in and out of ports in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. Unlike the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the PLA Navy would have enough resources and military capability to avoid a successful United States naval blockade. These events could have a high likelihood of ensuring the election of an isolationist U.S. government that would mandate bringing U.S. forces home to defend the homeland. As a result, China would have the freedom to reunite with Taiwan without fear of United States military intervention.

One could dismiss this scenario as something out of a Tom Clancy novel, but the reality is at the core of the PRC's number one military strategy since 1949: active defense.⁷ Active defense is a concept for conducting strategic defense in conjunction with offensive operations at the operational and tactical levels to ensure the security of strategic objectives. Militarily threatening the United States homeland from the Caribbean to secure Taiwan and East Asia and avoid United States military intervention is a perfect example of active defense.

Deceive Heaven to Cross the Sea

To threaten the United States homeland from the Caribbean is a risky undertaking, and PRC leaders understand this. To be successful, the PRC will potentially turn to another Warring States Period strategy—Deceive Heaven to Cross the Sea.

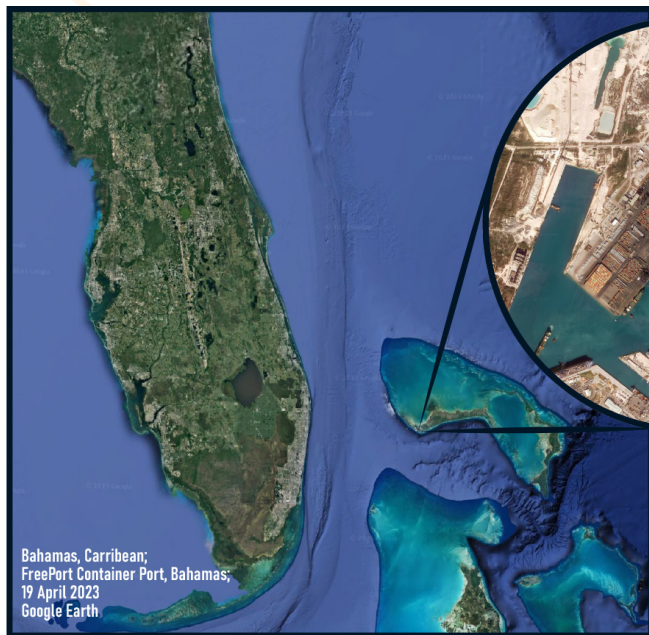
In the year 643, the Tang Emperor wanted to cancel a military operation because he was unhappy about crossing the sea. Determined to continue with the plan, the military leader, General Xue Rengui, invited the emperor to a banquet where he was entertained both day and night. Days later, the emperor realized the banquet was in a boat and was already halfway to modern day Korea.⁸ Realizing it was riskier to turn back, the emperor decided to continue.

As in the days of General Xue, today PRC leaders understand that they must use deception to achieve regional and global goals. "Hide capabilities and bide time" was the PRC's core strategy at the end of the cold war once they determined the United States was the biggest threat.⁹ Given that the world is waking up to the Chinese threat, PRC planners understand using deception today is more crucial than ever.

The Deception Exposed

Successful deception requires three main components: a subject as a diversion, a means to freely move around without drawing attention, and an authority figure to distract the audience.

Latin America is the Objective. To build military capability in Latin America and the Caribbean over time without attracting



Freeport Container Port in the Bahamas was opened in 1997 by Hong Kong-based Hutchison Port Holdings after they provided \$2.6 billion to the project. (Photos courtesy of Google Earth)

suspicion is a tall order. The PLA must be able to sustain a prolonged military standoff against the United States in the Caribbean. The duration of such an operation would directly correlate to the time required to reclaim Taiwan. Furthermore, the PLA must have the military capability to conduct a legitimate military campaign against the United States homeland from the Caribbean to force the United States into a stalemate, leading to the irrefutable conclusion that the only logical way forward is de-escalation. For the PLA to conduct a sustained forward operation in the Caribbean for that duration requires well-armed forward military bases and established secure sea lines of communication (SLOC) all the way back to China. To set up such an elaborate military network undetected requires a perfectly executed deception plan.

The Perfect Deception Tool. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) provide China the cover to freely move around Latin America and the Caribbean with limited United States scrutiny.¹⁰ Under the guise of the BRI, Chinese SOEs and businesses are laying the foundation for facilities and infrastructures that could easily be transformed into military forward bases and secure SLOCs.

By law, Chinese transportation enterprises are under obligation to function as strategic support forces for the PLA when needed. The same Chinese law mandates building all Chinese commercial ships and aircraft according to military specifications so they can transform into military assets when the need arises.¹¹ Therefore, every PRC-funded infrastructure venture must be viewed as a potential PLA military base.

PRC companies have funded numerous infrastructure projects that could easily transform into military facilities in Latin America and the Caribbean with varying degrees of success. Some of those projects include—

- ◆ In the Bahamas, a mega-port facility at Freeport, which is less than 100 miles off the coast of Florida; a \$40 million port off the Bahamian island of Abaco; and a resort next to the Prince George Wharf.¹²
- ◆ In Cuba, a \$120 million expansion project of the cargo port of Santiago in May 2019.¹³
- ◆ At Antigua and Barbuda, the modernization of the St. John's Deep-Water Harbor in December 2022.¹⁴
- ◆ In Panama, PRC SOEs are currently working on the Panama Colón Container Port and the Fuerte Amador Cruise Terminal, which are located at the Pacific and Atlantic entrances of the Panama Canal.¹⁵
- ◆ In Jamaica and El Salvador, PRC SOEs have attempted to secure port construction projects but so far have failed.¹⁶
- ◆ In Mexico, investments in various ports, airports, and transportation infrastructures.¹⁷

All these PRC-related projects have varying capacity to host PLA vessels and equipment, including submarines and aircraft carriers, and could easily transform into military bases in the future. If the current trend continues, conditions will be far more favorable for the PRC in 2035 when the PLA intends to complete its modernization effort.¹⁸

The establishment of successful forward operating bases will require multiple secure SLOCs back to China. A quick map study of PRC investments reveals three possible SLOCs from China to the Caribbean:

- ◆ Africa SLOC: Start from China to the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, around the African continent, across the Atlantic Ocean to South America then up to the Caribbean.
- ◆ Suez Canal SLOC: From China to the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean to the Gulf of Aden, through the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, Mediterranean Sea, across the Atlantic Ocean and to the Caribbean.
- ◆ Oceania SLOC: From China to the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Islands of Oceania, to South America then up to Central America and the Caribbean.

PRC SOEs and businesses are working to establish dual-use infrastructure, while avoiding suspicion from the United States, throughout the three SLOCs.¹⁹ The infrastructure under construction along each SLOC could become military bases within the next 14 years.

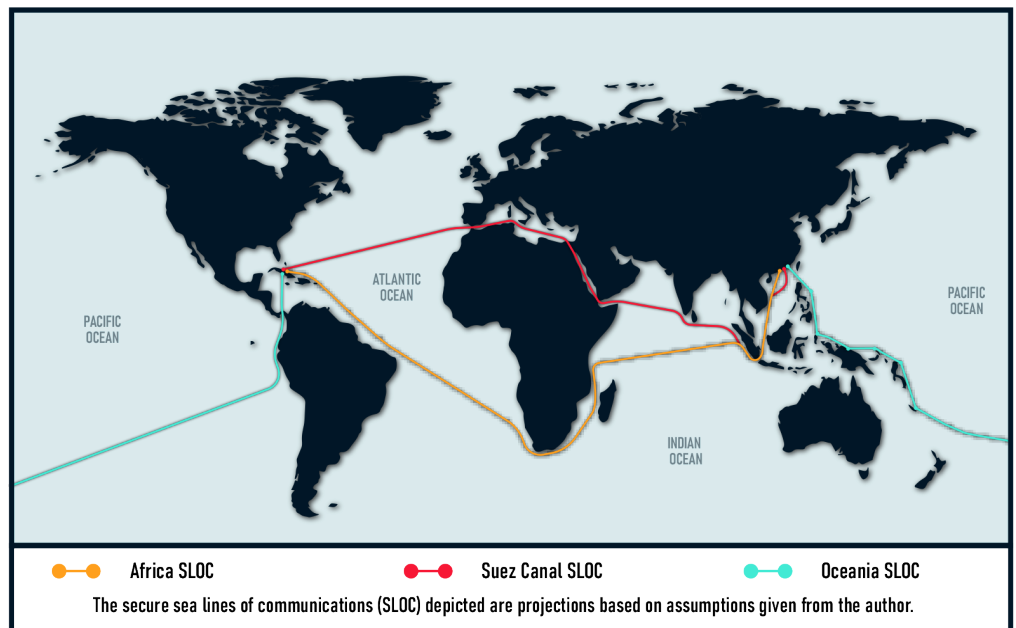
Authority Commands an Audience.

The BRI also provides the PRC with the perfect diversion to draw the United States attention away from PRC activities within Latin America and the Caribbean, the third component for any successful deception operation. A recent study from the William and Mary College shows that PRC BRI-like projects began decades before the official announcement by President Xi in 2013 and continued with no observable changes afterward.²⁰ The author of the study concluded that “there may be some truth to the claim that the BRI is nothing more than a branding strategy.” It is highly likely the 2013 BRI announcement by President Xi was part of a disinformation campaign to manipulate United States analysts’ and policy makers’ attention away from PRC priority areas. The release of BRI land corridor and maritime routes as part of the announcement diverted attention toward Eastern Europe and Asia and away from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.²¹

Taiwan as a Diversion. Another element the PRC is certainly attempting to exploit is the bipartisan determination within the United States to ensure Taiwan remain a free democratic island. PLA activities and comments from President Xi have led senior United States military leaders to believe a military invasion of Taiwan was approaching despite the PLA not yet having the capability.²² Aware of the effects of its activities on the minds of senior United States officials, the PLA will likely continue to incrementally heighten the level of activity around Taiwan in the next 5 to 10 years. This will prey on the anxieties of the United States and fix their attention on Taiwan while the PRC continues to use the BRI and its rebranded offspring, such as the Global Development Initiatives, to advance Chinese objectives in the Caribbean and along its three SLOCs.

Conclusion

The PRC plan to deceive heaven to cross the sea will be complete once conditions in the Caribbean and along the three SLOCs are set. The PRC will then execute its plan to besiege Wei to rescue Zhao. PRC planners are doubtlessly aware that 75 percent of global power transitions within the last 500 years resulted in wars, including World War I and World War II.²³ It would be negligent on the PRC’s part to not have



A representation of potential secure lines of communications from China to the Caribbean. (MIPB graphic)

a plan in place to mitigate risks against such an undesirable but highly probable outcome. Therefore, the plan laid out in this article is presumably the PRC’s decisive operation with other plans for aspects of its national power as supporting operations. This will not only ensure a peaceful reunification with Taiwan but will ensure the PRC a peaceful transition to the world’s dominant power, which, if China has its way, will occur no later than 2049. 🌟

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