MAO'S CHINA AND
THE COLD WAR

CHEN JIAN

The University of North Carolina Press
Chapel Hill & London
CHAPTER 7
BEIJING AND THE TAIWAN STRAIT
CRISIS OF 1958

We must not fear the ghost. The more we fear the ghost, the more it will prevent a deadly threat to us, and then it will invade our house and swallow us. Since we do not fear the ghost, we decide to shell Jinnan.
—Mao Zedong (1958)

Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense international situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction.
—Mao Zedong (1958)

At 5:30 P.M. on 23 August 1958, the People’s Liberation Army units in Fujian province suddenly began an intensive artillery barrage of the GMD-controlled Jinnan islands. In the first minute, some 2,600 rounds were fired. When the shelling ended around 6:55 P.M., the PLA shore batteries had poured more than 30,000 shells on Jinnan. About 600 GMD officers and soldiers were reportedly killed, among whom were three deputy commanders of the GMD’s Jinnan garrison.

In the ensuing six weeks, the PLA’s artillery bombardment continued, and several hundred thousand artillery shells exploded on the Jinnan islands and in the waters around them. By early September, a massive PLA invasion of Jinnan and other GMD-controlled offshore islands seemed imminent. In response to the rapidly escalating crisis in the Taiwan Strait, the Eisenhower administration reinforced the strength of the Seventh Fleet in East Asia and ordered U.S. naval vessels to help the GMD protect Jinnan’s supply lines. The leaders of the Soviet Union were also alarmed. Fearing that Beijing’s provocation might get out of control and cause a general confrontation involving the use of nuclear weapons between the Communist and capitalist blocs, they sent Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to Beijing early in September to inquire about Chinese
leaders' intentions. Early in October, however, the situation changed abruptly. On 6 October, Beijing issued a "Message to the Patriotics in Taiwan" in the name of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, calling for a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue so that all Chinese might unite in opposition to the "American plot" to divide China permanently. From that day on, the PLA dramatically relaxed its siege of Jinnan. Consequently, the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis ended without provoking a major confrontation between the Communist and capitalist camps.

Why and how did Beijing's leaders decide to shell Jinnan in August 1958? How did Beijing's leaders—and Mao Zedong in particular—manage the crisis? What factors caused Beijing's leaders to end the crisis as abruptly as they initiated it? With the support of insights gained from Chinese sources recently made available, this chapter will first review the evolution of Beijing's Taiwan policy from 1949 to 1958; it will then discuss the domestic and international situations facing Beijing prior to the crisis, emphasizing the impact of the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing in China in 1958; it will examine how Beijing's leaders handled the crisis, and how and why Beijing's perceptions and policies changed during the course of the crisis; and it will conclude with some general discussion about what we may learn from the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958.

**Beijing's Taiwan Policy, 1949-1958**

Since 1949, when the Nationalist regime was defeated by the CCP in the civil war and fled to Taiwan, the CCP and the GMD had been engaged in a continuous confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, making this area one of the main "hot spots" of the Cold War. The development of Beijing's Taiwan policy from 1949 to 1958 can be divided into four distinctive phases.

**The First Phase: Preparing to "Liberate Taiwan," Fall 1949-Summer 1950**

During this period, when the PLA was clearing the GMD remnants on the Chinese mainland, the CCP leadership actively prepared for conducting a major amphibious campaign to "liberate Taiwan," so that mainland China and Taiwan could be united under a new Chinese Communist regime.

The CCP leadership began planning for an attack on Taiwan in mid-June 1949. On 24 June, Mao Zedong sent a telegram to PLA commanders in East China, urging them to "pay attention to seizing Taiwan immediately." A week later, Mao dispatched another telegram to top PLA commanders in coastal provinces, again stressing the utmost importance of quickly settling the Taiwan issue and ordering them to "complete all preparations during summer and
During the three years of China’s intervention in Korea, Beijing maintained a defensive posture in relation to the GMD across the Taiwan Strait. While the PLA made no effort to attack the GMD-controlled offshore islands, the Nationalists occasionally invaded the Community-controlled coastal areas. In the meantime, the GMD leader Jiang Jieshi conducted a series of reforms in Taiwan, including a comprehensive land reform program, thus effectively enhancing the GMD regime’s foundation there. Consequently, the CCP-GMD confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, as well as the extension of the Chinese civil war, was prolonged.

The Second Phase: Korea, Not Taiwan, Became the Focus, June 1950–July 1951

The outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, as well as President Harry Truman’s subsequent announcement that the Seventh Fleet would enter the Taiwan Strait to neutralize this area, completely changed the strategic scenario in East Asia. Around the same time, the GMD’s secret services successfully unearthed a deep-rooted CCP underground spy network in Taiwan, shattering Beijing’s hope for collaboration with elements within the GMD during a Taiwan campaign. These two events combined to force Beijing’s leaders to postpone further the plan to attack Taiwan, and Beijing’s Taiwan policy entered the second phase.

On 30 June, five days after the eruption of the war in Korea, Zhou Enlai ordered Xuefeng, the Chinese navy commander, to postpone preparations for invading Taiwan. In mid-July, PLA commanders in East China received additional orders from Beijing to postpone the Taiwan campaign, so that China’s military emphasis would be placed on “assisting America and assisting Korea.” On 21 August, the CMC followed General Chen Yi’s suggestion to delay the Taiwan campaign until 1952 and postpone the attack on Jiang Jieshi until after April 1951. After Chinese troops entered the Korean War in October 1950, the CCP leadership formally called off the plan to invade Taiwan.
The PLA's decision to shell Jinmen must also be understood in the context of Mao's aspiration for creating new momentum for his continuous revolution. The end of the Korean War allowed Mao and his comrades to devote China's resources to the "socialist revolution and reconstruction" at home. From the chairman's perspective, 1954-55 represented a crucial transitional period for the CCP to build the foundation for a socialist society in China. In search of means to mobilize the party and the ordinary Chinese citizens for this new stage of the Chinese revolution, Mao, informed by his Korean War experience, again sensed the need to emphasize the existence of outside threats (be it from Japan's GMD or from the United States). In justifying Beijing's new Taiwan strategy, Mao and the CCP leadership stressed in an internal correspondence: "The introduction of the task [the liberation of Taiwan] is not just for the purpose of undermining the American-Jiang plan to sign a military treaty; rather, and more important, by highlighting the task we mean to raise the political consciousness and political alertness of the people of the whole country; we mean to stir up our people's revolutionary enthusiasm, thus promoting our nation's socialist reconstruction." 14

This emphasis upon using the Taiwan issue to promote domestic mobilization, however, contradicted from the beginning the "peaceful coexistence" foreign policy line Zhou Enlai was endeavoring to promote around the same period. It also caused great confusion in terms of Beijing's goals for the new strategy (that is, deterring American interference in China's internal affairs and driving a wedge between Taipei and Washington). When the PLA's shore batteries fiercely bombarded Jinmen on 3 and 23 September, especially after the PLA increased pressure on the GMD-controlled Dachen and Tiaojianshan islands off Zhejiang, Washington and Taipei accelerated negotiations toward signing a defense treaty. 15 On 2 December 1954, the treaty was formally signed, with Washington officially committing to using military force to defend Taiwan in the case of a Communist invasion. 16 The treaty, though, did not include explicit U.S. commitment to defending the GMD-controlled offshore islands. When the PLA finally conducted a full-scale landing operation in Dachen and Tiaojianshan in January 1955, Washington, except for helping GMD troops to withdraw from these islands, did not intervene. 17 When the PLA occupied all GMD-controlled islands off Zhejiang province in February 1955.
and, two months later, Zhou Enlai announced in Bandong, Indonesia, that Beijing was willing to negotiate with Washington to "reduce the tension in the Far East," the first Taiwan Strait crisis ended.18

The Fourth Phase: The Peace Initiative, Mid-1955–1957

The consequences of the 1954–55 Taiwan Strait crisis presented to Beijing's leaders a paradoxical challenge. On the one hand, the crisis caused the international community to pay attention to the Taiwan issue (although not exactly in the way Beijing's leaders had wanted), and the PLA's liberation of offshore islands in Zhejiang significantly improved the ROC's coastal security north of Fujian province. Therefore, Mao and his comrades felt justified in telling the Chinese people that Beijing's handling of the crisis was a great success.19 On the other hand, the American-Taiwan defense treaty made it more difficult for the PLA to "liberate Taiwan" and, as a result, the separation between the mainland and Taiwan became further formalized. In order to deal with this challenge, the CCP leadership began to reexamine its Taiwan policy in 1955, which resulted in a shift toward a possible peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue through negotiations with the GMD.

Zhou Enlai was one of the main architects of the new peace initiative, and at this moment Mao supported him.20 In July 1955, Zhou stated at the Second Session of the People's Congress that "there are two ways for the Chinese people to liberate Taiwan, one military way and one peaceful way. If possible, the Chinese people are willing to liberate Taiwan through the peaceful way."21 On 30 January 1956, Zhou announced the CCP's new policy toward Jiang Jieshi and the GMD at a plenary session of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference. While reiterating that the CCP was prepared to use military means to liberate Taiwan whenever necessary, the Chinese premier also made it clear that Beijing was now willing to consider "solving the Taiwan issue" in peaceful ways. He also welcomed GMD members living in Taiwan to come back to visit the mainland, claiming that "anyone who is willing to contribute to the unification of the motherland" would be pardoned for "whatever wrongdoing" they might have committed in the past.22 After a series of probes, Zhou Enlai announced publicly on 28 June 1956 that Beijing was "willing to discuss with the Taiwan authorities about the concrete steps toward, as well as conditions for, a peaceful liberation of Taiwan." He invited the Taiwanese authorities to "dispatch representatives to Beijing, or to another proper location, to begin such discussion with us."23 This statement represented a radical departure from Beijing's ambivalent policy during the first Taiwan Strait crisis less than two years earlier.

Beijing continued to carry out its new moderate policy toward Taiwan throughout late 1956 and 1957. In addition to openly announcing the CCP's willingness to negotiate with the GMD, Beijing's leaders also explored contacting Jiang and other GMD leaders in Taipei through secret channels. One such channel was through a Hong Kong-based freelance journalist named Cao Juren, who had extensive connections with GMD leaders. In a meeting with Cao on 7 October 1956, Zhou outlined Beijing's conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue: After Taiwan's "return to the motherland," the island would continue to be governed by the GMD, and a "southern position" would be arranged for Jiang Jieshi in the central government. Zhou also emphasized that Beijing had stopped anti-Jiang propaganda in order to create an atmosphere for negotiating with the GMD.24 From 1956 to 1958, Cao frequently traveled to Beijing to serve as a messenger between top CCP and GMD leaders. On one occasion, Zhou claimed that in carrying out the moderate policy toward Taiwan, "we are sincere and patient, we can wait."25

Beijing's peace initiative toward Taiwan in 1955–57 was a natural outgrowth of the CCP's longtime tradition of pursuing a "united front" with the GMD whenever the party leadership deemed it necessary.26 When the GMD regime in Taiwan signed the treaty of mutual defense with the United States, Mao and his comrades not only realized that liberating Taiwan by military means had become next to impossible but also were aware of the urgent need to do everything possible to prevent Taiwan from being "colonized" by a hostile imperialist foreign power.27 In addition, two important international and domestic pursuits supported China's Taiwan policy. First, during this same period, Beijing was seeking to improve the ROC's international status through the introduction of the principles of nonintervention and the "banding spirit," and the peace initiative toward Taiwan became an important component of this endeavor.28 Second, in September 1956, CCP's Eighth National Congress adopted a policy that emphasized economic reconstruction rather than class struggle in following China's path toward a socialist society, and the Taiwan initiative was compatible with this policy.29 Not surprising at all, with dramatic changes in these two pursuits in 1958, Beijing would return to a highly militant policy toward Taiwan, resulting in the second Taiwan Strait crisis.

1958: The Year of Mao's Revolutionary Outburst

Beijing's return to a more militant strategy toward Taiwan began around late 1957 and early 1958. On 28 December 1957, Mao Zedong instructed Peng Dehuai, China's defense minister, to "consider the question of moving our air force into Fujian in 1958."30 In mid-January, the headquarters of Fujian Military Region formulated plans for PLA air units to enter Fujian by early summer.
Mao's revolutionary outburst began early in 1978, with the Chinese chairman using every opportunity to argue that the "revolutionary enthusiasm" of the masses was required to push China's "socialist revolution and reconstruction" to a higher level. In the chairman's vision, the successful completion of the "socialist transformation" of China's industry, commerce, and agriculture in 1956 had already prepared conditions for Chinese society to enter a new stage in the Marxist order of socioeconomic development. By turning the Hundred Flowers Campaign into an Anti-Rightist movement in 1957, the chairman clearly revealed his determination to create a new wave of mass mobilization by manipulating China's "public opinion." At a series of conferences attended by top party leaders early in 1958, Mao vigorously criticized the mistakes of "opposing rash advance" committed by Zhou Enlai and others in 1956-57. In the meantime, he repeatedly outlined the blueprint for building a Communist society in China, calling upon the whole party and the whole country to "do away with all fetishes and superstitions, and [to] defy laws both human and divine." Consequently, in summer 1958, Mao and the ccp leadership, formally announcing that "the realization of a Communist society in China is not far away," unleashed the Great Leap Forward throughout China's cities and countryside.

While China's political landscape was being rapidly transformed by this Marxist revolutionary discourse, Beijing's security concerns and foreign policies were also undergoing profound changes. In March, yielding to Mao's insistence, Zhou Enlai criticized his handling of Chinese foreign policy in the 1954-58 period at the Chengdu conference. The premier admitted that in dealing with nations from countries he had put too much emphasis on unity with them to the extent of neglecting the "necessary struggle" against the reactionary elements in these countries, and that he should have taken a more aggressive approach to struggle against capitalist/imperialist countries like Japan and the United States. Zhou then resigned from his post as China's foreign minister. When Marshal Chen Yi took over the foreign Ministry, his first move was to follow Mao's instructions to convene a series of rectification meetings at the ministry aimed at "clearing up" the "rightist tendency" among members of the Chinese diplomatic service.

Against this background, in the spring and summer of 1958, Beijing initiated a series of diplomatic "offensives." As discussed in Chapter 1, when the Soviet leaders proposed to form a joint submarine flotilla with China and to establish a long-wave radio station on Chinese territory, Mao immediately characterized these proposals as indications of Moscow's "big-power chauvinism," throwing the leaders in the Kremlin on the defensive. Early in May, after

172 BEIJING AND THE TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS

1958. On 31 January 1958, Peng reported at a cc Politburo meeting that a main railway line leading to Xiamen had been completed (which was key to the PLA's large-scale military operations aimed at Jiaomen), that numerous PLA artillery units had been deployed in Fujian, and that the PLA air force would finish all preparations for occupying the newly constructed airfields in Fujian in July or August. Early in March, Mao approved Peng's plans. In April, the headquarters of the Fujian Military Region followed the cc's instruction to work out a detailed contingency plan to shell Jiaomen and formally submitted it to Beijing for approval on 27 April. Behind these changes was Mao himself. When top ccp leaders met in Chengdu in March, Mao announced that he had not been personally involved in military decision making since the Korean War and that "this year I will come back to do some military [commanding] work." All of these developments, as it soon turned out, would become the prelude to Mao's decision to shell Jiamen in summer 1958.

Why did Beijing hasten its policy toward Taiwan in 1958? In exploring the causes, some scholars have referred to ccp leaders' frustration with Taiwan's lack of positive response to their peace initiative in the previous two years. The more militant policy, these scholars argue, was designed to pressure the cc to take the ccp's peace initiative more seriously. Other scholars have focused their attention on Beijing's deepening confrontation with Washington. They point out that by late 1957 and early 1958, while the Chinese-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw (which began in 1951) had hit a deadlock, Beijing's leaders became alarmed by Washington's increasingly complicated military involvement in Taiwan following the signing of the U.S.-Taiwan mutual defense treaty. Consequently, Mao and his comradess found it necessary to "do something substantial" to probe Washington's real intention toward Taiwan, as well as to determine to what extent Washington was willing to commit to Taiwan's defense.

These interpretations make good sense as far as they go. But they do not take into consideration the profound connections between Beijing's changing policy toward Taiwan and the broader domestic and international environment in which Beijing's leaders formulated the policy. In order to understand the dynamics underlying Beijing's decision to shell Jiamen in summer 1958, the decision must be placed into the context of the emerging Great Leap Forward, one of the most important episodes in the development of Mao's continuous revolution. Indeed, as revealed by recently released Chinese evidence, the ccp leadership's handling of the Taiwan issue in 1958 was from the beginning shaped by the revolutionary zeal prevailing in Chinese political and social life during this unique moment in China's modern history.
two right-wing Japanese youth destroyed the PRC's flag at a Chinese exhibition in Nagasaki, Beijing's leaders quickly characterized this incident as a "serious imperialist plot" designed to attack the dignity and reputation of the People's Republic. In protest, Beijing decided to cancel all of China's trade and cultural exchanges with Japan, which led to further erosion of Beijing's already highly strained relations with Tokyo. It was within the context of these "offensives" that Mao made the decision to shell Jinnan.

What should be observed is the rapid radicalization of China's domestic and foreign policies reflected Mao's unique perception of the serious threats facing the People's Republic. Ironically, although Mao had repeatedly announced since late 1957 that "the East Wind has overwhelmed the West Wind" and that "while the enemy is becoming weaker everyday, we are getting stronger all the time," his sense of insecurity seems to have increased dramatically. On several occasions, the chairman fretted: "It is destined that our socialist revolution and reconstruction will not be smooth sailing. We should be prepared to deal with many serious threats facing us both internationally and domestically. As far as the international and domestic situations are concerned, although it is certain both are good in a general sense, it is also certain that many serious challenges are waiting for us. We must be prepared to deal with them." 33

It is apparent that Mao's concerns for China's security were not limited to the country's physical safety but were broader and more complicated. In order to fully comprehend the implications of Maoist rhetoric concerning China's security status, we must understand Mao's profound postrevolution anxiety. According to Mao, the final goal of his revolution was the transformation of China's old state and society and the retention of China's central position in world affairs. For Mao, the Communist seizure of power in China represented the completion of only the first step in the "Long March" of the Chinese revolution. Since the PRC's establishment, Mao repeatedly warned his comrades that if the revolution was not constantly pushed forward, it would lose its momentum. Therefore, in Mao's view, the threats to revolutionary China did not just come from without—such as from the imperialist/reactive forces hostile to the People's Republic—but also from within, especially from the chronic decline of the revolutionary vigor on the part of party cadres and ordinary party members. For the chairman, how continuously to mobilize the party and the masses thus became a central issue in dealing with the threats that revolutionary China would have to face. 34

In 1958, when Mao was leading the whole party and the whole nation to begin the Great Leap Forward, he found that the tension emerging in the Taiwan Strait provided him with much needed means to legitimize the unprecedented mass mobilization in China. Besides its disadvantageous side, a tense [international] situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction. . . . Lenin once introduced this point in his discussions about war. Lenin said that a war could motivate people's spiritual condition, making it tense. Although there is no war right now, a tense situation caused by the current military confrontation can also bring about every positive factor. 35

Mao's statement is telling because it reveals that Beijing's decision to shell Jinnan was made not only to punish the GMD's lack of interest in the CCP's peace initiative or to provoke Washington's intention in East Asia but also, and more importantly, to promote the extraordinary revolutionary outbreak in China in 1958. The shelling served as a crucial means for Mao to mobilize the Chinese people to devote their utmost support to the Great Leap Forward. In retrospect, given the revolutionary atmosphere prevailing in Chinese society in 1958, it would have been inconceivable for Mao not to make Taiwan an outstanding security issue.

The Decision to Shell Jinnan

Although Mao had actively considered "taking major military actions" in the Taiwan Strait since early 1958, 36 not until July did he decide to conduct large-scale shelling of the Jinnan islands. What triggered the decision, interestingly, was the crisis emerging in the Middle East following American and British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan.

On 14 July, a group of young nationalist officers led by Abdel Karim Kassem staged a coup in Iraq, which resulted in the establishment of a new regime friendly to the socialist bloc. In response, U.S. marines landed on Lebanon and British paratroopers landed in Jordan the next day. Beijing angrily protested the U.S.-British intervention. While millions of ordinary Chinese held protest demonstrations and rallies in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major cities, the PRC government announced that it firmly opposed Washington's and London's imperialist behavior in the Middle East and supported the newly born Republic of Iraq. 37

Beijing's protest was not confined to mere words. On 17 July, without consulting other top leaders in Beijing, Mao asked Peng Dehuai to convey the
following order to the PLA's General Staff. In response to the crisis situation in the Middle East, the air force should move into Fujian as soon as possible, the Fujian shore batteries should be prepared to shell Jinmen and blockade Jinmen's supply lines, and the General Staff should work out plans for conducting these operations immediately.7

The next evening, Mao chaired a meeting attended by Beijing's top military planners to discuss how to carry out the shelling operation.7 He told the participants that the U.S.-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan had made the Middle East the focus of an international confrontation between progressive and reactionary forces. China's aid to the Arab people, claimed the chairman, should not be restricted to moral support but must be given "through practical actions." He announced that he had decided to use the PLA's shore batteries to shell GMD troops in Jinmen and Mazu. "The first weapon," he instructed, "will include the firing of 200,000 to 200,000 shells, and will be followed by 1,000 shells every day for two to three months." The chairman said that he intended to make Ji Jieshi the main target and, at the same time, try to gauge the strength of the Americans. He also reasoned that since Jinmen and Mazu were Chinese territories, and the shelling was a matter of China's internal affairs, the Americans could not use it as an excuse to strike back.7

Late on the evening of 18 July, Peng Dehuai called a CMC meeting to work out more detailed plans to carry out Mao's order. It was decided that PLA's air force, unless hindered by bad weather, should move into the airfields in Fujian by 27 July to cover the shelling operation. In addition, more artillery units would be transferred to Fujian immediately to join the shore batteries already stationed there. The shelling would focus on Jinmen's harbor and GMD supply vessels, so that the islands' supply lines would be cut off. In making plans for the air force, Peng and his colleagues showed caution. They believed that the air force should restrict its operations to the airspace over the mainland and should never enter operations over open sea. The meeting participants also decided that the sheighting of Jinmen would begin in one week, on 25 July.7

The Chinese military machine was promptly put into motion after the meeting. At 11:00 P.M. on 18 July, the PLA General Staff relayed the CMC's order by security telephone to General Ye Fei, political commissar of the Fujian Military Region who, according to Mao's order, would assume the front command duty for the shelling operation. Ye immediately met with his staff to discuss how to implement the order. They decided to concentrate, by the evening of 24 July, thirty artillery battalions in the Xiamen area directed against Jinmen and another four artillery battalions in the Lianjiang area directed against Mazu.7 In the meantime, the air force decided that their air units would move into several Fujian and nearby eastern Guangdong airfields in two groups on 24 and 27 July, and that additional antiaircraft artillery units and radar units would be dispatched to Fujian.7 On 20 July, the naval headquarters ordered the units under its command to complete all preparations for operations in Fujian.7

In the next several days, the railways and highways leading to the Fujian coast became jammed by large numbers of PLA artillery and other supporting units being transferred to the front. Despite the difficulties created by a severe typhoon on 21 July, Ye Fei was able to report to Mao and the CMC on 23 July that thirty-three artillery battalions had taken position on the Fujian coast, that about 300,000 artillery shells had been distributed among front units, with another 100,000 shells on their way, and that all other preparations would be completed by 24 July. Ye also summarized the Fujian Military Region's operation plans: "(1) We plan to use our artillery forces to conduct abrupt and fierce shelling of the enemy in Jinmen and Mazu simultaneously. (2) In terms of the targets of our artillery strike in Jinmen, we will concentrate on attacking the enemy's docks, artillery grounds, and important warehouses. (3) We will then be prepared to enter operations in the air and, at the same time, will use our shore batteries to blockade the enemy's ports and airfields, striking continuously the enemy's artillery forces and other reinforcements."7 Although no landing operation was mentioned in these well-calculated plans, it is logical to conclude that the PLA would try to take over Jinmen and Mazu after significantly weakening the enemy's defense capacity and cutting off its supply lines. As PLA units nearly completed their preparations on the Fujian front, top CCP leaders in Beijing postponed the deadline for the shelling operation twice. On 24 July, after learning that Taipei had dispatched two more divisions to Jinmen as reinforcements, Peng Dehuai proposed to Mao to change the deadline from 25 to 27 July, and Mao approved.7 On the morning of 27 July, when Ye Fei and his staff were waiting for the final order from Beijing to commence the shelling, Mao decided to postpone the operation again. In a letter to Peng Dehuai and Huang Kecheng (a copy of which was simultaneously cabled to Ye Fei), the chairman stated:

I could not sleep and have thought about the question again. It seems more appropriate to hold the shelling on Jinmen for several more days. While holding our operations, we will observe the development of the situation. . . . We will wait until the other side launches a provocative attack and then
respond with our counterattack. The solution of the problem in the Middle East will take time. Since we have time, why should we be in a big hurry? We will hold our attack plan for the moment, but one day we will implement it. If the other side invades Zhangzhou, Shantou, Fuzhou, and Hangzhou, that is the best scenario. . . . It is extremely beneficial to have politics in a commanding position and to make a decision only after repeated deliberations. . . . Even if the other side attacks us, we still can wait for a few days to make clear calculations and then start our counter-attack. . . . We must persist in the principle of fighting no battle we are not sure of winning.93

Why did Mao decide to put the shelling of Jinmen on hold at the last minute? One possible explanation was that the chairman was not certain if the PLA artillery units on the Fujian front had indeed reached full readiness, and that he knew that his air force would need more time to occupy the airfields in Fujian.94 As a longtime advocate of "never fighting a battle without being fully prepared," the chairman must have felt it necessary to give the PLA more time to complete all preparations. The chairman also must have realized that the shelling would inevitably escalate the tension between China and the United States, and although he repeatedly claimed that he would never be scared by the American "paper tiger," he would like to calculate possible American reactions more carefully.95 Furthermore, given the emphasis he had placed upon the political impact of the shelling, it is possible that Mao hoped that the PLA's military concentration in the coastal area might trigger a GMD preemptive military attack on the mainland (most likely by air bombardment), which would provide additional justification for the PLA to shell Jinmen and thus greatly enhance the shelling's mobilization effect upon ordinary Chinese people.

In addition, Mao may have decided to postpone the shelling because Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was scheduled to visit Beijing in a few days to deal with a potential crisis recently emerging between Beijing and Moscow. In summer 1958 Moscow proposed to Beijing to establish a joint Soviet-Chinese submarine flotilla and a jointly owned long-wave radio station on the Chinese coast, which Beijing opposed immediately. On 22 July 1958, five days before Mao decided to postpone the shelling of Jinmen, he had a highly emotional talk with Pavel Yudin, Soviet ambassador to China, during which he criticized Moscow's proposals as evidence of Soviet leaders' "big-power chauvinism," as well as their desire to control China.96 Khrushchev, after receiving Yudin's report, quickly decided to travel to Beijing to meet Mao. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how this turn of events might have influenced Mao's consideration of the Taiwan issue, one thing is certain: the Chinese chairman did not want to let the Soviet leader have any impact on his decision making on Taiwan. When Khrushchev was in Beijing from 31 July to 3 August, he had four substantial meetings with Mao and other Chinese leaders, but Mao never informed Khrushchev that the PLA was planning to shell Jinmen.97 From the beginning, for Mao, the shelling was a challenge not just to Taipei and Washington but to Moscow's domination of the international Communist movement as well.

Militarily speaking, Mao's decision to postpone the shelling did give the PLA more time to complete pre-operation preparations. From 27 July to 13 August, several PLA air regiments successfully moved into airfields in Fujian and eastern Guangdong, thus establishing effective air coverage for the artillery and ground units that had taken position in Fujian.98 In the meantime, PLA field commanders in Fujian gained more time to establish better communications and logistical support for their troops.99 From Mao's perspective, though, prolonging the preparations gave him more opportunity to contemplate the shelling's possible consequences, especially Washington's likely reaction. Indeed, as we shall see, to avoid a direct confrontation with the Americans became a main concern for Mao when he made the final decision to shell Jinmen.

Mao's decision to postpone the shelling operation, however, also confused some of his own commanders. By mid-August, since they had not received further orders from Mao, top PLA commanders began to believe that the chairman meant to call off the shelling operation or postpone it indefinitely. On 13 August, Peng Dehuai instructed the Operation Department under the General Staff that if the Chinese/Mao side did not initiate any military activity in the next few days, the shelling operation in Fujian should be called off and the PLA units "there should return to 'normal status.'" On 19 August, the General Staff formally notified the Fujian Military Region that the "combat readiness" status on the Fujian front had been lifted.100

At this point, though, Mao was mentally ready to execute the shelling plan. Beginning on 27 August, the CCP leadership convened an enlarged politburo conference at Beidaihe, a summer sea resort for top CCP leaders, to discuss how to propel the Great Leap Forward into its most radical phase: the commodization of China's rural population and the militarization of the entire Chinese workforce (that is, the commencement of the nationwide "everyone a soldier" campaign). Although the Jinmen issue originally was not on the meeting's agenda on the first day of the conference, Mao suddenly announced that he had decided to shell Jinmen.101 Mao then offered one of the most outspoken statements he had given during the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis to justify
his decision, emphasizing that, as far as its mobilization effect is concerned, the situation was not a bad thing at all.

In our propaganda, we say that we oppose tension and strive for détente, as if détente is to our advantage [and] tension is to their [the West's] advantage. But can we or can't we look at [the situation] the other way around: is tension to our comparative advantage [and] to the West's disadvantage? Tension is to the West's advantage only in that they can increase military production, and it is to our disadvantage in that it will mobilize all our positive forces. . . . Tension can [help] gain membership for Communist parties in different countries. It can [help] us increase steel as well as grain production. . . . To have an enemy in front of us, to have tension, is to our advantage.90

No statement could be more revealing about Mao's intentions. Following this singular logic, Mao acted to create an enemy. Early on the morning of 18 August, he personally wrote a letter to Peng Dehuai, telling the defense minister to "prepare to shelter Jiaotun now, dealing with Jiang [Jiexi] directly and the Americans indirectly." The chairman also asked Peng to "call the air force headquarters' attention to the possibility that the 'Tawen side might counterattack us by dispatching large numbers of aircraft (dozens, or even one hundred planes) to try to back air control over Jiaotun and Mazu." "If this happens," he instructed Peng, "we should prepare to use large numbers of our air units to defeat them immediately." Demonstrating his willingness to maintain a balance between strategic aggressiveness and tactical caution, the chairman also advised the defense minister that "in chasing them, our planes should not cross the space over Jiaotun and Mazu." After being put on hold for more than three weeks, the shelling operation was again activated.

Two days later, Mao further defined the operation's scope and objective. He reduced the operation's size from what he had planned one month before, deciding that intensive shelling would be conducted only toward the Jima men islands, but not Mazu. He also made it clear that the shelling's main goal was to isolate the 600 troops on Jima, cutting them off from supplies. He also clarified that he intended to take over Jima, although not necessarily through a landing operation. "After a period of shelling," the chairman pointed out, "the other side might withdraw its troops from Jima and Mazu, or might continue to struggle in spite of huge difficulties. Then, whether or not we will conduct landing operations will be determined by the specific situation at that time. We should take one step and watch to see the next step."92

Mao's main concern was how the United States would respond to the shelling. In a general sense, Mao did not believe that Washington would intervene militarily for the sake of Jima and other Western-controlled offshore islands; nor did he anticipate that the shelling on Jima would result in a general war between China and the United States.91 But as an experienced military strategist, he had been accustomed to "striving for the best while preparing for the worst," and he thus needed to have contingency plans in hand. Consequently, before he gave his orders, Mao talked to his field commanders in person. Late on 20 August, the General Staff telephoned Ye Ye, who had been waiting for Mao's final order since late July, instructing him to fly immediately to Beidaihe to meet with Mao.94 Ye arrived at Mao's quarters on the afternoon of 21 August, and the meeting was also attended by Marshal Nie Fengzhi and Lin Biao. After Ye reported to Mao in detail the situation on the Fujian front, the chairman abruptly asked: "You use so many cannons in the shelling, is it possible that some Americans would be killed?" Ye, knowing that there were American advisers in Jima, replied that it was possible. Mao also asked: "Is it possible that you might avoid hitting the Americans?" Ye said that it was impossible. Mao did not ask another question, before peremptorily adjourning the meeting. The next day Mao again summoned Ye to his quarters and told him that even though the shelling might result in the deaths of Americans, it should go on. And in order to assure that the central leadership, and Mao in particular, would directly control the shelling, the chairman ordered Ye to stay in Beidaihe to command the operations by telephone.95

The fact that Mao made the final decision in mid- and late August to begin the shelling is highly revealing. By that time, the tension in the Middle East had already been greatly reduced—since early August, Washington and London had recognized the new nationalist government in Iraq, and they both had begun to withdraw their troops from Lebanon and Jordan. As a result, Mao's main original reason to shell Jima—"to support the people in the Middle East"—was no longer a valid justification for the decision. The logical inconsistency, as will be discussed below, can only be that he was driven by domestic political considerations.

On the morning of 23 August, all PLA units in Fujian entered a "first-class alert of operation readiness." At the PLA's frontline headquarters in Xiamen, General Zhang Yishuang, the vice commander of the Fujian Military Region who had been assigned the frontal commanding duty during Ye Ye's absence, maintained constant telephone communication with Ye in Beidaihe. After almost a whole day's waiting, at around 5:20 p.m., Zhang received the order from Mao via Ye that the shelling should start at 5:31 p.m. Ten minutes later, a large-scale barrage of the Jimaen islands began.96
The Shelling and the Crisis

The PLA’s intensive bombardment of Jinmen on 23 August touched off a major international crisis. Although the Eisenhower administration was not caught entirely off guard by the shelling since for weeks American officials had observed Beijing’s massive military buildup in Fujian and had been monitoring various contingency plans, policymakers in Washington were not certain about Beijing’s intentions.616 Fearing that the shelling could be a prelude to a major invasion of the gmd-controlled offshore islands or even Taiwan itself, President Eisenhower ordered U.S. forces in East Asia to enter “readiness alert” for war operations. To enhance American naval strength in the Taiwan Strait, he ordered two aircraft-carrier groups (recently deployed in the Middle East during the crisis over Iraq and Lebanon) to sail to East Asia. In the meantime, Washington expedited the shipment of all kinds of military equipment and ammunition, including the deadly Sidewinder air-to-air missile, to Taiwan.618 Indeed, as historian Gordon H. Chang points out: “Within days the United States had assembled off the Chinese coast the most powerful armada the world had ever seen.”619

These developments did not come as a surprise to Mao, since one of his main purposes was to stir up international tension on his own terms. On the evening of 23 August, Mao called a Politburo Standing Committee meeting at Beidaihe and delivered a long and comprehensive speech, divulging his understanding of the international impact of the shelling. According to Wu Lengxi, who attended the meeting as director of the Xinhua News Agency and one of Mao’s political secretaries, the atmosphere was in very high spirits. He first explained why he chose 23 August for the barrage. The chairman pointed out that just three days earlier the UN Assembly had passed a resolution requesting that American and British troops withdraw from Lebanon and Jordan, a request that, in his view, made “American occupation of Taiwan look even more unjust than before,” thus making the timing perfect for beginning shelling on Jinmen. In elaborating on the purpose of the shelling operation, the chairman stressed: “Our demand is that American armed forces withdraw from Taiwan, and Jiang’s troops withdraw from Jinmen and Matsu. If they do not do so, we will attack. Taiwan is too far away to be bombed, so we shell Jinmen and Matsu. This will surely produce a shock wave in the world. Not only will the Americans be shaken but the Asians and the Europeans will be shocked, too. The people in the Arab world will be delighted, and the vast masses in Asia and Africa will take our side.”620

As he did on so many other occasions in the summer of 1958, the chairman again explained how international tension could be beneficial to China’s con-
tinuous revolution. He told Wu Lengxi that the Chinese media should continue to propagandize that China opposed the international tension created by the imperialists and was in favor of relaxing international tension. However, stressed the chairman, his real belief was that “all bad things have two sides.” While “international tension is certainly a bad thing, there is a good side to it: it will bring about the awakening of many people, and will make them determined to fight against the imperialists.”

During the course of his long talk, the chairman stated that the bombardment of Jinmen was also meant to “teach the Americans a lesson.” “The Americans have bullied us for many years,” claimed the chairman, “so now that we have a chance, why don’t we give them a hard time?” He emphasized that “the Americans started a fire in the Middle East, and we are now starting a fire in the Far East.” In his opinion, “we did not permit Americans in the wrong; they did it by themselves—they have stationed several thousand troops on Taiwan, plus two air force bases there.” Beijing should observe how the international community, and especially the Americans, respond to the shelling operation, the chairman continued, and “then we will decide on our next move.”621

Fighting continued in the Taiwan Strait area on 24 August. In addition to inflicting another day of the fierce artillery bombardment (about 10,000 rounds were fired), the PLA navy dispatched six torpedo boats to attack several gmd supply ships of the Jinmen port. It was reported that one gmd ship, Zhongbei, was severely damaged, and another one, Taiping, was sunk.622 In retaliation, the gmd used forty-eight F-86 fighters to attack the PLA air force the next afternoon, leading to a major air battle over the Fujian coast. The outcome of the battle has become a myth since each side claimed that it had won a victory.623

As the conflict in the Taiwan Strait escalated, Mao called another Politburo Standing Committee meeting on the afternoon of 25 August, specifically devoted to the discussion of Washington’s reaction and Beijing’s next move.624 Again the chairman dominated the meeting. Beginning his talk by joking that “now we are taking our summer vacation here at Beidaihe, but we have made the Americans extremely nervous,” the chairman told the participants that, according to his observations, Washington was worried that the PLA not only would land on Jinmen and Matsu but also would attack Taiwan itself. “In reality,” commented the chairman, “we have fired dozens of thousands of rounds on Jinmen, we only mean to probe the Americans’ intention. We will not say if we are, or if we are not, going to land on Jinmen. We will be doubly cautious and will act in accordance with the situation.” The chairman further clarified that he was taking such a cautious attitude not be-
cause there were 95,000 GMD troops stationed on Jinnem islands but because he needed to assess the attitude of the American government. "Washington has signed a treaty of mutual defense with Taiwan, but it does not clearly spell out whether or not the U.S. defense perimeter includes Jinnem and Mazu."

Thus, Ma'o continued, "we need to see if the Americans want to carry these islands on their backs." In the chairman's opinion, the best way to deal with the Americans at the moment was to keep them guessing. Thus Ma'o directed the Chinese media not to link U.S. actions in the Middle East directly with the PLA's bombardment of Jinnem for the moment, but rather to criticize Washington's "imperialist behavior" in broad terms, including its "occupation of China's Taiwan." "We should build up our strength and store up our energy, that is, draw the bow but not discharge the arrow," concluded the chairman.

In response to Ma'o's vague instructions, the planners at Beijing's General Staff headquarters spent the whole evening of 25 August working out what specific strategy the PLA's three services in Fujian should take in the next few days. On 26 August, Peng Dehuai, with Ma'o's approval, summarized the planners' conclusions in a telegram to Vice Commander Zhang Xianing: The artillery forces should do everything possible to isolate the Jinnem islands, cutting off communications between Big Jinnem and Small Jinnem and between the Jinnem and Taiwain, while destroying airstrips at the Jinnem airport; the navy should strengthen attacks on the GMD's small and middle-size vessels; and the air force should guard the defense of the mainland's airspace by repulsing any air attack the GMD might launch against targets on the mainland, and in no circumstance should the air force engage in fighting outside the mainland's airspace. It is apparent that Beijing's military strategy now concentrated on strangling the Jinnem islands rather than landing on them directly, with eventually seizing Jinnem, Mazu, and other GMD-controlled offshore islands as the operational objective.

In an international crisis, the big picture sometimes can be changed by a small incident. On 24 and 27 August, the PLA's Fujian frontline radio station, without Beijing's authorization, announced that "our army's landing operation is imminent" and called on the GMD to surrender and "join the great cause of liberating Taiwan." But policymakers in Washington, as well as the Western media, immediately took this provocative message as evidence that Beijing was about to launch an amphibious landing operation against Jinnem. The same day, for the first time since the crisis began, the U.S. State Department publicly announced that the GMD-controlled offshore islands such as Jinnem and Mazu were vital to the defense of Taiwan itself.

Beijing's leaders were alarmed by Washington's statement since it revealed that, with any mistake, the shelling of Jinnem could turn from a CCP-GMD conflict into a direct Chinese-American military showdown. This prospect was unacceptable to Mao. No matter how provocative the chairman had been toward the United States in internal speeches and open propaganda, what he really wanted was, to borrow a phrase from the political scientist Thomas Christensen, "a conflict free of war." After learning of the contents of the Fujian radio station's broadcast from Cankou zhuan (an internally circulated journal by the Xinhua News Agency that published translations of Western news reports on a daily basis), Mao "lost his temper." He sternly criticized this "serious mistake," reemphasizing that no one should comment on issues related to the Taiwan Strait crisis without Beijing's approval.

In the face of a greater American military threat in the Taiwan Strait, Mao needed to adjust Beijing's strategies. He wanted to continue the military pressure on GMD troops in Jinnem, but his attention increasingly turned to using other measures to contain the danger in direct American intervention. One was announcing the limits of the PRC's territorial water.

Right after the shelling of Jinnem began, Mao had instructed the Foreign Ministry and the General Staff to study how best to define the boundaries of China's territorial water. At the end of August, Mao decided that the time for a decision had come. On 1 and 2 September, Mao chaired a two-day Political Bureau Standing Committee meeting, which was also attended by several international law experts from the Foreign Ministry, to discuss the issue. Although the experts believed that the limits should be set up at three nautical miles from the coastline, Mao and other top CCP leaders, for political and strategic considerations, decided that the limits should be established at twelve miles.

On 4 September, Beijing formally established the PRC's territorial waters at twelve nautical miles and declared that no foreign military aircraft or naval vessels would be allowed to cross the boundary without Beijing's permission. In Zhou Enlai's words, this declaration was made at this particular moment to "prevent American military vessels from coming close to the Jinnem islands, which were situated well within the twelve-mile zone of China's territorial water." In the meantime, in order to observe Washington's responses, Mao ordered the PLA to stop shelling GMD targets for three days.

The "Noise Strategy"

Beijing's leaders did not have to wait long for Washington's response. The same day that Beijing announced the extent of its territorial water, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, after meeting with President Eisenhower, issued a statement on the Taiwan Strait crisis. He emphasized that "[t]he
United States is bound by treaty to help defend Taiwan (Formosa) from armed attack" and that "we have recognized that the securing and protecting of Que-mean [Jimmun] and Matsu [Mazu] has increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan." In the same statement, Dulles also indicated that Washing-ton was willing to resume the ambassadorial talks with Beijing in order to reach an agreement on "mutual and reciprocal renunciation of force" in the Taiwan Strait. Dulles's statement, along with Washington's subsequent announcement that the Seventh Fleet would begin escorting oil supply vessels to Jimmun, brought the Taiwan Strait crisis to a crucial juncture. Now Bei-jing's leaders had to face the tough reality that if the shelling on Jimmun went out of control, a direct military confrontation with the United States could follow. Within this framework, Mao introduced his "noose strategy."

When Dulles's statement reached Beijing, Mao was chairing a Politburo Standing Committee meeting to discuss the new situation in the Taiwan Strait, focusing on analyzing Washington's intentions. Mao emphasized that it seemed to him that the Americans were afraid of fighting a war, and it was unlikely that they would engage in a major war for Jimmun. Zhou Enlai pointed out that the current world situation was different from that of the Korean War period, and none of the U.S. allies—such as Britain, Japan, and the Philippines—would support American military action in the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, claimed Zhou, the U.S. government would be unwilling to use military means to end the crisis. The meeting participants concluded that although the Americans certainly would help pressure the U.S. to defend Taiwan, it was doubtful that they would help defend Jimmun and Mazu as well. Participants of the meeting believed that the shelling of Jimmun had already successfully probed Washington's intentions toward Taiwan and the offshore islands, as well as mobilized the people in the world. Regarding Beijing's future strategy, Mao pointed out that now was the time to turn Jimmun into a "noose" for Washington. He pointed out that Jimmun but putting more pressure on the Americans. When American ships entered China's newly established territorial water, the chairman asserted, they should first be warned to leave, and then, if they refused to leave, "due measures should be taken." The chairman was also prepared to return to the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, thus "employing the diplomatic means to coordinate the fighting on the Fujian front"; at the same time, he stressed, Beijing should further mobilize the people in the whole country through a big propaganda campaign centered on condemning America's "interference with China's internal affairs." On 5 and 8 September, Mao made two speeches at the Fifteenth Meeting of the Supreme State Council, in which he explained in particular what he meant by using a "noose strategy" to deal with the Americans. The chairman repeatedly stressed that international tension was more a "good thing" than a "bad thing" because it would help mobilize the people both in China and in the world. Washington feared Beijing more than Beijing feared Washing-ton, and that, in the final analysis, "the East Wind has overwhelmed the West Wind." Within this context, the chairmen claimed that Jimmun and Taiwan, like many other places in the world where the United States had military bases, were "nooses" for the United States.

At present, America has committed itself to an "all-round responsibility" policy along our coast. It seems to me that the Americans will only feel comfortable if they take complete responsibility for Jimmun and Mazu, or even for such small islands as Dadan, Erdan, and Dongding [small islands within the Jimmun archipelago]. America has fallen into our noose. Thereby, America's neck is hanging in China's iron noose. Although Taiwan is [for America] another noose, it is a bit farther from the [mainland]. America is now moving its head closer to us, since it wants to take responsibility for Jimmun and other islands. Sooner or later we will kick America, and it cannot run away, because it is tied up by our noose. Despite Mao's provocative language, his "noose strategy" did not represent any significant escalation of Beijing's belligerence toward Washington. Behind Mao's radical rhetoric and metaphoric language lurked cunning and careful calculations. He understood that the American military mobilization in the Taiwan Strait made it impossible for Beijing to "liberate Taiwan" through military means and that it would be necessary to deal with the Americans at the negotiation table. But, to prevent the negotiations from jeopardizing the mobilization effect he hoped to achieve through the shelling of Jimmun, he figured that a dramatic propaganda campaign, with a provocative concept as its central symbol, had to be introduced. In other words, the primary desig-nated audience of the "noose strategy" was not the Americans but China's ordinary people. Not surprising at all, when millions of Chinese were told that Jimmun and Mazu had become "nooses" for the Americans and were holding anti-American demonstrations and rallies throughout China, Mao was turning his attention to the diplomatic front and preparing to negotiate with the Americans.

"Dancing" with Moscow, Negotiating with Washington

On 6 September, Zhou Enlai issued a formal response to Dulles's statement of two days earlier. The Chinese premier sternly condemned Washington's
"policy of aggression" in the Taiwan Strait and "continuous intervention in China's internal affairs." He reiterated that it was within China's sovereignty for Beijing to use military means to deal with the GMD's "subversion and subversion activities." But Zhou also stated that Beijing would make a distinction between the "international dispute between China and the United States in the Taiwan Strait" and the "internal matter of the Chinese people's efforts to liberate Taiwan," and thus was willing to "sit down at the negotiation table with the Americans to discuss how to relax and eliminate the tension in the Taiwan Strait."

The timing of Zhou's statement was probably related to a secret visit to Beijing by the Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko. Since the beginning of the shelling on Jinmen, Beijing had kept Moscow in the dark about the plans for the operation and the prospect of a Sino-American clash in the Taiwan Strait alarmed the leaders in Moscow. On September 5, Khrushchev personally telephoned Beijing's leaders, informing them that he intended to dispatch Gromyko to China. The next day, Zhou Enlai met with N. G. Sudarshon, a counselor at the Soviet embassy in China. The Soviet diplomat informed Zhou that Khrushchev was planning to send a message to Eisenhower regarding the Taiwan Strait crisis, and the major goal of Gromyko's visit was to inform Beijing's leaders of the message and to "exchange opinions on this matter," Zhou, for the first time since the outbreak of the Taiwan Strait crisis, explained to the Soviets Beijing's aims in conducting the shelling. Zhou emphasized that by shelling Jinmen, Beijing meant to have the Americans "get stuck" in Taiwan, "just as they have 'gotten stuck' in the Middle East and Near East." The shelling, according to Zhou, would also cause "more acute contradictions" between Jiang Jieshi and Dulles, as well as "prove to the Americans that the People's Republic of China is strong and bold enough and is not afraid of America." The shelling's domestic aim, Zhou continued, was "to raise the combat spirit of our people and their readiness for war, to enhance their feeling of not being afraid of war and their hatred toward American imperialism and its aggressive, insolent foreign policy." Zhou stated that the shelling of Jinmen and Matsu would not be followed by a landing operation on the GMD-controlled offshore islands, let alone on Taiwan. In particular, Zhou promised that Beijing would take full responsibility for its own behavior and would not "drag the Soviet Union into the water" if "big trouble" resulted from the shelling.

Gromyko arrived in Beijing on the morning of 6 September and met with Zhou Enlai at 2 p.m. the same day. At the beginning of the meeting, Zhou gave Gromyko a copy of the statement he had issued that day, and the Soviet foreign minister presented to Zhou a draft letter Khrushchev was preparing to send to Eisenhower. With Gromyko's prodding, Zhou again explained Beijing's aims and plans regarding Taiwan, basically repeating what he had told Sudarshon the day before. Gromyko stated that "the CC CPSU is in full support of the stand and measures taken by the Chinese comrades." He also mentioned that Zhou's statement and Khrushchev's letter to Eisenhower represented "two important actions that are highly compatible and mutually supplementary on the diplomatic front." At 6:30 p.m. Gromyko met with Mao. He again expressed Moscow's support for the "stand, policies, and measures" Beijing had taken during the Taiwan Strait crisis. In addition, he emphasized that Khrushchev's letter to Eisenhower would send a "serious warning" to the Americans, which should make the Americans "take a cold bath." Mao found that "ninety percent" of Khrushchev's message to Eisenhower was "correct" and only "a few points may need to be further discussed." With Beijing's consent, Khrushchev sent the letter to Eisenhower on September 7, warning Washington that an attack on China "is an attack on the Soviet Union" and that Moscow would "do everything" to defend both countries.

Behind this open demonstration of solidarity between Beijing and Moscow, the Sino-Soviet schism that had emerged after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization widened. According to Soviet documentary records and Gromyko's recollections, how to deal with Washington's nuclear threat was an important topic the Soviet foreign minister discussed with both Zhou and Mao. Zhou told Gromyko: "Inflicting blows on the offshore islands, the PRC has taken into consideration the possibility of the outbreak in this region of a local war between the United States and the PRC, and it is now ready to take all the hard blows, including atomic bombs and the destruction of its cities." The Chinese premier advised the Soviet foreign minister that the Soviet Union should not take part in the Sino-American war "even if the Americans use tactical nuclear weapons." Only if Washington resorted to using "larger nuclear weapons" and risked broadening the war "should the Soviet Union respond with a nuclear counter-strike." In his memoirs, Gromyko recorded a similar conversation with Mao. The Chinese chairman, according to Gromyko, stated that if the Americans were to invade the Chinese mainland or to use nuclear weapons, the Chinese forces would retreat, drawing American ground forces into China's interior. The chairman proposed that during the initial stage of the war, the Soviets should do nothing but watch. Only after the American forces had entered China's interior should Moscow use "all means at its disposal" (which Gromyko understood as Soviet nuclear weapons) to destroy them.
Although China's official account of the conversation angrily rebuked Ge-
myyo's story after it was first published in 1988, claiming it to be a "serious dis-
tortion of the historical truth," I believe that both Mao and Zhou had made
these statements concerning the danger of a nuclear war since both remarks
were consistent with Mao's own philosophy and view on this issue. Since the
mid-1910s, Mao had repeatedly expressed his unique views on the destructive
effects of nuclear weapons, claiming that "even if the American atom bombs
were so powerful that, when all dropped on China, they would make a hole
gn right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything
to the universe as a whole, although it might be a major event for the solar sys-
tem." For Mao, the discussion concerned not a strategic matter but rather
a philosophical issue. With a profound belief that "history is on our side,"
Mao, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, often adopted a very special definition
of space and time in discussions of important policy and strategic issues,
referring to the universe (or "all under the heaven"—Tianzun in Chinese)
and "ten thousand years" as the basic scale in measuring the grand mission of
his revolution. Within this context, Mao would often describe nuclear weapons
as nothing but a "paper tiger." Mao's unconventional attitude toward nuclear
weapons had already scared many of his Communist comrades in other parts
of the world (especially at the summit of Communist leaders in Moscow in
November 1957): this time, he alarmed his comrades from Moscow.

Despite Mao's belligerent rhetoric, Beijing acted cautiously toward Ameri-
can participation in the PLA's supply convoys to Jenmen. During the early days
of the shelling, Beijing issued a strict order to PLA units on the Fujian front
that they should not take any action toward the Americans without Beijing's
authorization. On 7 September—when, for the first time since the outbreak
of the crisis, American ships were involved in escorting GMD supply vessels
to Jenmen—the PLA Ministry issued a "serious warning" to Wash-
ington, but the PLA's shore batteries maintained complete silence. Actually,
Beijing's leaders were carefully considering how to respond to this new de-
velopment, taking into account all possible contingencies. They finally reached
a decision close to midnight and sent the following order to the Fujian Frontal
Headquarters:

1. Our artillery units on the Xiamen front should conduct another punitive
barage on the important GMD military targets at Jenmen. The strike should
be both accurate and fierce. The scale of the barrage should be larger than
that of 21 August with a plan to fire about 50,000 rounds.

2. Concerning American military ships' action of escorting Jiang's vessels
and invading our territorial water, the spokesman of our Foreign Ministry
has already issued a warning. If the American ships come again, we will issue
another warning. After these two warnings, if the American ships continue
to invade our territorial water to escort Jiang's ships, we will concentrate
the strength of our artillery force and navy to bombard Jiang's vessels stationed
in the Liuolowan beach (of the Big Jumon). However, no strike should be
aimed at American ships.

The order puzzled the PLA's front commanders since they could not figure
out how their units, in a long-distance artillery bombardment of the mixed
American-GMD convoy, might manage to hit only GMD vessels. Ye Fei, who had
returned from Beidu to resume the command post in Fujian late in August,
personally called Mao seeking clarification. When he asked if he should order
the firing in the event that American and GMD ships were mixed together, Mao
said, "Yes." He then asked if he could strike both American and GMD ships.
Mao replied, "No, only strike the GMD but not the Americans." He also asked
if he could retaliate if the Americans opened fire first. Again, Mao said, "No." The
chairman also instructed Ye to report the position, composition, and di-
rection of the mixed GMD-American convoy at least once every hour and not
to open fire until he received the final order from Beijing. When another
jett GMD-American convoy approached Jenmen the next day, Ye strictly fol-
lowed Mao's orders. When he ordered firing, to his surprise, he found he only
needed to deal with the GMD because all American ships were staying at least
three miles offshore to avoid exchanges with the PLA's shore batteries.

Mao's insistence that the PLA avoid hitting American ships reflected not
only his caution in dealing with Washington in a military situation but also the
emergence of a new focus in Beijing's management of the Taiwan crisis while
the seizure of Jenmen and other offshore islands remained one of Mao's key
goals, his main attention had moved from the military conflict in Jenmen to the
Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, which, after being suspended
for more than nine months, would soon resume.

The Sino-American ambassadorial talks first opened in Geneva in August
1955, serving as the only channel of communication between Beijing and
Washington. In December 1957, the meetings were suspended when the Ameri-
can negotiator, Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, was reassigned to Thailand
and the Chinese refused to accept his replacement, Edwin Martin, because he
was not an ambassador. On 30 June, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a
statement, demurring that Washington appoint an ambassadorial negotiator
in fifteen days; if Washington did not comply, Beijing would regard the talks
as being terminated by the American side,\textsuperscript{143} Washington, though missing the fifteen-day deadline to name a new negotiator, announced on 28 July that the U.S. ambassador to Poland, Jacob Beam, had been appointed as the American representative to the talks, which would be moved to Warsaw.

As soon as the shelving on Jinmen begun, Mao started formulating Beijing's strategy for the ambassadorial talks. Late in August, he recalled Ambassador Wang Bingnan, the chief Chinese negotiator at the bilateral talks. Two days after Wang arrived in Beijing, he attended a plenary meeting to brief top party leaders on the progress of the ambassadorial talks from 1955 to 1957. At this meeting and then during a private talk with Wang, Mao demonstrated a keen interest in knowing if Washington could be persuaded to force the GMD to withdraw from the offshore islands through the ambassadorial talks.\textsuperscript{144} Before Wang left for Warsaw on 4 September, he received a five-point draft proposal and a signed letter from Zhou Enlai. In addition to reiterating that Taiwan and the offshore islands were Chinese territory and that the Taiwan issue belonged to China's internal affairs, the proposal included two new points. First, in order to "remove the immediate threat," Jinmen and Matsu posed to Xiamen and Fuzhou, Beijing proposed that if "GMD troops are willing to withdraw from the islands on their own initiative, the PRC government will not pursue them." Second, after the PRC government had recovered Jinmen, Matsu, and other offshore islands, it would "soon negotiate with Taiwan and Penghu by peaceful means and [would] resolve, in a certain period, avoid using force to liberate Taiwan and Penghu."\textsuperscript{145} These two points represented a major concession on Beijing's part because, if Washington accepted them, Beijing would be obliged to give up use of force as a means to liberate Taiwan. Zhou Enlai's letter provided detailed instructions on the tactics Wang should follow:

Here are the main points of your presentation (draft). At the first meeting, if the Americans are eager to present their opinions, you may let them speak first. . . . If the Americans present their proposal first and if there are some parts in it that are worthy of consideration, you should not hurriedly present our proposal out. On the contrary, you should discuss the ridiculous parts in the American proposal and wait to give a comprehensive response to the other parts at the next meeting. If the American side does not present anything concrete and is eager to learn about our opinion, you may use the points drafted here and present the proposal we have prepared.\textsuperscript{146}

The new Chinese stand demonstrated that Mao was now willing to bring the Taiwan Strait crisis to an end through negotiating with the Americans. Mao triggered the crisis himself in the first place, so he could have ended it easily—for example, just by ordering the N. A. to lift the siege of Jinmen—if he had wanted to do so. But Mao needed the crisis to end in a way that would allow him to claim a great victory. This was particularly important for Mao since the shelving of Jinmen was central to promoting his Great Leap Forward. He also knew that profound differences in opinion existed between Taipei and Washington, so he believed it possible to "persuade" the Americans to force the GMD to withdraw from Jinmen and other offshore islands.\textsuperscript{147}

At the same time that Beijing was preparing to resume the ambassadorial talks with Washington, Zhou Enlai began to explore the possibility of reestablishing contacts with Jiang and the GMD in Taiwan. On 8 and 9 September, the premier twice met with Cao Juren, who had served as a messenger between Beijing and Taipei since 1956. Zhou asked Cao to tell the GMD leaders that they had three options in Jinmen: first, they could "live and die together with the islands"; second, they could "withdraw the whole force back to Taiwan"; and third, they could "be forced by the Americans to withdraw." Zhou commented that the third option should be the best for Jiang, since the GMD troops on the offshore islands accounted for almost one-third of Jiang's whole military strength, and "by withdrawing them lack to Taiwan, Jiang will have more capital to bargain with the Americans." Zhou also asked Cao to inquire of the GMD leaders: "If the Americans can openly negotiate with us, why cannot the CCP and the GMD also begin another round of open negotiations?"\textsuperscript{148}

Wang Bingnan returned to Warsaw on 2 September, and, in the two days, he and Beam had agreed that the ambassadorial talks would reopen on 13 September at the Swiss embassy. At that moment, however, Mao changed his mind again about how to proceed with the talks. By then the chairman had left Beijing for an inspection tour in the South. On 13 September he wrote a two-part letter to Zhou Enlai and Huang Kecheng from Wuchang. In the first part of the letter, the chairman ordered the PLA artillery units in Fujian, in addition to bombarding GMD ships "entering the Lanyuan harbor to unload supplies," to also begin "sporadic shelling (by firing 300 to 500 rounds a day)" on Jinmen's military targets, in order to make "the enemy panic and restless day and night." In the second part of the letter, the chairman dictated a new negotiation strategy at Warsaw: "As far as the Warsaw talks are concerned, in the next three to four days, or one week, we should not lay out all of our cards on the table at once but should first test [the attitudes of the Americans]." He also predicted that it was "unlikely that the other side would lay out all of their cards at once, and they will try to test us as well."\textsuperscript{149}

Mao's letter reflected his calculations at both tactical and strategic levels. In a practical sense, the chairman, himself a long-time player of all kinds of power
games, fully understood that unless his representative was able to speak from a position of strength at the negotiation table, the Americans would not easily make concessions. Therefore, the shelling of Jinmen needed to be continued in ways new and disturbing to the enemy. In a strategic sense, the last thing Mao wanted to do was to create the impression that Beijing had significantly softened its stand on Taiwan. To do so, from Mao’s perspective, would be extremely harmful to the revolutionary reputation Mao had persistently strove to create for the PRC abroad, and, especially, to the huge political mobilization effect Mao had managed to initiate through the shelling campaign at home.

Although Zhou Enlai informed Mao in a note dated 13 September that, after receiving Mao’s letter, he had instructed Wang Bingnan to “go around with the Americans to force them to lay out all of their cards first.” Wang, for whatever reason, failed to act in accordance with Mao’s new instructions. When the ambassadorial talks reopened on 15 September, Beam, the American negotiator, argued for an immediate cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait before any other issue could be discussed. Wang asked for a ten-minute recess and then presented Beijing’s five-point proposal. Beam immediately countered that the Americans could not “entertain” the proposal because it “would seem surrender of territory” belonging to an American ally. The next day, Dulles publically announced that immediate cease-fire was the first step toward resolving the Taiwan Strait crisis.

Mao flew into a rage when he received the reports about Wang’s performance. In the chairman’s view, Wang exposed what was supposed to be Beijing’s bottom line on the first day of the negotiations, thus making the Americans think that Beijing was vulnerable. The chairman commented: “Wang Bingnan is worse than a pig; even a pig knows to turn around when it hits the wall, and Wang Bingnan does not know how to turn around after he hits the wall.” He intended to fire Wang immediately. Only after Zhou Enlai “took the responsibility” for Wang’s mistakes and pointed out that firing Wang would cause more confusion did Mao decide to keep him in the Warzaw. But this episode had already completely changed Mao’s view of and, as a result, strategies toward the ambassadorial talks. Instead of regarding the talks as a chance to bring about acceptable solutions to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait, Mao now firmly believed that he had no other choice but to treat the talks as a forum to expose the “reactionary” and “aggressive” nature of America’s imperialist policy in East Asia. Following Mao’s instructions, Zhou called a series of meetings at the Foreign Ministry to consider new diplomatic alternatives. The participants concluded that Beijing “should adopt a policy line of positive offensive” toward the Americans at the forthcoming meetings.


“If the American side fails to respond to our proposal directly and continues to argue for an immediate cease-fire,” reported Zhou in a letter to Mao on 17 September, “we should immediately present another proposal, demanding that the Americans withdraw all of their armed forces from Taiwan, Penghu, and the Taiwan Strait, stop all provocative military actions in China’s territorial space and water, and cease interference in China’s internal affairs, thus relaxing the tension existing in the Taiwan Strait.” Mao probably was not totally satisfied with Zhou’s response because the next day, after having met with several other top party leaders, the premier presented a more comprehensive plan for “struggling against the United States”.

In order to counter America’s cease-fire request, we should expand our activities in all respects to demand that U.S. armed forces stop all provocations and withdraw from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait. Concrete measures are as follows: (1) Prepare a statement by the foreign minister to rebuff Dulles’s televised speech. (2) After the issuance of the statement, mobilize newspapers, various parties, and people’s organizations all over the country to echo it. (3) Convey our strategies to Soviet chargé d’affaires and Liu Xiaobo
Zhou’s new plans delighted Mao. The chairman immediately wrote to the premier, praising these plans as “very good indeed” since they “will allow us to gain the initiative.” The chairman also instructed Zhou to “take due action immediately”; in particular, he asked Zhou to convey these plans both to Wang Bingnan in Warsaw and to Ye Fei in Fujian, “making sure that they understand that the keys to our new policy and new tactics are to hold the initiative, to keep the offensive, and to remain reasonable.” The chairman commented at the end of the letter: “Sweeping down irresistibly from a commanding height, and advancing like a knife cutting through a piece of bamboo—is this what our diplomatic struggle needs to be.” With the implementation of Mao’s instructions, the possibility of ending the crisis through the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw virtually disappeared.

“Leaving Jinnan in Jiang’s Vanda”

In late September, when the crisis was entering its second month, the tension in the Taiwan Strait looked as bad as—if not worse than—it did at any point in the previous four weeks. On 22 September, when Wang and Beam met for the third time in Warsaw the Chinese ambassador was primed for a counteroffensive. He called the proposal Beam presented on 18 September, which emphasized immediate cease-fire as the first step toward relaxing tension in the Taiwan Strait, “absurd and absolutely unacceptable.” Abandoning his own offer from one week earlier, Wang presented a new three-point proposal, which established U.S. withdrawal of all its armed forces as the precondition to ease the tension in the Taiwan Strait area. The Swiss embassy was turned into a battlefield of sharp accusations and denunciations, with Wang and Beam rebutting every point the other side was making and charging the other side for causing the crisis in Taiwan and in East Asia.

At the same time that Wang was “taking the offensive” in Warsaw, Zhou Enlai was making every effort to mobilize international support. On 18 September, Zhou met with S. F. Antonov, Soviet charge d’affaires in Beijing, to brief him on recent developments in the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou told him that after the first meeting of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, Beijing firmly believed that “the central issue is that the United States should withdraw all of its armed forces from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait area, and that only after the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces will the tension in this area be eliminated.” Zhou also told Antonov that if Washington continued to request an immediate cease-fire in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing would demand the withdrawal of all U.S. forces first. In the meantime, Beijing would “mobilize the entire Chinese media to demand that the U.S. armed forces withdraw from the Taiwan Strait area,” and the PLA would “continue to concentrate on conducting punitive shelling of Jiang’s troops on Jumun and Maizi.” Zhou asked Antonov to convey these points to the Soviet government as well as to the Soviet representative to the UN. In the following days, Zhou met with Indian, Burmese, and Ceylonese ambassadors to China, as well as a government delegation from Cambodia, denouncing Washington’s “cease-fire plot” at Warsaw and asking the representatives of these “friendly countries” to prevent Dulles from “playing with the same cease-fire plot” at the UN. On 20 September, Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi issued a statement to rebut Dulles’s speech of four days earlier, claiming that “the six hundred million Chinese people are determined to unite together to resist the U.S. aggressors and to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the great socialist motherland.”

Despite the highly provocative language used in open propaganda, Beijing’s leaders did not want to escalate the military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. What Mao desired from these “offensives” was to win back the “initiative” in a diplomatic confrontation with the United States rather than to trigger a military showdown. When commanders at the Fujian Frontal Headquarters received the instruction from Beijing to “win back the initiative,” they immediately worked out a new plan to escalate military operations aimed at Jinnan so it would “coordinate with the diplomatic struggle in Warsaw.” According to the plan, in addition to continuing artillery shelling, the PLA’s air force would begin bombarding Jinnan to “increase pressure on GMD troops there,” and, then, ground shelling and air bombardment would be coordinated to pursue “bigger and more comprehensive results.” When the plan was submitted to Beijing for approval, Zhou found it inappropriate. In a letter to Mao dated 22 September, the premier pointed out:

Under the current situation, it is appropriate for the guidelines for operations in Jinnan to remain “shelling but not landing” and “cutting off [the enemy’s supplies] but not letting [the enemy] die,” so as to make the enemy panic and retreat without being able to take any rest. It is indeed not easy to coordinate a joint operation of the navy, air force, and ground artillery forces, and the possibility that American ships and planes could be hit. It is even more inappropriate for our air force to bomb Jinnan, as...
this will provide Jiang's air force with an excuse to bomb the mainland. At present, the U.S. is controlling Jiang's air force, not allowing it to bomb the mainland, and one main reason for this is that they are not certain how our air force will retaliate: by bombing Jinmen or Taiwan? Since the Americans are unable to predict the direction of our air force's operations, it is beneficial to us not to trigger Jiang's air force to bomb the mainland. If Jiang's air force bombs the mainland and we are only able to bomb Jinmen (but not Taiwan), we are showing our weaknesses.  

Mao approved Zhou's letter as soon as he read it. The chairman commented that the premier's opinions about operations in Jinmen were "all correct, as they will allow us to occupy an unbeatable position while at the same time completely holding the initiative." In accordance with Mao and Zhou's instructions, the PLA shore batteries in Fuijian continued sporadic daily shelling of the Jinmen islands, striking the GMD's supply convoys, while the PLA's air force and navy occasionally attacked the GMD's transport planes and ships in the Jinmen area (but always avoided the Americans). Consequently, the actual combat intensity in the Jinmen area had reduced significantly by the end of September.

Within this context, Beijing's leaders again considered how to bring the crisis to an end. In a meeting with Soviet charge d'affaires Astrov on 29 September, Zhou discussed three future scenarios for the Taiwan Strait crisis. The first scenario was that "when the conditions become mature, the United States will be ready to make concessions. ... If the United States guarantees the withdrawal of Jiang's troops [from Jinmen], we may agree to hold fighting for a period to allow Jiang's troops to withdraw." The second and third scenarios were that "the current confrontation will continue as both sides will stick to their positions," or that "the United States will voluntarily put its neck into the noose" by directly involving itself in the military conflict. In Zhou's opinion, the second scenario was the most possible.

However, at the end of September, when signs indicated that Washington might be willing to end the crisis along the lines of the first scenario, Beijing's whole approach toward seizing Jinmen, a key goal of the shelling campaign, changed completely. On 30 September, Dulles made extensive comments on the Taiwan Strait crisis at a news conference. In response to a question concerning whether it would be feasible for the GMD troops to withdraw from the offshore islands, the secretary of state asserted, "[I]t all depends upon the circumstances under which they would be withdrawn. ... If there were a cease-fire in the area which seemed to be reasonably dependable, I think it would be foolish to keep these large forces on these islands." Dulles' message immediately caught Beijing's attention. By that time, Mao had returned to Beijing from his inspection tour of southern China. On 3rd October, the 22nd Politburo Standing Committee met to discuss Beijing's overall strategy toward the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou reported to his colleagues that, in his opinion, Dulles intended to "use the current opportunity to create two Chinas." What Dulles wanted, according to the premier, was for Beijing to commit to a non-military policy in dealing with the Taiwan issue, and Washington in turn would pressure Taiwan to give up the plan to "recover the mainland." In Zhou's view, Dulles' unspoken goal was to "trick Jinmen and Mazu for Taiwan and Penghu," thus formalizing the separation between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. Zhou particularly emphasized that this was exactly what the Americans had tried to do at the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, and that "the American negotiators spoke even more undisguisedly at the talks than had been suggested in Dulles' speech." Reaching to Zhou's introduction, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping pointed out that both China and the United States had been probing the other's real intentions, and, by now, both sides had gained some idea about the other side's bottom line. They also argued that both China and the United States had acted cautiously during the crisis to avoid a direct military confrontation. Now, in their views, "the shelling had mobilized the Chinese masses, had mobilized world opinion, had played the role of supporting the Arab people, and had created dramatic pressure on American rulers." In short, they believed that it was time to bring the crisis to an end.

At this point, Mao asked a crucial question: "How about leaving Jinmen and Mazu in Jiang Jieshi's hands?" The chairman, who obviously had carefully considered this issue, presented his reasoning: "The advantage of doing so is that since both islands are very close to the mainland, we may maintain contact with the GMD through them. Whenever necessary, we may shell them. Whenever we are in need of tension, we may tighten this noose, and whenever we want to relax the tension, we may loosen the noose. We will let them hang there, neither dead nor alive, using them as a means to deal with the Americans." The chairman also argued that even if Jiang were allowed to continue to occupy Jinmen and Mazu, he could not stop the socialist construction in the mainland; nor would his troops at Jinmen and Mazu alone be capable of constituting a serious security threat to Fujian province. In comparison, argued the chairman, if Jiang lost Jinmen and Mazu or if his troops were forced...
by the Americans to withdraw from them, "we will lose a card to deal with the Americans and Jiang, thus leading to the emergence of a de facto "two Chinas" situation."

At Mao’s urging, the poliburo agreed to adopt this new policy of “leaving Jinnem in Jiang’s hands,” so that the offshore islands might be “turned into a burden for the Americans.” Mao then pointed out that, to justify the new policy domestically and internationally, it was necessary to begin a huge propaganda campaign. Indeed, how to present Beijing’s new strategy to end the crisis became an important task for Mao. The chairman knew very well that Ma had been ordered to fail to present his case powerfully, the very excuses for the entire shelling operation, as well as Beijing’s initiation and management of the crisis, would be called into serious question. Mao proposed that Beijing’s propaganda emphasize that the Taiwan issue was a matter of China’s internal affairs, that the shelling of Jinnem was the continuation of the Chinese civil war and thus should not be medicated in by any foreign power or international organization, that the presence of American troops in Taiwan was a violation of China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that after the Americans left, the Taiwan issue could be solved through direct negotiation between the CCP and the GMD. At the end of the meeting, Mao instructed the Chinese media, and Rizhim ribao in particular, to “hold the fire” for a few days in order to “prepare and replenish munitions,” and then “ten thousand cannons will boom with one order.”

As soon as Mao had made up his mind, he moved to change his will into action. What he put together was an extraordinary drama, one that would combine in one act unexpected military maneuver, well-calculated diplomatic feints, and, most important of all, an unconventional propaganda effort. On 7 October, Mao wrote a letter to Peng Dehuai and Huang Kecheng in which he laid out his operational plans. “Our batteries should not fire a single shell on 6 and 7 October, even if there are American airplanes and ships escorting the GMD. If the enemy bombards us, our forces should not return fire. [We should] cease our activities, lie low, and wait and watch for two days. Then, we will know what to do.” The chairman stressed to Peng and Huang not to “issue any public statement during these two days because we need to wait and see clearly how the situation will develop.”

At the same time that Mao was shuffling military deployments, Zhou was busy with diplomatic activities. He first met with Indonesia’s ambassador to China. The premier told him that he had learned that eight countries, with Indonesia as one of the main initiators, had been preparing to issue a statement concerning the Taiwan Strait crisis. Zhou advised the Indonesian am-

bassador that the statement should acknowledge that Taiwan was part of Chinese territory, that the crisis was the result of America’s policy of aggression in the Taiwan area, and that Washington had no right to intervene in Jinnem and Mazu. Zhou then met with the Soviet charge d'affaires. After informing Antonov that Beijing had decided that it is better to leave Jinnem and Mazu in Jiang’s hands, the premier gave a detailed explanation about why Beijing had reached this decision. In particular, said the premier, the new policy would turn Jinnem and Mazu into a huge burden for Washington, “whenever we were tense, we would strike at them, and whenever we want relaxation, we will lose [the noise] there.” Thus the new policy would play the role of “educating the people of the world, and primarily the Chinese people,” while deepening the already profound contradictions between Taipei and Washington. The premier asked that Moscow give the policy its full support.

Early on the morning of 6 October, Beijing stopped all regular radio broadcasts to deliver a “Message to the Comparisons in Taiwan” in the name of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai. Written in powerful and shrewd yet elegant language, this document actually was Mao’s creation. The chairman originally did not plan to issue a statement because he wanted to observe how Taipei and Washington would respond to the PLA’s holding of fire on Jinnem. But he quickly changed his mind and decided to draft a message himself. “We are all Chinese and reconciliation is the best course for us to take,” the message asserted. The shelling of Jinnem was designed to punish the "rampant actions" of Taiwan’s leaders and to highlight that “Taiwan was part of Chinese territory, not part of American territory” and that “there exists only one China, not two Chinas.” The U.S. imperialists are the common enemy for all of us,” the message continued, and, beginning on 6 October, the condition of "two American escorts," the PLA would suspend shelling on Jinnem for seven days so as to allow supplies to be “freely delivered” to the islands. After seven days, on 13 October, Peng Dehuai announced that the shelling would be put on hold for another two weeks. Yet Mao still wanted to show that Beijing was in full control of the situation. Therefore, taking Dulles’s forthcoming official visit to Taiwan as an excuse, Mao ordered the PLA’s shore batteries to conduct a one-hour barrage of Jinnem on 20 October. Mao instructed that the shelling should be announced in both Chinese and English in order to achieve the biggest propaganda effect. On 25 October, Peng Dehuai issued “Another Message to the Comparisons in Taiwan” (again drafted by Mao), announcing that, from that day on, the PLAs would shell the Jinnem islands only on cold days, leaving even days for M0 troops to receive supplies.
and take rents.37 After more than two months, the PLA stepped regular and intensive shelling on Jinnan, and the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958 finally came to an end.

Conclusion

Given the fact that the use of nuclear weapons had been widely considered and discussed during the course of the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1958, the event must be regarded as one of the most dangerous unconventional crises in Cold War history. Yet, from a conventional “threat reaction” perspective—even by taking into account the usually extraordinary sense of insecurity prevailing during the Cold War era—this crisis should not have occurred in the first place. Despite frequent military clashes between Taiwan and the mainland since the 1949 war, neither the US nor the United States presented a serious and immediate threat to the PRC in 1958. Indeed, since the first Taiwan Strait crisis in 1954–55, the tension in the strait had been declining continuously, with Taipei dramatically reducing its hostile military activities aimed at the mainland (partly because it was bound by the 1954 U.S.-Taiwan treaty of mutual defense) and with Beijing offering peace overtures to the US. When the crisis erupted in the summer of 1958, Mao and his comrades saw little chance from the United States and its allies (including the GMD regime in Taiwan) to the PRC’s physical safety; and they did not believe that the United States was either willing or ready to involve itself in a major military confrontation with the PRC in East Asia.38 Thus, narrowly defined “security concerns,” which emphasize only “hard” and physical threats, cannot be the main reason that Beijing initiated the crisis.

As indicated in this study, Mao decided to bring China into the crisis primarily for the purpose of creating an extraordinary environment in which the full potential of the Great Leap Forward—a crucial episode in the development of Mao’s grand enterprise of continuous revolution—would be thoroughly realized. No other world leader had ever used such straightforward and enthusiastic language as did Mao in 1958 to discuss the huge advantage involved in using international tension to initiate domestic mobilization. Mao certainly was obsessed by a tremendous sense of insecurity, but his fear in no way resembled any of the conventional “threat perceptions” that prevailed during the Cold War period; first and foremost, Mao’s obsession was the product of his unique “postrevolution anxiety.” What worried the chairman most was that if he failed to find new and effective means to enhance the inner dynamics of his continuous revolution, the revolution would lose its momentum and, as a result, would eventually wither. For Mao, this was a threat of
is why, despite the fact that China is so far away from the Middle East and had so few practical interests there, Mao still found it necessary to respond to the American-British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan in dramatic ways.

Equally revealing is Mao's attitude toward Moscow before and during the crisis. Although the Soviet Union was China's most important ally in the 1950s, Mao intentionally kept the Soviet leaders in the dark about the timing, course, and purpose of his actions against Taiwan. Particularly troublesome was Mao's consistent expression of contempt for the danger involved in the possibility that the crisis might lead to a nuclear catastrophe. The chairman certainly did not believe that the crisis would lead to such a dire situation—indeed, it was exactly because he did not believe so that he ordered the shelling. However, he enjoyed repeatedly bringing the topic—in his highly dialectic and philosophical manner—to the attention of the Soviet leaders. What Mao wanted was to challenge the moral courage and ideological values of the Soviet leaders, thus making them appear morally inferior. Consequently revolutionary China's centrality in the international Communist movement and in the world—since communism represented the future of the human race—would naturally be established and recognized.

For China 1967 turned out to be a year of great disaster. Following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 million Chinese people died in a three-year-long nationwide famine. The effects of the Taiwan Strait crisis were for China no less serious. In the wake of the crisis, the conflict between China and the United States intensified, the distrust between Beijing and Moscow deepened continuously, and the hostility between the mainland and Taiwan, especially in a psychological sense, increased dramatically. However, from Mao's perspective, his initiation and management of the crisis remained a successful case of promoting domestic mobilization by provoking international tension. The experience set a decisive precedent in Mao's handling of China's domestic and external policies in the 1960s, especially when he was leading China toward another crucial episode in his continuous revolution—the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. That, as is well known today, was a path toward another great disaster.