CHINA'S CALLOUT CALCULATIONS ON ATTACKING TAIWAN

China's changed rhetoric suggests a desire to constrict the existential space of Taiwan: Taiwan duli versus Taidu.

It is not certain that Western sanctions will deter China, as China has strong countermeasures in place.

China is very unlikely to attack Taiwan in 2023, but the likelihood will increase with time.

The Chinese Communist Party's anti-Taiwan rhetoric has recently undergone a significant change. Whereas China previously used the term *Taiwan duli* to refer to Taiwanese independence, the term used now is *Taidu*. Both mean Taiwanese independence in Chinese, but the shorter version has a broader meaning, describing not only pro-independence forces but anyone who supports building a stronger Taiwanese identity and civil society. This means that China has decidedly broadened its anti-Taiwan spectrum in order to constrict the existential space of Taiwan. The term *Taidu* was included in the revised party constitution presented at the 20th CCP Congress.

Central to the possible attack on Taiwan is Xi Jinping, who feels he personally has a historic mission to unite China by conquering Taiwan. Objectively, China has a number of factors that do not support an attack, but Xi's personal vision is very likely to override these. What factors play a role in China's calculations?

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First – sanctions. Normally, Western sanctions in the event of an attack on Taiwan should deter China, but sanctions did not discourage it in Hong Kong or Xinjiang. Neither was China deterred by Western sanctions (some of which are still in place) during the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. While it respects the sanctions imposed on Russia, China considers them unlawful. In addition, China would impose countersanctions (e.g. on rare earth minerals and supply chains). Xi Jinping believes he has a sufficiently effective response to Western sanctions.

Since 2021, the relationship between Lithuania and China has deteriorated – the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office in Vilnius alone was enough to anger China; using the name "Taiwanese" added fuel to the fire. The image here displays the name "Taiwan" at the representative office in Brussels.

Source: private collection

Another important factor is restricted access to Western markets. Given the negative outlook for China's real estate sector and the rapid increase in the debt burden, exports will be crucial to generate growth in China. At the same time, China needs to consider the potential of substitute markets. A number of Chinese initiatives with a global reach clearly indicate that China is deliberately focusing on large markets outside the Western countries to improve its ability to operate independently of the West. It is not a question of calculating whether the new markets will be able to match Western markets in terms of export volumes but whether Xi Jinping thinks they will be enough for China to survive.

The third and probably one of the most crucial factors is restricted access to Western technology and know-how. In addition to the industriousness of the Chinese people, China's technological success largely relies on access to cutting-edge Western technology. The CCP has set itself the goal of becoming a technological superpower by 2035, but it will not succeed without using Western technology and recruiting Western scientists.

The fourth factor is the unity and resilience of the West and like-minded countries against China. Western unity regarding Ukraine surprised China, but it believes this unity will crumble. Concerning Russia's aggression, China asked its businesses to assess the prospects for the Russian economy over the course of at least 12 months, which shows that China is prepared to bet on a longer time frame in anticipation of Western unity collapsing.

An attack on Taiwan would create major internal tensions in China from an economic point of view. In this context, Xi Jinping's emphatic message of unity at the 20th CCP Congress and the change in his tone of voice when he emphasised the phrase "dare to fight" (ganyu douzheng) – China must be ready for confrontation – while reading out the report is particularly noteworthy. Xi Jinping probably has at least a decade of political life left. China is very unlikely to attack Taiwan in 2023, but the likelihood will increase with time.