



NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

Chinese-Taiwan Tensions

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Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) are perennial ideological, economic, and military adversaries. They are physically separated by the Taiwan Strait, strategically divided by various alliances, and politically estranged by different forms of government. The National Security Council is concerned about the fates of these two nations because their interactions directly impact American interests. The PRC is a communist nation that frequently aligns itself with Russia and even Iran, while the ROC is an isolated, Western-friendly remnant of a former regime. The PRC has the largest military in the world, vast reserves of manpower, and a rapidly developing economy. It also has a history of hostility towards the ROC, which has manifested itself diplomatically, financially, and even militarily. Most importantly for the United States, America has unequivocally committed itself to the defense of Taiwan (ROC) against Chinese (PRC) aggression.

History

The animosity between Taiwan and China is, geographically speaking, somewhat artificial. Taiwan was not under Chinese rule until after the Second World War, when the Japanese forces occupying Taiwan surrendered to the military of the Kuomintang (the precursor to the ROC). The Kuomintang (KMT), led by General Chiang Kai-shek, ruled both Taiwan and mainland China from 1945-1949. However, the later portion of these four years was marked by increased instability, as Communist forces led by Mao Zedong swelled in both strength and fervor. By 1949, the Chinese Communist Part (CPC), the precursor to the PRC, had expelled Chiang Kai-shek's forces from Beijing. The KMT, after losing its economic base, popular backing, and American military support, was forced to flee mainland China. In October 1949, the CPC declared the creation of the People's Republic of China, and in December 1949 the KMT announced that Taipei, Taiwan would be the 'temporary' capital of the Republic of China. Although their clashes never reverted to overt warfare, the two nations remained in a state of warfare until 1979. During the thirty years between 1949 and 1979, the ROC and PRC engaged in battles ranging from **guerrilla warfare** to amphibious invasions and artillery bombardments. Most significantly for the National Security Council, the United States Congress authorized the Presi-

guerrilla warfare—*conflicts in which a small group of combatants use small-scale military tactics, the element of surprise, and extraordinary mobility to harass a larger and less-mobile traditional army or strike vulnerable military targets.*



dent of the United States to use military force to defend the Republic of China. This pledge has been repeated over the decades and has gone as far as the deployment of the US Seventh Fleet to the Straits of Taiwan. From the late 1970s until the late 1990s, relations between the PRC and ROC seemed to be thawing, with the governments of both nations becoming at least nominally interested in eventual reunification. This temporary thaw came to an end in 1996 when Taiwan expressed an interest in total independence without reunification, and China responded with a missile exercise. This diplomatic non-contact continued until 2008, with the Chinese military dramatically increasing operational capabilities and the Taiwanese government considering a declaration of absolute independence. In 2008, the KMT regained power in Taiwan, dedicating itself towards reestablishing economic and diplomatic ties with the PRC. During 2008 and 2009, the ROC and PRC engaged in indirect talks and increased financial contact. Militarily, however, the situation has become more hostile. Despite requests from the ROC government for the PRC to stand down its cross-strait missile batteries, the PRC has shown no signs of withdrawing artillery and missile forces. Additionally, on January 30, 2010, the United States promised to sell \$6.4 billion of advanced military equipment to the ROC, a move that has seriously antagonized the PRC leadership. This weaponry might potentially ignite a regional **arms race** in Asia, and has most certainly resulted in the deterioration of Chinese-American relations in the short run.

Current Military Relations

Although the Chinese government has sought to assuage Western concerns of a possible military invasion of Taiwan, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has only increased its presence along the Straits of Taiwan. This is somewhat paradoxical, especially since official PRC actions have tended towards reestablishing financial and diplomatic ties with the ROC. The PLA has well over 100,000 soldiers, more than 1,000 fighters and bombers, almost 2,000 ballistic missiles, and a considerable amount of naval and land artillery ready to deploy quickly against Taiwan. Coastal PLA forces regularly conduct amphibious assault training, and China is deploying its latest weapons technology to the Straits as it becomes available. On a more strategic level, the PLA vastly outnumbers the Taiwanese military—China has the largest population and armed forces in the world. Without outside intervention, and facing a full-fledged Chinese invasion, there is little doubt that Taiwan would fall to the PLA. The Taiwanese military is highly competent, equipped with cutting edge technology, and is currently among the twenty largest armed forces in the world. Like the PRC, the ROC often simulates an invasion of Taiwan from the Chinese mainland. Although the US does not have access to the results of PRC simulations, ROC

arms race—*a competition between two or more nations for the best and most well-equipped armed forces.*

simulations have shown a mutually destructive battle in which the PRC ultimately prevails, but only after losing a majority of its invasion force. Simulations of this variety are often quite controversial within the Taiwanese legislature since the military is often lobbying for increased funding and additional arms procurement from the United States. Perhaps most importantly, the PRC has a considerable arsenal of nuclear warheads, as well as airborne, naval, and ballistic delivery options. Although the ROC had a nuclear weapons development program in the 1970s, it was dismantled under intense pressure from the international community. While it is highly unlikely that the PRC would launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the ROC, it is slightly more plausible that nuclear weapons might come into play if the US military intervened on the side of Taiwan.

American Military Options

If the PRC did invade the ROC, the United States would be forced to act quickly and decisively. Since the United States and China have the two largest economies and arguably the two most powerful militaries on Earth, any recommendation made by the NSC will have serious and irrevocable consequences for the entire world. As members of the NSC, you will have the responsibility to recommend to the President of the United States what course of action to undertake in the event of war between the ROC and PRC. The following propositions have been considered in the past to respond to a crisis of this type—they are available for your consideration, consolidation, or even reinvention. You are free to embrace these strategies as they currently exist, to modify them, to merge them, or to create solutions of your own.

Diplomatic/Economic Sanctions

This has become the response of choice for many crises around the world. For example, in response to the alleged nuclear weapons programs of Iran and North Korea, the United Nations (UN) imposed both diplomatic and economic **sanctions** on both countries. The efficacy of these sanctions is highly questionable—North Korea has exploded at least two nuclear devices and continues to develop long-range ballistic missiles, while Iran continues to develop nuclear reactors. Imposing strict, punitive sanctions against China in the event of an invasion of Taiwan would require rapid multilateral action by both the US government and the United Nations. Based on prior history, they would have a limited chance of success, but based on China's increasing economic interactions with the outside world, they might be capable of inflicting significant financial damage on the PRC.

sanction—*measures taken by a nation or group of nations to coerce another to conform to an international agreement or norms of conduct.*

Limited Military Response

The American military is powerful, technologically advanced, and stretched very thin. It would be very difficult to deploy a viable US expedition against PRC forces with American forces already deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Korean DMZ. However, it would still be possible for the US to launch a limited military response to a PRC invasion of Taiwan. It should be noted that these actions would likely have the same diplomatic consequences as an invasion of the Chinese mainland (war with the PRC), but they would require an initially lower commitment of military force. Examples of limited responses include air strikes, cruise missile launches, and Special Forces operations. These actions would likely decrease the operational capacity of PRC forces, disrupt supply lines, and delay the fall of Taipei. The United States could also attempt to forcefully divide the two parties by deploying a naval contingent to the Straits of Taiwan. This particular action has been taken by the US in the past to defuse tensions, and could prevent outright warfare if taken early enough.

Retaliatory Invasion

One extreme option to distract PRC forces from an invasion of Taiwan would be to land an invading force on the mainland of China. This is both an extraordinarily risky and extremely costly proposition. Launching a viable, all-out war against the PRC would likely involve the reinstatement of the draft, an exponential increase in defense spending, and the relocation of American military forces across the globe. The United States could reasonably expect the cooperation of the Japanese and South Korean militaries as well as its **NATO** allies, and should expect some level of resistance from North Korea, Iran, and potentially Russia. There is little chance that an invasion would be the first response of the United States against the PRC, but it could be the culmination of a series of smaller military actions. Any consideration of an invasion must be taken extremely seriously, as both the US and the PRC, as well as many of their respective allies, are in possession of nuclear weapons. Although nuclear weapons have not been used for more than sixty years, they remain a grim reminder that conventional warfare can spiral dangerously out of control.

NATO—*North Atlantic Treaty Organization; an intergovernmental military alliance that constitutes a system of collective defense whereby its member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party.*

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