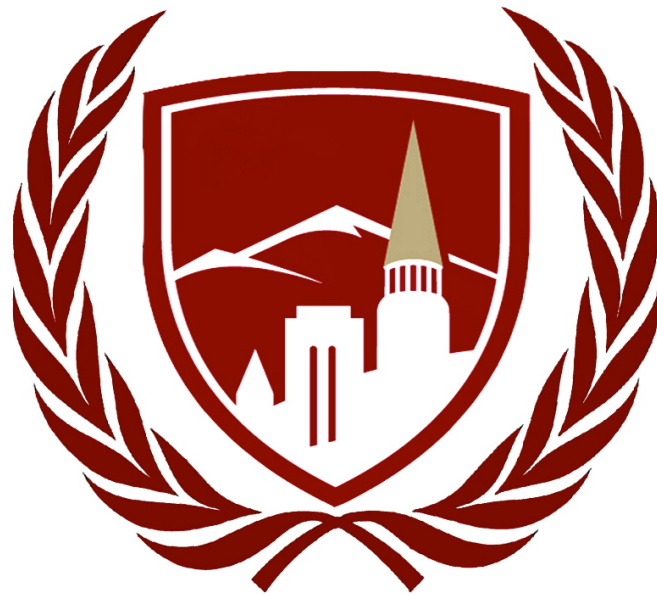


UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



ADVANCED AD HOC CRISIS COMMITTEE

The Taiwan-China Conflict



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Introduction

In December 1949, Chiang Kai-shek evacuated his Nationalist government to the island of Formosa, now known as Taiwan, abandoning mainland China to the victorious Communist army. Thus began the contemporary history of strife between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC). What was once an ideological clash between the two factions has since evolved into a struggle of supremacy and equality within the region, and while international support of the Taiwanese government has balked serious military action, PRC hostility has all but festered over the decades. What has resulted has been some of the most fascinating, and dangerous, case studies between the David and Goliath of the Eastern Asian theatre. And though quiet for some time, heightened tensions in late 2013 has once more drawn international attention to the simmering resentment between the two powers and the more important of question of how to alleviate, if not solve, such a volatile issue.

History of the Issue

Civil War and the Beginning of Division

After nearly three hundred years of imperial rule, the Qing Dynasty in China finally fell in 1911. Collapsing from both internal and external factors, it left in its wake a country at the mercy of several warlords who devastated the countryside in their struggle for national control. Desperate, a young nationalist, Sun Yat-Sen, futilely reached out for international aid in defeating the warlords. His pleas fell upon deaf ears within the Western powers and so in 1921, he turned to the Soviet Union who quickly seized upon the chance to assist both Sun Yat-Sen and the newly created Communist Party of China (CPC).

In 1923, Sen released a declaration affirming Soviet support behind Chinese reunification on the basis of cooperation between both Sen's Kuomintang party (later the KMT) and the CPC. Reluctant cooperation continued between the two parties throughout the following years, even despite Sun Yat-Sen's death in 1925. However, in 1927, after the defeat of the warlord Sun Chuanfang, the rift flared between the two factions in deciding where the seat of KMT power should be shifted. Chiang Kai-shek, successor to Sun Yat-Sen, refused to move KMT operations into the communist-sympathizing province of Wuhan and moved it eastward into Jiangxi. Thus the rift festered and on April 12th, 1927 violence broke out between the factions as KMT began mass arresting and execution of hundreds of CPC members. What followed was a series of revolts and attacks staged by the CPC including the Autumn Harvest Uprising and the Nanchang Uprising in August 1927, initiating all-out war between the CPC and the KMT now known as the "Ten Year's Civil War". Such a war indeed lasted a decade, much of the Communist army destroyed or massacred by the KMT as they retreated into the interior province of Shaanxi during the Long March. It was, however, at this time that Mao Zedong was able to rise to the forefront of CPC leadership, easily replacing old-guard general Zhang Guotao whose army had been all but annihilated by KMT forces.

The Ten Year's Civil War came to a close in 1937 when the Imperial Japanese Army invaded and successfully subjugated Manchuria. While initially hostile to the idea of allying himself with the Communists against the foreign threat, Chiang was arrested, held hostage by a once-allied warlord and forced into truce with the Communist leadership in what is known as the Xi'an Incident. Both parties suspended fighting to focus their resources on repelling the Japanese invasion, though active cooperation was minimal at best and eventually hostilities once more resumed in 1941, effectively ending the Second United Front between the CPC and the KMT.

The Second Sino-Japanese War had proven costly to the KMT. While the CPC had engaged in guerilla-style hits upon Japanese units, KMT operations had mostly consisted of direct confrontation with the superiorly equipped and trained Imperial Japanese Army. Moreover, as having the status of legal government within China, far more pressure was put on the KMT to achieve success as opposed to the CPC. Both left the KMT severely weakened directly following the end of the war and slowly the balance of power within mainland China shifted in favor of the Communists. What further aided the Communists in their struggle was the secret support of the Soviets, who secretly provided captured Japanese caches of weapons and tanks to the CPC, and while the KMT had fervent military and monetary support by President Truman, Mao's land distribution policies eventually proved to be the key in luring the Chinese peasant class into communist wings.

On July 20th, 1946, the final phase of the Chinese Civil War was initiated, named presently by the PRC today as the "War of Liberation". Chiang Kai-shek launched an attack of 1.6 million troops against the Communists, who in turn responded in guerilla-style warfare tactics. A year later they had wiped out 1.12 million men, and though the KMT had captured the CPC capital of Yan'an, the CPC launched a blistering counterattack resulting in the communist capture of Shenyang, Changchun, and Luoyang. Between November 1st, 1948 and January 31st, 1949 in the Pingjin Campaign, the CPC captured Zhangjiakou, Tianjin, Dagu, and Beiping (later renamed Beijing), and wiped out over 170 KMT divisions, effectively wiping out the backbone of the KMT armies. By April 23rd, 1949 the CPC captured the KMT capital of Nanjing, forcing the KMT government to flee to Canton, and then Chongqing, and then Chengdu and finally Taiwan on December 10th. By this time Mao had already proclaimed the birth of the People's Republic of China with its new capital at Beijing on October 1st.

United States' Intervention and Following Decades

Though having initially supported the KMT cause, American support for Chiang's Kuomintang party steeply declined as news of corruption among government officials surfaced. However, at the outbreak of the Korean War, President Truman found it politically impossible not to defend the tiny island from a Communist takeover by the PRC and so ordered the United States 7th fleet into the strait between mainland China and Taiwan. As the Cold War reached its height, Western powers continued to treat diplomatically solely with the newly founded Republic of China despite the authoritarian nature of the Taiwanese government. Point of fact, the ROC was viewed as the only legitimate representative of China within the United Nations until 1971 when under strong diplomatic pressure, UN Resolution 2758 installed the PRC as the sole representative of China and expelled the ROC.

Leading up to 1971, however, ROC-PRC relations were characterized by ROC political commitment to militarily retake mainland China (although actual control was limited to the islands of Taiwan itself, Penghu, Kimen, Matsu, the Dongsha Islands and the Nansha Islands) and a series of Cross-Strait Crisis mainly initiated by the PRC.

The Taiwan Crises

The First Taiwan-Strait Crises was in fact, however, precipitated by ROC plans for an invasion of mainland China. The Nationalist Chinese Government continued to uphold its goal of reunification by whatever means necessary, and to this end, following Eisenhower's withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet out of the Taiwan Strait in February 1953, deployed 73,000 troops on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in August 1954 immediately off the Chinese coast. In response, the PRC began shelling the islands and installations being constructed by the Nationalists, and, despite American warnings of retaliation, widened its attack by bombing the Tachen Islands. While Eisenhower resisted a recommendation U.S. Chiefs of Staff to use nuclear weapons, he did help create the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan which both parties signed on December 2nd, 1954. PRC aggression continued, eventually winning the PRC the Yijiangshan Islands, until U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles mentioned in February 1955 that the United States was seriously considering a nuclear strike. On April 23rd, 1955, the PRC said it was willing to negotiate but the underlying issue of the crisis was never solved, leading to another crisis three years later.

The Second Taiwan-Strait Crisis was a direct continuation of the First Taiwan-Strait Crisis when on August 23, 1958 the PRC launched a heavy artillery assault against the island of Quemoy. In the exchange, 2,500 ROC and 200 PRC soldiers were killed. As per the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, President Eisenhower directed the Seventh Fleet back into the Strait to protect ROC supply lines and also provided AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles to give the ROC an advantage over the PRC MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter jets. On September 22, 1958, several such PRC jets were shot down by ROC fighters and faced with a sudden stalemate, the PRC announced a significant decrease in bombardment against Quemoy and Matsu. In a rather odd end, the PRC and the ROC continued bombardment every other day of the week, filling their shells with propaganda leaflets though this practice ended in 1979.

The Third Taiwan-Strait Crisis was instigated interestingly by Taiwan's President Lee Teng-Hui accepting an invitation by his alma mater, Cornell University, in 1995 to give a speech on "Taiwan's Democratization Experience". Seeking to try and isolate Taiwan diplomatically, the PRC staunchly resisted visits by ROC leaders, and though the U.S. State Department was opposed to granting Lee a visa into the United States, the United States Congress in May 1995 passed a resolution mandating the allowance of the Lee's visa. Infuriated by this shift in policy, the PRC announced on July 7th, 1995 missile tests that would occur between July 21-26 in an area only 60 km from the ROC islet of Pengjia and also began mobilization of forces in Fujian. Naval exercises and missile tests were conducted well into August. It is now believed such actions were taken by the PRC in an attempt to send a very clear message to the Taiwanese electorate leading up to the 1996 presidential election: electing Lee would mean war. However, in response to these demonstrations, President Clinton ordered two aircraft battle groups into the

Strait of Taiwan as well as ordering Carrier Group Five and Carrier Group Seven into the region. Resolution of the crisis eventually led to the buildup of Chinese navy ships to counter American carrier groups, while Lee in fact jumped 5% in the polls, giving him not only a plurality but also a majority. American sales of arms also increased to the ROC and American-Japanese military ties were significantly strengthened.

Current Status

Today the issue of Taiwan and China is contentious at best. The PRC maintains that the government in Taiwan is illegitimate while the ROC views itself as a sovereign state, though it is not recognized by the United Nations due to diplomatic pressure from Beijing. The PRC is set upon a One-China Policy, by which Taiwan is the 23rd Province of the People's Republic of China and also by which any formal declaration of independence will be met with force of arms. Moreover, the PRC refuses to have any diplomatic relations with states which recognize the ROC, and requires any nation seeking diplomatic relations to sign recognition of PRC claims to Taiwan. Because of this only 21 UN member states and the Holy See have diplomatic relations with the ROC, though the ROC does have de facto embassies in many nations around the world called Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Offices (TECRO). The United States continues to be one of the ROC's main allies, President Obama announcing the sale of \$6.4 billion dollars of military hardware to Taiwan and is the major mediator between the two factions. Though recently Beijing has sought a thawing of relations with the ROC, it still maintains that it will invade if Taiwan declares independence, develops nuclear weapons or suffers from civil chaos.

Bloc Positions

China-

The PRC only sees one way to resolve the separation of Taiwan and China, that is, through the eventual incorporation of Taiwan into the larger Chinese state. China has been developing its military capabilities and influence in the East and South China Seas with the intent of countering the response capabilities of the United States, which is the primary external source of security for Taiwan. China is likely to be supported diplomatically by such countries as North Korea and to a lesser extent Russia, but would likely be on its own militarily if a conflict were to emerge. This combined with the significant damage that any conflict would cause to its trade relations with Taiwan and the United States make it hesitant, but it is clear that it seeks to test its growing power. Nevertheless, China's desire to be seen as a responsible state discourages rash actions.

Taiwan-

Taiwan's interests lie in maintaining the status quo. Its political leaders have long since lost hope of retaking the Chinese mainland, but they are intent on preserving its actual, though not nominal, independence from the Communist PRC. Though diplomatically isolated due to the PRC's place in the United Nations, Taiwan's economic strength and democratic government

discourage hostilities. Though it has been developing its military capabilities with US support, it would rely on US forces to guarantee its security in the event of an actual conflict.

Japan and South Korea-

As the PRC expands its influence into the East China Sea, it has come into conflict with Japan and South Korea over the territorial boundaries and exclusive economic zones between the three countries. For Japan, the tension over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands near Taiwan is particularly troubling. Japan has administered these islands since the return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, but recently Chinese vessels both public and private have tested Japan's control and patience. These islands have become a focal point of competition between the two powers. Similar island disputes in addition to disputes over sea-floor resources between South Korea and the PRC exist. Japan and South Korea seek to counter the flexing of the PRC's muscles, but both have close economic ties that prevent escalation of the conflicts from posturing to actual confrontation. Both have extensive economic and security ties with the United States, such that if a conflict over Taiwan involved the US, bases on Japanese and South Korean soil would likely be used. South Korea is particularly vulnerable to an escalation of regional conflict due to its close proximity with the PRC and the presence of the large army of North Koreans at the edge of the Demilitarized Zone. Nevertheless, neither country would have an improved security situation if the PRC's aggressive posturing achieves its goals.

ASEAN-

Like Japan and South Korea, many of the member-states of ASEAN find themselves in territorial disputes over islands and ocean-floor resources with the PRC. Vietnam and the Philippines in particular have long running disputes with the PRC. Unlike Japan and South Korea, most of the countries lack the same level of defensive capabilities or the special relationship with the United States. Most ASEAN states have banded together on issues of territorial sovereignty where they are in conflict with the PRC, but others such as Cambodia and Myanmar have supported the PRC in hopes of compensation. ASEAN seeks to discourage conflict over the Taiwan issue primarily because they would become increasingly vulnerable to the PRC if such a conflict arises. This has led some countries, including the Philippines, to seek to improve their security relationship with the United States, in hopes that it might be capable of containing the PRC.

United States-

The United States interventions were the primary reasons for the subsidence of the previous Taiwan crises. The security dependence of Taiwan on the US remains significant, not only for naval intervention, but also in terms of the sale of military arms and technology. In general, the United States seeks to counterbalance the growing power of the PRC, to prevent it from emerging as the sole hegemon of the East Asian region. The "pivot to Asia" proclaimed by the Obama administration, is a key indicator of the growing attention that the United States is placing on the region. South Korea and Japan are the key US allies within the region, but others such as the Philippines are increasingly returning to the US security umbrella. However, the US

also lies within the web of economic dependence and it is unclear to what extent the US will risk its economic prosperity in any confrontation with the PRC.

European Union-

While generally US allies, the members of the European Union are interested in avoiding economically harmful conflict and lack the same security interests of the other players in the region. With a long history of hosting negotiations, some EU states such as the Sweden and Denmark will undoubtedly be loud voices for a diplomatic resolution to any conflict within the region. However, because the EU lacks the same capability to project military power across the world that the US does, its ability to deter conflicts is limited.

Preparation Questions

1. What risks do security confrontations between Taiwan and the PRC have for the global economy?
2. In an environment of increasing military capabilities and territorial assertiveness, how can accidental confrontations be prevented or if they occur, kept from escalating?
3. What roles do domestic politics with Taiwan, the PRC, and their allies play in determining their actions in the international arena in relation to the issue of Taiwan?
4. How is the security issue of Taiwan and the PRC entangled with other such issues in the region like that with the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands?
5. What have Taiwan and the PRC done to improve economic and cultural relations between each other and what can be done to improve these relations in the future? How might these ties affect the security/political issue?
6. How can countries not directly involved in the East Asian security situation support peace and cooperation within the region?