

The ROC's Security Strategies After the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis*

Tuan Y. Cheng

Associate Research Fellow
Institute of International Relations
National Chengchi University

The PRC's recent missile tests in the seas near Taiwan have raised serious concerns over the ROC's security, and various proposals have been suggested for Taipei to deal with Beijing's looming threat. Among them, six policy options are worthy of discussion. They include arms buildup, missile defense, regional collective security, closer relations with the United States, a peace accord with the PRC, and the nuclear option. After a systematic analysis, the paper concludes that Taipei's options are still limited, and it will not be easy to make a major shift from current security strategies. One possible way to improve cross-Strait relations is to open talks for a peace accord wherein the two sides agree to the "one China" principle but are allowed to have their own interpretations of "one China."

Keywords: ROC security; security strategy; Taiwan arms buildup; missile defense; cross-Strait relations

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A series of missile tests and military exercises undertaken by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the seas near Taiwan from July 1995 to March 1996 has raised serious concerns over the Republic of China's (ROC's) security. It was the first time since the Kinmen (Quemoy) bombardment in August 1958 that the two sides were on the verge of military confrontation. It was also the first time since the ROC government withdrew to Taiwan that the PRC demonstrated its capability to pose a direct military threat to the island. As shown by the missile tests, the PRC could easily disrupt Taiwan's major air and sea lanes, or even blockade the island's air space and seaports.

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Moreover, the accuracy of the PRC's missiles, which was estimated by test firings which landed within 500 yards of their targets,¹ sends a strong warning to Taiwan that it may be unable to protect its military and civil facilities from attack.

Basically, in the past, or at least prior to July 1995, whether the PRC had the intent and capability to attack Taiwan by force was more a political issue than a security one. Reactions to the PRC threat were divided along ideological lines. Those who were for Chinese unification were more likely to believe the danger of war and show concern over the PRC's military power. However, those who advocated Taiwan independence were more likely to dismiss the PRC military threat, arguing that it was a scare tactic used by the ruling government or some pro-unification groups to frighten the general public from advocating Taiwan independence.² Some even claimed that the PRC had neither the opportunity nor the capability to invade Taiwan in the foreseeable future.³ In the event that the PRC did take military action against Taiwan, they believed that the United States would intervene and provide assistance to Taiwan.⁴

The conflicting views on the PRC threat, however, seemed to soften after the Taiwan Strait crisis in March 1996 and worries over Taiwan's security rose. Although the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's major leading opposition party, never accepted the charge that Taiwan independence would lead to Chinese invasion, the DPP supported the need to upgrade Taiwan's defense capabilities in dealing with the threat from Beijing. The New Party, which is pro-Chinese unification and Taiwan's second largest opposition party, was strongly against the Chinese missile tests and called for peaceful negotiations to resolve the disputes between the two sides.⁵ The ruling

¹Sheila Tefft, "China's Missile Tests Reveal a Potential U.S. Can't Ignore," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 26, 1996, 1.

²Tsai Tung-jung, "Taiwan's Security and Self-help," *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times) (Taipei), March 2, 1995, 11; Li Hung-hsi, "Anti-Taiwan Independence Scares Taiwanese," *Ziyou shibao* (Liberty Times) (Taipei), September 26, 1994, 3; and Liu Fu-tseng, "Don't Fool Yourself," *ibid.*, June 6, 1995, 7.

³Defense Research Group of the Taiwan Research Fund, *Guofang baipishu* (National defense white paper) (Taipei: Taiwan Research Fund, 1989), 195.

⁴Parris H. Chang, "If China Crosses the Taiwan Strait: The International Response," *Ziyou shibao*, April 26, 1993, 6; and Hsu Hsin-liang, "If the Chinese Communists Invade Taiwan, the United States Would Intervene," *Zhongguo shibao*, January 16, 1995, 4.

⁵The New Party initiated a mass street demonstration against China's missile tests in Taipei on March 10.

Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party of China) urged the public to maintain faith in the government's countermeasures, stating that it would increase military preparedness and enhance defense capability.

Various proposals have been suggested by both domestic and international sources for Taiwan to deal with mainland China's looming threat. Many have voiced the need to strengthen Taiwan's ballistic missile defense and procure advanced submarines for anti-surface and anti-submarine capability.⁶ Some have asked for the maintenance of U.S. interests in Taiwan's survival and urged the United States to sell arms to Taiwan, especially strategic missile defense weapons.⁷ Many still call for a peaceful negotiation between the two governments to end the mutual hostility and sign an armistice agreement.⁸

This paper will discuss and examine the ROC's security strategies in the aftermath of the Taiwan Strait crisis in March 1996. A systematic analysis will be provided to examine the options being considered or adopted by the ROC government and how they can meet the PRC's security challenges. In discussing options, a number of factors, including domestic as well as international forces, will be dealt with. The final part of the paper will assess the utilities of these options and cross-Strait relations. The author hopes that the paper can shed some light on the ROC's security strategies, its problems, and future challenges in the face of mounting PRC military pressure.

National Security Strategy

The term "national security strategy" has been widely used in

⁶Yung Wei, "Apply Scorpion Fighting Strategy to Deter China Threat," *Zhongguo shibao*, March 4, 1995, 11; and Richard A. Bitzinger and Bates Gill, *Gearing Up for High-Tech Warfare? Chinese and Taiwanese Defense Modernization and Implementation for Military Confrontation Across the Taiwan Strait, 1995-2005* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 1996), i-ii.

⁷William Tow, "U.S. Strategic Capacities and Coercive Options" (Paper prepared for an international workshop on "Political and Strategic Foundations of Taiwan's Future" at the Australian National University, Canberra, May 7-8, 1996); and Stephen J. Yates, "The Challenge of Taiwan's Democracy for the United States and China," *Backgrounder* (Heritage Foundation), no. 272 (April 12, 1996).

⁸Andrew Nien-dzu Yang, "Taiwan's Strategic Capacities and Defensive Options" (Paper prepared for an international workshop on "Political and Strategic Foundations of Taiwan's Future" at the Australian National University, May 7-8, 1996); "Stay Back, China," *The Economist*, March 16, 1996, 13-14; Henry Kissinger, "Restraint Should Be Exercised by All Three Sides—U.S., China, and Taiwan," *Zhongguo shibao*, April 5, 1996, 11.

international relations literature but its meanings are quite unclear and ambiguous.⁹ First, national security strategy is not a single conceptually-defined concept. It consists of at least three main components—national security, defense strategy, and policy response—and each component requires careful definition and formulation. Second, national security strategy is not just defined from the military point of view, although it constitutes a major part of the concept. It also takes the interests of national development, foreign relations, and the international environment into account. Third, national security strategy is more like a policymaking process than policy itself. It involves various domestic and international forces, and has to make constant adjustments in meeting the challenges of environmental changes and national development.

Basically, devising national security strategy is a complicated policy process. A nation needs first to clarify its national interests and objectives in terms of its national needs, values, and development. Following that, an assessment of threats or potential threats to national security or interests is made in calculating necessary actions. A national security strategy will then be devised to respond to the threat, which may consist of a defensive orientation, deterrence, foreign alliance, peaceful negotiation, or others. Finally, a set of policies or policy options designed to implement the strategy will be formulated, comprising mainly a defensive policy but including other aspects of national policy as well.

In general, every sovereign state has, explicitly or implicitly, its own security strategy for protecting national security or creating a favorable environment to advance its national interests. Some nations have published official documents to clarify their positions to the public. The “defense white paper” is one commonly used form, but some have issued special national strategy reports.¹⁰ For example, in its *Defense Paper 1995-1996*, the South Korean government identifies

⁹See Arnold Wolfers, “National Security as an Ambiguous Symbol,” *Political Science Quarterly* 67 (December 1952): 481-502; Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and John Garnett, “Strategic Studies and Its Assumptions,” in *Contemporary Strategy: Theories and Practices*, ed. John Baylis, Ken Booth, John Garnett, and Phil Williams (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), 3-21.

¹⁰George Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States: 1990-1991* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1990); and Ronald Reagan, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988).

three defense goals: "defending the nation against external military threats and aggressions, supporting the peaceful unification of Korea, and contributing to regional stability and world peace."¹¹ In terms of threat assessment, the *White Paper* primarily focuses on North Korea and its rising military threat to South Korea. A defense strategy is then developed in response to the threat: in this case, military preparedness, developing a high-quality military force, and ROK-U.S. security cooperation.

The ROC's *National Defense Report* and other official documents include three main national objectives currently pursued by the government.¹² They are "to strive for peaceful national unification, ensure territorial integrity and sovereignty, and maintain economic prosperity and social stability." The main threats to the ROC's security come from "(1) potential military invasion by forces from the PRC, (2) secession of national territory, and (3) regional conflicts."¹³ Accordingly, especially in response to the PRC threat, the ROC has developed a defense strategy of a "strong defensive posture" and "effective deterrence" for building up its military capabilities and protecting national security.

Nevertheless, although the ROC government has announced its defense strategy to the public, it is only an overall strategic concept or strategic guiding principle. It does not clearly spell out what actions will be taken to implement the strategy, nor does it explain how the security strategy can meet Chinese military challenges; for example, a ballistic missile attack. Moreover, the strategy has a primarily defensive point of view but does not take into account other aspects of national strategy, such as political negotiation with the PRC, cooperative security with the United States, or engagement in regional security dialogues.

The following discussion will take a broader view in examining the ROC's security strategies. It will pay close attention to defense, but other issues related to security will also be included. Since the

¹¹The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, *Defense White Paper 1995-1996* (Seoul: 1996), 16.

¹²ROC Ministry of National Defense, *1996 National Defense Report of the Republic of China* (Taipei: Li Ming Cultural Enterprise Co., 1996); National Unification Council, *Guidelines for National Unification* (Taipei: Executive Yuan, ROC, 1991); and "Full Text of the Inaugural Address by President Lee Teng-hui," *China Post* (Taipei), May 20, 1996, 5.

¹³1996 *National Defense Report of the Republic of China*, 59.

discussion will mainly focus on possible actions that could strengthen the ROC's "effective deterrence" capability against a PRC threat, it could be referred to as a discussion of policy options. Of course, the options shall not be limited to the government's articulations, and the opinions of other sources will be included. According to various recent proposals, there are at least six policy options which are worthy of discussion. They include arms buildup, missile defense, regional collective security, closer relations with the United States, a peace accord with the PRC, and the nuclear option.

Arms Buildup

An arms buildup is the most commonly used method for a nation to strengthen its defense capabilities and counter foreign threats. Indeed, for the last four decades, the ROC government has made great efforts in building up its military strength. It commands an armed force of 400,000 with approximately 1,200 tanks, 40 ships, and 400 fighter planes. However, due to the PRC's military pressure and the need to modernize its armed forces, the ROC is currently undergoing some new trends.

First, the ROC government intends to quicken the establishment of second-generation weaponry. This military modernization program, which started from 1990, is expected to be completed in ten years. The goal is to build an "armored, automatic, electronic and three-dimensional" force.¹⁴ At the time of this writing, a large portion of the program has already been implemented. In 1992, the U.S. government sold 42 Ah-1W Cobra and 26 Oh-58D Kiowa helicopters to Taiwan. These helicopters will aid the army's mobile operation capabilities and air fire. To supplement its ground forces, the army completed the Yunghu (Brave Tiger) program in 1993, which upgraded Taiwan's 450 M-48 main battle tanks.¹⁵ In 1995 and 1996, the army also acquired 160 and 300 M-60A3 tanks (the latter valued at US\$223 million), respectively, from the U.S. government.¹⁶ The army is also working on enhancing its electronic warfare and air

¹⁴ROC Ministry of National Defense, *1992 National Defense Report of the Republic of China* (Taipei: Li Ming Cultural Enterprise Co., 1992), 83.

¹⁵Yang, "Taiwan's Strategic Capacities," 14.

¹⁶*Lianhe bao* (United Daily News) (Taipei), June 26, 1996, 1.

defense capabilities; these will be analyzed later in this paper.

In naval operations, a second-generation fleet will be established within the next three to four years. The new fleet will consist of seven Chengkung-class missile frigates, six Lafayette frigates, six Knox-class frigates, twelve 500-ton Chinchiang-class offshore patrol vessels, and about nine upgraded destroyers. So far, the navy has already commissioned four Chengkung-class frigates, which are modeled on the U.S. Perry-type missile frigates, and built by the state-run China Shipbuilding Corporation.¹⁷ In May 1996, the navy received its first French-built Lafayette frigate, and three more will be received by the end of 1997.¹⁸ In addition, three Knox-class frigates on lease from the United States joined the naval service in October 1993. The first Chinchiang-class vessel made by Taiwan was commissioned in December 1994.

To replace its aging F-104 and F-5 jet fighters, the air force purchased 150 F-16 fighters from the United States and 60 Mirage 2000-5 from France in 1992. The initial delivery of the jets will begin from mid-1997 and be completed by the end of 2000.¹⁹ In the meantime, Taiwan has cooperated with the United States in developing Ching-kuo indigenous defense fighters (IDF). The first IDF combat squadron was commissioned in 1994. All 130 IDF fighters are scheduled to enter service by the end of 1998. In addition, the air force plans to upgrade about 90 F-5 fighters from its current force for future use. In short, all of these aircraft fighters will form the backbone of the ROC's air defense.

Second, both the ROC government and legislators have placed a new emphasis on defense spending. The Legislative Yuan approved a defense budget of NT\$272.2 billion (equivalent to US\$9.9 billion) for the 1997-98 fiscal year, a 5 percent increase over the previous year of NT\$258.3 billion. If aided by a special NT\$58.2 billion annual outlay on advanced fighters ordered in 1992, total defense spending will constitute about 27 percent of the government budget.²⁰ A major part of the increase in defense spending is for weapon procurement and maintenance, including outlays for buying U.S. Stinger anti-

¹⁷1996 National Defense Report of the Republic of China, 134.

¹⁸*Lianhe bao*, May 19, 1996, 1.

¹⁹“Sale of F-16s to Taiwan on Schedule, U.S. Says,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 15, 1996, 4.

²⁰*China News* (Taipei), June 6, 1995, 1.

aircraft missiles and Patriot anti-missile systems.

It is significant to note that although the 5 percent increase of military spending for the next year is modest, it marks the first time since the post-Cold War era began that the ROC government has raised its defense budget. In 1989, the ROC's defense budget of NT\$255.3 billion occupied 45 percent of the government budget, but after then, there was a clear descending trend. In 1990, defense spending dropped to NT\$231.9 billion, or 34 percent of the government budget. The ratio continued to decrease in the following years to 30 percent in 1991, 27 percent in 1992, 25 percent in 1993, 24 percent in 1994, and 24 percent in 1995. In 1996, defense spending was NT\$258.3 billion, or the same level as 1989, but the share had decreased to only 22.7 percent.²¹

Third, the ROC has continued to strengthen its early warning and surveillance capabilities. Due to the short flight distance between Taiwan and mainland China and the need to protect Taiwan from Chinese air and missile attacks, it is necessary for the ROC to detect Chinese military actions early so as to gain more warning time for combat readiness. In the mid-1980s, the ROC military established a semi-automatic Tienwang (Sky Net) air defense system to replace the traditional height-finding or search radars. A more developed and automatic Chiangwang (Strong Net) system was installed in 1990, which links the island-wide radar stations, air force bases, and anti-aircraft missile units through a centralized command and control center.²² The ROC air defense system was further improved in early 1996 when two of the four E-2T Hawkeye II early warning/command and control aircraft ordered from the United States in 1993 finally arrived in Taiwan. Currently, the ROC military is seeking to procure long-range ground-to-air and ground-to-surface radar, and electronic warfare and jamming aircraft, as well as set up a satellite monitoring and reconnaissance system in the future.²³

Fourth, the ROC is planning to procure new advanced weapons, especially submarines and missile defense systems, from the United States and other Western countries. The PRC has one of the largest submarine fleets in the world, and its submarines have currently been

²¹1996 National Defense Report of the Republic of China, 124.

²²Bitzinger and Gill, *Gearing Up for High-Tech Warfare?* 27-28.

²³1996 National Defense Report of the Republic of China, 70.

active in waters near Taiwan. In order to counter these activities, it has been a military priority for the ROC to beef up its anti-submarine forces. The ROC navy has set up an anti-submarine command center in southern Taiwan, and another command center will be set up in the east.²⁴ Meanwhile, under its “second-generation warship” development program, most of Taiwan’s new ships have been equipped with advanced submarine detection capabilities.

However, the ROC has not been successful in procuring advanced submarines from foreign countries. The ROC navy has only four submarines; two of them are old, unarmed, and just for training purposes, and another two are diesel-powered submarines built by the Dutch in the early 1980s. The navy plans to set up a submarine force consisting of ten to twelve submarines in the next five years. However, because of Chinese obstruction, the plan has not worked well. In the first half of 1996, countries like the United States, Australia, and Germany all turned down Taiwan’s requests for purchasing new submarines.²⁵ Taiwan has certainly been disappointed over the matter but it has not been discouraged. Past experience has shown that as long as Taiwan has enough patience, diplomatic skill, and financial power, it will eventually be able to make a deal for submarines.²⁶

Missile Defense System

The PRC’s missile tests in waters near Taiwan in March 1996 demonstrated that the ROC needs an effective anti-missile system to protect its national security. According to a military report, the ROC plans to establish a nationwide missile defense system in the next five years.²⁷ The system is composed of three layers of air defense—high altitude, low altitude, and field operations. For high-altitude defense, two anti-missile systems will be deployed: the Patriot-based Modified Air Defense System (MADS) and the Taiwan-built Tienkung (Sky

²⁴“ROC Navy to Beef Up Anti-submarine Forces,” *China Post*, June 21, 1996, 18.

²⁵“Australia Will Not Sell Subs to Taiwan,” *China News*, May 17, 1996, 2.

²⁶It took three years for Taiwan to procure two submarines from the Netherlands and almost ten years for it to procure advanced jet fighters from the United States and France. Indeed, Taiwan has accumulated much experience, knowledge, and skill in foreign military weapons procurement. See also, “ROC Navy Chief Asks U.S. for New Submarine Policy,” *China Post*, August 20, 1996, 16.

²⁷*Zhong guo shibao*, August 22, 1996, 1.

Bow) II. In 1993, the United States agreed to sell Taiwan five Patriot missile systems, which are expected to arrive in Taiwan in the fall of 1996. Three of the missile systems will be deployed in the Taipei metropolis, and the other two will be deployed separately in Taichung and Kaohsiung.²⁸ The Tienkung II (100-kilometer range) is a modified version of the Tienkung I (30-40 kilometer range) and was first deployed in September 1993. The ROC military is expected to build 250 Tienkung I and 250 Tienkung II missiles before 2001. They will be positioned at four military bases on the island and two bases off the island.

The Tienkung I and the Nike Hercules SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) serve as low-altitude defense. Currently, Taiwan has about thirteen Nike Hercules SAM bases, and plans to expand their number to twenty as well as upgrade their detection capabilities.²⁹ As for air defense of field operations, the ROC has just completed a missile deal valued at US\$420 million with the United States, which will sell Taiwan 1,299 vehicle-mounted "Stinger" anti-aircraft missiles along with other related equipment.³⁰ The Stinger missile, which has a range of five kilometers and high mobility, will be helpful for air defense of ground battalions. The ROC is also attempting to order French "Mistral" anti-aircraft missile systems, but the deal is still in the bargaining process.

The ROC is also interested in joining the U.S. "Theater Missile Defense" (TMD) project.³¹ The TMD, which was a subsystem of President Ronald Reagan's proposed Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), is designed to destroy incoming ballistic missiles in outer space or high-altitude air space. The U.S. military plans to complete the experimental process in the next few years and begin deployment from 2001. Currently in Asia, only Japan has joined the TMD project. The ROC military has shown interest in the project, but it is too early to anticipate the result, as there are too many uncertain factors, i.e., the feasibility and cost of the project, U.S. interest, the PRC reaction, and the East Asian security environment, none of which can be easily clarified.

²⁸"U.S. Will Update Patriot System," *China News*, June 18, 1996, 2.

²⁹The Nike Hercules SAMs were provided by the United States in the 1960s, and have been deployed in Taiwan for more than thirty years.

³⁰"U.S. Congress Notified of Stinger Sales to Taiwan," *China Post*, August 25, 1996, 1.

³¹*Zhongguo shibao*, November 13, 1995, 9.

In addition, the ROC military seems to be interested in developing short- or medium-range ballistic missiles to counteract the PRC missile threat. A proposed Tienchi (Sky Spear) ballistic missile project is based on the foundation of the established Tienkung missile systems. It is estimated that in two or three years, Taiwan can successfully remodel the Tienkung system from ground-to-air to ground-to-ground through its own efforts. However, the proposed Tienchi missile project has caused controversy: some are in favor of it and believe that offense is the best defense, while others believe that their counterbalancing function is quite limited and the project will escalate the conflict across the Taiwan Strait.³² As of this writing, the ROC has not yet announced that the Tienchi project is official.

Regional Collective Security

As a small nation, the ROC has been very concerned about Asia-Pacific regional security. In fact, ROC President Lee Teng-hui was one of the few Asian leaders who made the early call in the post-Cold War period for the establishment of an Asian collective security system. He proposed that all concerned countries in the region should participate in order to foster common interests and solve differences, and stated that the ROC government would be pleased to contribute its efforts for this purpose, including donating to a common security fund.³³ The ROC interest in joining a regional security organization has gained more impetus since the recent Taiwan Strait crisis. If Taiwan becomes a member, it at least could help reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait at a time of conflict and offer a communication channel for problem-solving.

However, Taiwan's interest in a regional security organization has not been well received by Asia-Pacific countries. Because of opposition from Beijing, not only has Taipei been excluded from the Asia-Pacific institution-building process, but it has also failed to gain access to regional security dialogues such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP). The former, which was established in

³²Arthur S. Ding, "The Costs and Benefits for the ROC Developing Ballistic Missiles," *Zhongyang ribao* (Central Daily News) (Taipei), January 13, 1996, 10.

³³Lee Teng-hui, "Outlook for a New Order in the Asia-Pacific Region" (Message to the Fourth Asia Open Forum, Kyoto, Japan, November 8, 1992).

1994 and consists of the ASEAN members and most of the Asia-Pacific countries, is currently the only government-to-government security organization in the region.³⁴ In 1996, at its third annual meeting, the ARF took the PRC's position that the Taiwan issue is a Chinese domestic issue, and the PRC officially became a member state of the ARF.³⁵ The CSCAP, established in 1993 and affiliated to the ARF for policy consultation, is an informal institution composed by academic institutes of ASEAN members and seven other Pacific states.³⁶ The CSCAP has denied Taiwan membership but allows Taiwan scholars, based on individual status and invitations by working groups, to participate in group discussions. Currently, the CSCAP has four working groups—Confidence and Security Building Measures, Concepts of Cooperative and Comprehensive Security, Maritime Cooperation, and Enhancement of Security Cooperation in the North Pacific.

In Taipei's view, this exclusion is both discriminatory and unfair to the ROC, and its response has been to maintain communication channels with all Asian countries. Some of its adopted measures have included continued participation in CSCAP working groups, developing closer academic cooperation and exchanges with ASEAN scholars, and applying for observer status in the CSCAP. Some have also proposed that in order to break its diplomatic isolation, Taiwan should establish its own regional security dialogue or forum by inviting various institutes from Asian countries to discuss security issues of common concern.³⁷

Closer Relations with the United States

The United States was the only country that provided security assistance to the ROC during the recent Taiwan Strait crisis. Not only did it publicly call for Beijing's self-restraint in the military exercises, but it also deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups in the waters near Taiwan to show its concern over the tense situation.

³⁴Michael Antolik, "The ASEAN Regional Forum: The Spirit of Constructive Engagement," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16, no. 2 (September 1994): 117-36.

³⁵*Lianhe bao*, July 26, 1996, 9.

³⁶Paul M. Evans, "Building Security: The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)," *Pacific Review* 7, no. 2 (1994): 125-40.

³⁷*Zhongguo shibao*, June 22, 1996, 2.

Although many other countries were sympathetic with Taiwan, none voiced opposition to the PRC's war games. The event proved that the United States is against "any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means,"³⁸ and is also the only country that Taiwan can depend upon in security matters.

Although the U.S. moves in the recent Taiwan Strait crisis were highly appreciated by the ROC government and the public, some have questioned the former's actions and motives. They have argued that Washington overreacted and risked escalating the conflict. However, the United States understood that the PRC was only engaged in military exercises; its actions were not so much for Taiwan's security interests as for maintaining its influence and prestige in the Asia-Pacific region. Hence, the U.S. actions in the recent Taiwan Strait crisis were a special case, and should not be taken as a general response. Until now, the United States has not changed its policy of "strategic ambiguity" in relation to Taiwan's security.³⁹

Nevertheless, developing a closer relationship with the United States has become one of the main goals of the ROC's foreign policy. According to the policy report of Jason C. Hu, Taipei's newly appointed chief representative to Washington, top priority will be placed on strengthening communication with the U.S. government, upgrading the bilateral relationship, and continuing ongoing mutual visits of high-ranking officials. On security matters, Taipei will continue to urge the United States to keep its commitments in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, including a clear expression of the U.S. intent to oppose the use of force against the island, the continued sale of advanced defensive weapons to Taiwan, and providing help to Taiwan for joining regional security dialogues or forums.⁴⁰

Peace Accord with the PRC

Prior to the presidential election, President Lee Teng-hui em-

³⁸This is quoted from Section 2. (b) (4) of the 1979 "Taiwan Relations Act."

³⁹David S. Chou, "U.S. Roles in the Taiwan Strait Crisis," and Tai Wan-chin, "The Involvement of the U.S. in the March 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis: Analysis from the Theory of Coercive Diplomacy" (Papers presented at the Conference on the Security Relationship Between the United States and Taiwan: After the March 1996 Mini-Crisis, Tamkang University, Taipei, July 10, 1996).

⁴⁰Jason C. Hu, "The Prospects for the ROC-U.S. Relationship" (Report to the Foreign Relations Committee and Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the Legislative Yuan, Taipei, June 5, 1996).

phasized in a press conference that whoever is elected as president should aim to end hostilities across the Taiwan Strait and develop a peace accord between the two sides.⁴¹ After he was reelected, President Lee in his inaugural address again called upon the two sides of the Strait to end hostilities, and stated that if necessary, he was willing to embark on a journey of peace to mainland China.⁴² In addition, Vice President and Premier Lien Chan also urged the two sides to formally terminate hostilities and sign a peace accord as soon as possible.⁴³

There are some good reasons why Taipei has made such a peace accord proposal. First, legally, Taipei and Beijing have not terminated their state of hostilities since the civil war, even though cross-Strait activities have substantially increased over the last decade. Second, in Jiang Zemin's "eight points" speech issued on January 30, 1995, Beijing seemed interested in holding talks with Taipei on formally ending hostilities. Third, the signing of a peace accord with Beijing would ease the tension and develop the confidence of both sides. Finally, a peaceful and stable relationship across the Strait would greatly assist Taiwan's security and economic development.

However, proposed talks on a peace accord have not proceeded well. As of this writing, the two sides have not been able to resume dialogue, as Beijing suspended talks a year ago after President Lee's visit to the United States. The major problem has been the different perceptions of the "one China" principle. Beijing's position is that so long as Taipei accepts the principle of "one China," all issues can be discussed, including official talks between the two sides and peace accord proposals. However, Taipei is not willing to accept this precondition since it is strongly suspicious of Beijing's interpretation of "one China." From Taipei's perspective, the "one China" principle implies that Beijing is the central government and Taiwan is merely a part of the PRC, which is unacceptable to Taipei.

It seems that dialogue between the two sides will not occur in the immediate future. Beijing is not in a rush to deal with Taipei; instead, it intends to use Hong Kong as leverage to place more pres-

⁴¹"Contents of President Lee's Press Conference," *Lianhe bao*, February 24, 1996, 5.

⁴²"Full Text of the Inaugural Address by President Lee," 5.

⁴³Vice President Lien Chan's Keynote Speech to the 25th Sino-American Conference on Contemporary China, Taipei, June 10, 1996.

sure on Taiwan for political and economic concessions. Currently, most Taiwan exports to mainland China go through Hong Kong, and the amount of exports to the mainland and Hong Kong combined accounts for one-third of Taiwan's total exports. It will be almost impossible for Taiwan to ignore the reality of 1997, and other political solutions must be sought.

The Nuclear Option

International society has often raised questions about Taipei's nuclear intentions, but the ROC government has never claimed that it has had the interest or intent to develop nuclear arms. In the aftermath of the recent Taiwan Strait crisis, President Lee reiterated that "the ROC would definitely not develop nuclear weapons even though we have the capability to do so."⁴⁴ However, it is interesting to note that recently, a few scholars have openly called on Taiwan to use the nuclear option.⁴⁵ That is, they are not actually calling on Taiwan to build nuclear weapons, but rather keep the option open so it can have an extra bargaining chip in nuclear negotiations or regional security talks.

The pro-nuclear option defenders argue that Taiwan should adopt unconventional strategies to break its diplomatic isolation and gain international attention. For too long, Taiwan's well-being and national interests have been ignored by international society. Even though Taiwan has behaved well and pledged to abide by the rules of international nonproliferation norms, it has still not been allowed to participate in regional or international security arrangements. Moreover, any Taiwan pledge not to develop nuclear arms or massive destructive weapons will not change Beijing's military and diplomatic policies against Taiwan. Therefore, for strategic concerns, it has not been necessary to abandon the nuclear option, even though Taiwan has stated that it would prefer not to develop nuclear weapons.

Although the "nuclear ambiguity" approach may appeal to some under Taiwan's current isolated situation, it has not been paralleled by Taiwan's foreign policy and economic development. In fact, under a bilateral agreement with the United States, the ROC has adopted

⁴⁴*Zhongguo shibao*, August 1, 1996, 2.

⁴⁵Cheng-yi Lin, "Taiwan's Nuclear Thinking," *ibid.*, August 3, 1996, 11.

and implemented the international high-tech control system since July 1995.⁴⁶ It also plans, after the system's stable implementation, to further enlarge its scope to include such international nonproliferation items as nuclear and chemical weapons and missiles. In short, the point is that no matter whether the ROC can become a member of various international or regional nonproliferation regimes, it is almost impossible to reverse trends and deviate from current practices.

Assessment

Since the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the ROC has made some efforts and adjustments in its strategic planning. As shown from the previous discussion, there have been some developments which are worthy of our attention. First, the ROC has not made a major shift in its security strategies from the preceding period: that is, strong defense posture along with peaceful relations with the PRC. The ROC has mostly reinforced its defensive capability and developed closer relations with friendly nations. This also demonstrates that with a lack of resources, strategic options for small nations like the ROC are often limited. Second, there have been some signs that indicate that there is growing support for an offensive posture in defending Taiwan. This includes calls for introducing the "scorpion strategy," developing ground-to-ground ballistic missiles, and keeping the nuclear option open. Third, the ROC government seems to understand the importance of cooperative security developments in the Asia-Pacific region in the post-Cold War era.⁴⁷ It has strived to engage in regional security dialogues, join international nonproliferation regimes, and restore the communication channels across the Taiwan Strait, but none of these has turned out successfully.

Basically, cross-Strait relations are more of a political issue than a security one. The majority of views from domestic and international sources agree that the best approach to solve the problem

⁴⁶Tuan Y. Cheng, "The Republic of China's High-Tech Export Control System," *Issues & Studies* 32, no. 5 (May 1996): 1-23.

⁴⁷Cooperative security seeks to accomplish national security through constructive dialogues, confidence-building, and institutionalized arrangement rather than through threats of political or military coercion. For more details of the concept, see Janne E. Nolan, ed., *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994).

is through political negotiation. However, before this can properly take place, the ROC must prepare for the worst.

It is generally agreed that the ROC owns a rather strong military force for an East Asian country, and its strength will be further upgraded by the completion of its second-generation weaponry program in 2000. But even so, it is uncertain whether Taiwan could deter any kind of Chinese military attack by itself. Moreover, Taiwan is quite vulnerable to Chinese missile threats. Even if a missile defense system is installed within the next few years, it is still unclear whether Taiwan can confidently defend itself. Indeed, Taiwan's arms buildup and the introduction of a missile defense system are for deterrent purposes, which are indispensable but do not guarantee safety. They also help build the confidence of the general public.

It is also generally agreed that the United States is vital to the ROC's national security. Not only has it provided defensive weapons to Taiwan, but it is also against any methods other than peaceful means in solving the cross-Strait conflict. However, there are some problems with Taipei counting on Washington for security assistance. First, Taiwan often cannot procure the weapons such as submarines that it badly needs. Second, the United States is not always reliable and helpful. Its policies toward Taiwan are unclear, ambiguous, and easy to change. Third, Taiwan is only part of U.S. concerns in its overall assessment of its relations with the PRC. Indeed, the ROC government is fully aware of these problems. It has attempted to separate the Taipei-Washington relationship from the Beijing-Washington relationship, and reduce the interference of the China factor; however, it has not proved successful.

With the rapid growth of China's economy and military strength, Taiwan certainly faces a greater challenge in its national security and foreign relations. As noted above, it should be in Taiwan's interests to act beyond military means in response to Chinese intimidation or threats. The proposed peace accord is the one option that has received the most attention recently; however, because of the controversy over the "one China" issue, both sides have been unable to open talks. In my personal view, for both domestic political stability and salvaging cross-Strait relations, the ROC government will insist on the "one China" principle and the pursuit of national unification. The meaning of "one China" could be defined in a more flexible way in terms of the circumstances that the ROC presently faces. Above all, in a strategic sense, it seems unnecessary and risky for the ROC to deviate from or abandon the long-held principle,

which will only worsen the distrust and intensify the tense relations between the two sides.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed and analyzed the ROC's security strategies under the impact of the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. It indicates that the ROC has rather limited options to respond to future PRC threats. Defensively, the most the ROC can do is strengthen its deterrent capabilities and establish a missile defense system; however, these are costly and only for deterrent purposes. Diplomatically, the only foreseeable choice is to develop a closer link with the United States; however, the bilateral relationship has been mostly determined by the U.S. side and its own national interest concerns, the China factor, and domestic politics. As for cross-Strait relations, due to political differences and lack of trust on both sides, it will not be easy to change the course of conflict in a short time. One possible way to break the present deadlock is to open talks for a peace accord wherein the two sides agree to the "one China" principle but are allowed to have their own interpretations of "one China."

In the long term, domestic consensus-building and economic competitiveness are the two other major factors related to Taiwan's security. It is beyond the capability of this paper to explore their roles, but they will be included in future research. Domestic politics has certainly played a more important role in determining Taiwan's foreign relations and security policies. Without an understanding of the dynamic nature of Taiwan's political forces, it is not easy to foresee the future development of Taiwan's security strategies. Moreover, the economy is the main force that has accounted for Taiwan's survival and national development. If Taipei loses its economic edge in the near future, it will lose its bargaining chip in dealing with Beijing.