

Foreign Military Relations: Taiwan and China Look Abroad*

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Taiwan faces numerous challenges as it modernizes and reforms its defense establishment—the challenges of developing the right relationships between civilians and military, and the right degree of jointness among the military services. These are challenges that we in the United States have had a lot of experience with over the years, and we are eager to help. Just as important as arms sales issues, these non-hardware or software exchanges serve very important purposes. They can help Taiwan to better integrate newly acquired systems into its inventory. And these initiatives can provide an avenue to exchange views on Taiwan's requirements for defense modernization, to include professionalization, organizational issues, and training.

—Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Defense Secretary, March 2002¹

Since June 1989, political strains between Washington and Beijing over regional and international issues have caused the U.S.-China military relationship to oscillate up and down. The Pentagon describes the current

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¹Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Remarks to U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, March 11, 2002, St. Petersburg, Florida," Reuters, April 8, 2002.

policy for contact with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as "limited but measured."² Meanwhile, the buildup by China's armed forces opposite Taiwan has led Washington to steadily increase its military relationship with Taipei, especially on the "software" side. Over the past decade, hundreds of Taiwan military officers have visited the United States for a broad range of military training and exchanges. The number of active duty U.S. military officers visiting Taiwan has also increased by tenfold since 1992, when only limited visits were allowed.³ One Pentagon official compared the U.S. military relationship with China and Taiwan as follows: "The U.S. military relationship with China is 90 percent form and 10 percent substance, while it is 90 percent substance and 10 percent form with Taiwan."⁴

Although Taipei relies heavily on the United States for the island's military modernization, Beijing has a very broad foreign military relations program aimed at helping the PLA modernize its forces. Given Taiwan's international political status, Taipei has opted for a low-profile yet active military exchange program with several countries, especially the United States. Although not all the details are made public, the PLA sends hundreds of officers abroad annually to a growing number of countries to discuss a broad range of military issues. In addition, some PLA officers are spending from one to two years abroad as students in civilian and military schools. The PLA also hosts dozens of foreign military delegations each year, and has foreign military students studying at its National Defense University (國防大學).

The purpose of this paper is to briefly trace the history of the U.S. military relations with Taiwan and China, and to provide an overview of the military relations Taiwan and China have with other countries.

²Interview with Pentagon officials, May 2002.

³Nadia Tsao, "U.S. Strikes Balance with Taiwan Arms Sales," *Taipei Times*, November 7, 2000. The term "tenfold" has to be put into perspective that the baseline in 1992 was very small to begin with.

⁴Interview with Pentagon official, May 2002.

U.S.-Taiwan Military Relations

The 1950s-1970s

From the signing of the U.S.-Taiwan Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954 until the early 1970s, the United States maintained a robust military relationship with Taiwan because the Republic of China (ROC) was an ally, and the U.S. military was using Taiwan as a support base for its operations in Vietnam.

In March 1953, the United States established a formal "Formosa Patrol Force" under the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT).⁵ This force became the Navy service component of the Formosa Defense Command, which was created in December 1953 as a sub-unified command under the Commander in Chief of Pacific Command (CINCPAC). The initial commander of the Formosa Defense Command was also the commander of the Seventh Fleet. In 1957, the command received its own full-time commander (a Navy vice-admiral) and changed its name to the U.S. Taiwan Defense Command (TDC), with operational control of all U.S. forces committed to the defense of Taiwan.

By the time Vietnam fell in 1975, almost all of the U.S. military's operational forces had left Taiwan, resulting in the TDC becoming a mere shell during the latter half of the 1970s.⁶ According to a declassified history of the U.S. Pacific Command published in 1979, "Shortly after President Nixon's 1972 visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Shanghai Communiqué at that time, the first steps were taken to withdraw U.S. forces from Taiwan."⁷ The report stated that "a total of 1,121 U.S. military personnel were stationed in Taiwan on 31 May 1978," and that following President Carter's announcement to recognize the PRC "all

⁵Peter M. Swartz, *Drawing Lines in the Sea: The U.S. Navy Confronts the Unified Command Plan (UCP), 1946-99* (Center for Naval Analyses, January 1999), 148. The Formosa Patrol Force changed its name to the Taiwan Patrol Force in 1955.

⁶The author was stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Taiwan from 1974 to 1976.

⁷"CINCPAC Command History: 1978" (Published by the Command History Branch, Office of the Joint Secretary, Headquarters CINCPAC, 1979), vol. 1:62-63. This document was declassified in 1998.

U.S. forces would be withdrawn by 30 April 1979, and the Mutual Defense Treaty was to be terminated by the United States effective 1 January 1980."

The U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) provides a good example of the reduction in force during the 1970s. During the 1960s, MAAG maintained advisors in units below the regiment level throughout the ground forces in Taiwan, and thousands of Taiwan's military personnel at all levels had trained in the United States.⁸ According to the 1972 CINCPAC command history, the number of active duty U.S. military advisors in MAAG was reduced from 190 in 1971 to 157 in 1972. MAAG also had about 25 U.S. civilians and 25 local employees. The 1978 CINCPAC history listed only 9 MAAG personnel in October 1978.

Arms sales to Taiwan date back to the 1950s, when the United States provided most of the weapons systems and training under the military grants-in-aid program at virtually no cost to Taiwan.⁹ By 1965, Taiwan's economic prosperity allowed all U.S. economic assistance to be phased out, while the military grants-in-aid program was gradually phased down over the next fifteen years. In 1977, the U.S. Congress was still lending about US\$80 million annually to Taiwan to purchase U.S. military equipment. By 1979, Taiwan was paying for 96 percent of its annual military purchases under the foreign military sales (FMS) program, with the United States still providing some help to upgrade the defense system.¹⁰

The 1980s

During the mid-1980s, the United States continued to sell Taiwan defensive arms under the provisions of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act—at the same time that the U.S. military relationship with China was expanding. Although China protested the arms sales on grounds that they violated the 1982 Shanghai Communiqué, the objections were somewhat muted because Beijing perceived that the United States was maintaining a rough

⁸Interview with former chief of staff, U.S. MAAG, Taiwan, April 2002.

⁹John H. Erstline, "The Crisis of the Republic of China," in *About Face: The China Decision and Its Consequences*, ed. John Tierney, Jr. (New York: Arlington House, 1979), 183.

¹⁰Anthony Kubek, "Principles over Pragmatism," in Tierney, *About Face*, 138.

balance with defense ties with both sides. For example, the United States helped Taiwan with its Indigenous Defensive Fighter (IDF) program at the same time that the Pentagon was working with the PLA and Aviation Ministry to upgrade the F-8-2 fighter. In addition, the United States agreed that Taiwan could build several new Perry-class type frigates under U.S. supervision, while the Pentagon was also negotiating a torpedo program with the PLA Navy. The overall objective in Washington was to facilitate an indigenous Taiwan defense industry in the hope that over time the arms sales irritant to U.S.-China relations would be minimized.

The 1990s to Present

Since 1979, the primary focus of U.S. military relations with Taiwan has been arms sales. However, the United States has not been the sole source of Taipei's weapons systems. According to worldwide sources, Taiwan received a total of US\$21 billion in arms deliveries from 1993 to 2000, of which US\$12.8 billion came from the United States.¹¹ Part of the US\$21 billion total includes Mirage fighters and Lafayette frigates from France.

Although the public focus has been on weapons systems, following the tensions in the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96, the Clinton administration began to quietly expand the military relationship with Taiwan to levels unprecedented since the 1970s.¹² The broader exchanges have increased the amount of attention paid to "software," including discussions over strategy, training, logistics, command and control, and plans in the event of an attack from the PRC. These exchanges were prompted by U.S. concerns about Taiwan's integration of the hardware the island had received into a credible joint service defensive capability.

The Bush administration has further increased the number of ex-

¹¹Shirley Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990," CRS Report to Congress, January 30, 2002, 1-2. In an interview, Kan stated, "One caveat is that the values of arms sales to Taiwan are broad indicators of trends and significance, and one should be careful about using the data as accurate numbers, especially across many years."

¹²Ibid., 2. Original reports came from Jim Mann, "U.S. Has Secretly Expanded Military Ties with Taiwan," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1999; Kurt M. Campbell and Derek J. Mitchell, "Crisis in the Taiwan Strait?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 4 (July/August 2001): 14-25.

changes. In July 2001, the Pentagon revealed that there had been seven meetings since 1997 with Taiwan military authorities "to discuss issues of interaction and means by which to provide for the defense of Taiwan."¹³ The Pentagon has also sent various teams to Taiwan to assess the island's military capabilities and needs. The Bush administration also allowed Minister of National Defense Tang Yiau-ming (湯曜明) to attend a defense-related conference in St. Petersburg, Florida, in March 2002 hosted by the U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, where he met with Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Assistant Secretary of State Jim Kelly.

Taiwan's Foreign Military Relations

Prior to the PRC replacing the ROC in the United Nations in November 1971, the ROC military had an active foreign relations program, especially with the United States, Israel, South Africa, and other Asian countries such as South Korea and Singapore.¹⁴ Beginning with the U.N. recognition of the PRC in 1971, most countries began changing their recognition from Taipei to Beijing, so that today less than thirty countries still formally recognize the ROC. However, many countries still have strong relations with Taipei through reciprocal trade offices that function as embassies. Some of the ROC's trade offices overseas include active duty military officers who perform the same functions as military attachés or military assistance and procurement officers.

While the PLA has increased the visibility of its foreign relations program since the early 1980s, the ROC military has opted for a low-profile

¹³Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990," 2. Original reports came from *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times) (Taipei), July 18, 2001; *Washington Times*, July 18, 2001; U.S. Department of Defense News Briefing, July 19, 2001.

¹⁴From 1950 until Washington changed its diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC in 1979, thousands of ROC military personnel received training at all levels in the United States. Training levels are now returning to pre-1979 levels. Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and South Korea all changed their diplomatic recognition to the PRC in the early 1990s.

yet active program. In addition to discussions and training associated with acquisition and maintenance of U.S. weapons systems, Taiwan has also maintained continuous military relations and exchanges with several Asian, Latin American, and African countries. Taipei also established a European-wide weapons procurement office in Paris in the early 1990s. The Political Warfare College (政治作戰學校) provides a Foreign Officers Course for select officers from Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. In addition, the Naval Academy (海軍軍官學校) has special courses for foreign officers.

Active duty military officers are also involved in visiting fellow and graduate programs abroad, including the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and Germany. For example, there were sixteen officers involved in strategic studies, command and staff education, master's degree programs, and Ph.D. programs in foreign military and civilian universities in 1997. In addition, the Ministry of National Defense holds seminars and entrusts private academic institutions to hold seminars on national defense and special topics.¹⁵ According to interviews, Taiwan funds approximately two hundred military students per year in the full range of U.S. military training and academic institutions, including the various war colleges, service schools, and cadet exchanges.¹⁶ Taiwan officers also fill various senior fellow and researcher positions set aside for military officers at civilian universities and think tanks.

Finally, Taiwan's military hosts numerous foreign retired senior officers and defense officials, who were not able to visit Taiwan when they were on active duty or serving in an official capacity. Taipei takes these opportunities to inform them about developments on Taiwan and to elicit the support of these foreign contacts when they return home.

¹⁵*Republic of China: 1998 National Defense Report* (Taipei: Li Ming Cultural Enterprise Co., 1998), 184-85.

¹⁶Interviews with various American and Taiwan government and nongovernment people, April 2002.

U.S.-China Military Relations

The first decade of the U.S.-China military relationship that began following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 has been well documented. Since the early contacts, the strategic motivation for the defense relationship has changed, and with it, the nature of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. The Cold War context provided the dominant and relatively clear rationale for the early years. In the post-Cold War era, the strategic basis for U.S.-China defense cooperation has changed. As a result, the existing state of the political relationship between Washington and Beijing sets the boundaries for military cooperation.

The 1980s were characterized by the rise of military interaction with the United States based on the "three pillars"—high-level visits, working-level exchanges, and military-technology cooperation—which were agreed upon during Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's September 1983 visit to China. The "three pillars" served as the framework for the defense relationship throughout the 1980s, which averaged about two to three U.S. military delegation trips to China per month. At that time, there was a long list of senior Department of Defense civilian and military officials who wanted to visit China. The Pentagon also provided the PLA with copies of different non-operational regulations, documents, and manuals, covering everything from training to personnel management to guiding documents for certification of aircraft parts manufacturing.

The bubble of optimistic expectations burst as the PLA's crackdown in Tiananmen (天安門) in June 1989 became the focus of the U.S. political reaction and brought the Sino-U.S. military relationship to an abrupt halt. President George Bush suspended all high-level exchanges with China, which included visits by defense officials, as well as the full range of defense technology cooperation, including all FMS programs that had developed over the preceding decade.

The 1990s and early 2000s can be characterized by a series of ups and downs as the military relationship resumed and then was overcome by events. Following Tiananmen, there was almost no contact until late 1993, when exchanges resumed at a moderate pace. These exchanges were cut

short by the PLA's missile launches in the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96. From early 1997 until the United States inadvertently bombed China's embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, several senior Department of Defense officials visited China and PLA leaders visited the United States.¹⁷ Since 1999, various events have led to another downturn in the relationship, including China's continuing deployment of short-range ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan, the PLA's growing military modernization program aimed at Taiwan, Congressional legislation establishing strict rules for the Pentagon's dealings with the PLA, and the Department of Defense establishing new criteria for contact with the PLA following the EP-3 and F-8 collision over the South China Sea in April 2001. One of the latest issues of contention was Beijing's protest against allowing Taiwan's defense minister to participate in the U.S.-Taiwan Business Council's defense conference in Florida in March 2002.¹⁸

China's Foreign Military Relations

Although U.S.-China military relations have had their high and low points over the past decade, China's overall worldwide foreign military relations program has grown considerably and continues to expand across a broad spectrum. When the PRC celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in October 1999, the official Xinhua News Agency carried an article reviewing fifty years of PLA diplomacy.¹⁹ Pertinent highlights from that report are as follows:

¹⁷U.S. defense officials who visited China in 1997 and 1998 included Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Shalikashvili, USAF Chief of Staff General Michael Ryan, USN Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jay Johnson, and U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) Commander Admiral Joseph Prueher.

¹⁸"China Protests U.S. Official Contacts with Taiwan," *People's Daily*, March 14, 2002, available at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200203/14/eng20020314_92085.shtml>.

¹⁹Huang Cailong, "Moving Toward the World and Peace: Roundup of Five Decades of PLA Foreign Military Interaction," Xinhua, September 14, 1999 (FBIS-FTS 19991005000721, October 5, 1999).

- From 1949 to 1977, the PLA sent delegations abroad for discussions, but never sent any ships abroad. Since reform began in 1978, the PLA has established over ninety military attaché offices overseas [today the number stands at one hundred]. Senior PLA officers have led over 1,300 delegations to more than eighty countries. The PLA has welcomed over 2,100 military delegations from five continents, of which more than half of the delegations were led by defense ministers, joint service commanders, chiefs of the general staff, and service commanders.²⁰
- During the 1990s, the PLA's Academy of Military Science (軍事科學院) has interacted with counterparts in twenty-seven countries. Since the National Defense University was founded in 1985, it has received 749 military delegations from seventy-nine countries, involving 6,407 foreign military personnel.
- Since 1991, the PLA has sent over 20,000 people in more than 800 specialized technical delegations overseas to investigate, cooperate in research, and participate in studies.

Military student exchanges have also taken center stage in the PLA's foreign relations program. The 1999 Xinhua report stated that over two thousand military students from more than seventy Asian, African, and Latin American countries had trained in China.²¹ From 1996 to 1999, the PLA sent over one hundred military students to more than twenty coun-

²⁰In terms of comparison with the United States, Secretary of Defense William Cohen averaged one foreign trip per month during 1998 and visited over forty countries, while China's Minister of Defense Chi Haotian (遲浩田) took two trips to a total of nine countries. Also in 1998, the PACOM participated in a total of 1,368 activities with foreign military forces, including 223 exercises, 16 disaster relief projects, and 32 humanitarian assistance projects. The U.S. Navy also made 655 port visits within PACOM's area of responsibility, while the PLA Navy conducted a single three-ship visit to Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. See Kenneth W. Allen and Eric A. McVadon on *China's Foreign Military Relations*, published by the Henry L. Stimson Center in October 1999.

²¹No specific dates were given for this training, which could reach back to the 1960s. Unclear is if this means only students at military academies, or whether it includes foreign military personnel who trained on specific Chinese weapons systems purchased from China.

tries, including Australia, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Romania, Hungary, and Poland.²² Meanwhile, military students from countries such as Romania, Poland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, South Korea, and Israel had studied at the PLA's National Defense University. In addition, from 1998 to 1999, China reached agreements with Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and pertinent surrounding countries to conduct military student visits. In October 2001, Defense Minister Chi Haotian met with fifty-four middle- and high-ranking officers from thirty-seven countries who were studying at the PLA's National Defense University and were participating in a seminar on international issues.²³ The PLA students who have studied abroad received high-level attention in February 2002 when Jiang Zemin (江泽民) addressed the All-Army Military Study Abroad Work Conference held at Zhongnanhai (中南海).²⁴

Conclusions

The Pentagon's 1998 East Asian Security Review (EASR) stated, "As the United States, China, and others in the region work to build a security

²²See note 19 above.

²³"Chi Haotian Meets Foreign Officers Studying at the Chinese National Defense University," Beijing Zhongguo Xinwenshe, October 29, 2001. For several years, the PLA's National Defense University (NDU) has taught foreign students at two-to-three-month courses focused on political and international affairs, but their campus is located several miles north of Beijing and is not co-located with the NDU campus. Unlike the United States, where American and foreign students are in the same class, there is very little interaction between the foreign students and non-faculty members of the PLA. For example, according to a New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs Report from Beijing (Sino-File July/August/September 2001, <<http://www.mft.govt.nz/foreign/regions/northasia/news01/august/sinofilejulyaug.html>>), New Zealand sent its fourth student to participate in a PLA International Symposium course in Beijing in October and November. This was a new course conducted at NDU. English is the language of instruction and the class is attended by many overseas officers at the colonel and brigadier level as well as a number of PLA officers with proficiency in English. The course provides an ideal venue for exchange of perceptions and includes visits to PLA installations and bases.

²⁴"Jiang Zemin Greets All-Army Military Study Abroad Work Conference Delegates," *Xinhua Net*, February 23, 2002, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2002-02/23/content_287493.htm>.

architecture, the greatest challenge will be to manage the gap that still exists in strategic visions and to develop mutually acceptable approaches to security. Dialogue between the United States and China will remain critical to ensure that both countries have a clear appreciation of one another's regional security interests. Dialogue and exchanges can reduce misperceptions between our two countries, increase our understanding of Chinese security concerns, and build confidence between our two defense establishments to avoid military accidents and miscalculations."²⁵ The EASR also pointed out that "The United States maintains robust but unofficial relations with the people on Taiwan, governed by the Taiwan Relations Act and guided by the three U.S.-PRC joint communiqués. The United States sells defensive arms to Taiwan to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability."

In March 2002, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz discussed the current state of military relations with China and Taiwan. He pointed out, "With respect to China, the United States seeks a balanced and constructive relationship. China is not an enemy. We wish to develop areas in which our interests converge. This includes military-to-military contacts which are in our mutual interest. But these must be disciplined, purposeful, and systematic."²⁶ Turning to Taiwan, Wolfowitz stated, "Just as important as arms sales issues, non-hardware or software exchanges with Taiwan serve very important purposes. These types of exchanges enhance Taiwan's ability to assess longer-term defense needs, and develop well-founded security policies. Such exchanges enhance Taiwan's capacity for making operationally sound and cost-effective acquisition decisions."

Official statements like these make clear that the United States has an interest in maintaining a measured military relationship with China. However, Washington has also determined that China's military posture opposite Taiwan poses a potential threat to Taiwan and that the Pentagon's understanding of Taiwan's military structure and capabilities has lapsed.

²⁵"The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region: 1998" (U.S. Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, November 1998).

²⁶See note 1 above.

Therefore, according to interviews with various U.S. government officials, one of the best ways to help provide stability in the region and to prepare for possible U.S. involvement in military contingencies across the Taiwan Strait is to have "a more robust exchange program with Taiwan's military."²⁷

Finally, although the U.S. military relationship with China is currently in a holding pattern, the scope of the PLA's worldwide foreign relations program is expanding. Each year, more PLA officers are traveling abroad in high-level and functional delegations, as well as individual students. In addition to the symbolic political value, these visits afford China's military leaders and younger officers the opportunity to acquire modern military knowledge, especially from the developed world, in doctrine, operations, training, military medicine, administration, and a host of non-combat related areas. As more officers from the military regions travel abroad, the PLA hopes that they will be more likely to help implement unit-level reforms that have been initiated from the general headquarters in Beijing.

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²⁷Interviews, April 2002.

