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Title	The First Taiwan Strait Crisis and China's "Border" Dispute Around Taiwan
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Citation	Eurasia Border Review, 3(Special Issue), 75-91
Issue Date	2012
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/50964
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	EBR3-S_008.pdf



The First Taiwan Strait Crisis and China's "Border" Dispute Around Taiwan

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As a vast territorial state with long land and coastal borders, China has experienced numerous border issues historically and even into present times. Among the many border disputes that China encountered during the period following the end of World War II, the murkiest and most volatile is probably the issue on where the border line should be drawn around Taiwan. Currently, Taiwan, as well as the Pescadores and the so-called offshore islands adjacent to the Chinese coast, are under the control of the Republic of China (ROC), while the Chinese mainland is the domain of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Practically speaking, the demarcation line between these two entities is drawn within the perimeters of the Taiwan Strait. However, as long as both the governments of Beijing and Taipei uphold the principle of "one China," the line will never be called a "border."

This article attempts to explain how this situation came about by highlighting developments surrounding the Taiwan Strait in the late 1940s and 1950s. In particular, special attention is given to the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, which arguably brought about the existing situation. In September 1954, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began to bomb the island of Quemoy (Jinmen), one of the offshore islands nearest to Amoy (Xiamen). This triggered a military crisis between the PRC on the one side and the ROC and the United States on the other. Although the military crisis ended without a major war, the three parties involved interacted with divergent and convergent interests, producing the outcome that lingers today. This article tries to show how the policies and priorities of the ROC, PRC, and the United States interacted in bringing about the outcome.

In conducting this research, special attention is paid to Taiwanese archival materials, while U.S. and PRC sources are utilized as well. Because Taiwanese archival materials were not available until recently, the previous works on the First Taiwan Crisis have been based mostly on the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, mainland Chinese archival materials.¹ This was unfortunate, because after all, the

¹ Thomas E. Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands: Together with an Implication for Outer Mongolia and Sino-Soviet Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1985); Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy Toward Taiwan, 1950-1955* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996); John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Gordon H. Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 96-122; He Di, "The Evolution of the People's Republic of China's Policy toward the Offshore Islands," in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 222-45; Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Shu Guang Zhang, *Deterrence and*

view from Taipei has been understudied despite the fact that it was an equally important player in the crisis. This article tries to redress this imbalance.

As it turns out, using Taiwanese sources is quite revealing. It shows that the ROC was trying to devise a sophisticated strategy to keep U.S. support when it was dwindling under the leadership of U.S. President Harry Truman. It also shows how Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) envisioned a counteroffensive to “return to the mainland” after President Dwight Eisenhower came to power. Furthermore, Taiwanese sources demonstrate that before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, U.S. officials had been encouraging Chiang to become more aggressive toward the mainland, giving a strong signal that Chiang could expect more support from the United States. This suggests that the U.S. government should assume its fair share of blame in contributing to the crisis, more so than the conventional wisdom indicates.

This article is organized as follows: the next section shows how the ROC government tried to insure its survival before the Korean War. The article then highlights how the Eisenhower administration's policy shift affected the ROC. After that, the article analyzes how the First Taiwan Strait Crisis developed as a result of complex interactions among the ROC, the PRC, and the United States. The article concludes with a discussion on how the convergence and divergence of the three parties' interests and goals resulted in the stalemate in the Taiwan Strait, which basically remains even today.

U.S.-ROC Relations before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis

By the late 1940s, the U.S. government became disillusioned with the ROC due to the latter's corruptions and inefficiencies.² Consequently, the Truman administration issued a statement on 5 January 1950 that they would not intervene for the defense of Taiwan. One week later on January 12, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made his famous speech in which he excluded Taiwan from the U.S. defense perimeter in the Western Pacific. This decision of the United States placed the ROC's survival in doubt. What saved the ROC from this dismal situation was the outbreak of the Korean War, which forced the Truman administration to modify its policy toward China. On June 27, the Truman administration issued a statement to “neutralize” the Taiwan Strait. In July, it began dispatching the Seventh Fleet of the U.S. Navy to the Taiwan Strait in order to prevent a military clash between the PRC and the ROC. It also resumed its large-scale military and economic aid to the ROC.³

The Truman administration's policy of “abandoning” the ROC is well documented in history, but how did the ROC government respond to the U.S. policy before the Korean War? It is not difficult to imagine that it made a desperate move to insure its survival while on the verge of abandonment by the United States, but precisely how it tried to survive has remained unknown up to now. The

Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

² See *United States Relations with China* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1949).

³ Academia Sinica eds., *Taiwan Guangfu Meiyuan Shiliao: Junxiejihua* (Taipei: Academia Historica, 1995).

Taiwanese archival materials shed some light on this question.

The ROC memo dated 25 November 1949 shows how desperate the ROC was in trying to avoid abandonment by the United States. Titled “Proposed Sino-American Agreements Concerning Taiwan,” the document shows that the ROC proposed, or at least considered proposing that the ROC should “enter into three separate agreements with the United States concerning Keelung, Kaohsiung and the Taiwan Railroad *in terms identical with those contained in the Sino-Soviet Agreements of 1945 concerning Dairen, Port Arthur and Chinese Eastern Railway.*”⁴ Simply put, the proposal suggested that the United States and the ROC would form an alliance so that the United States would keep military bases in the two Taiwanese cities and retain rights to operate the Taiwan Railroad.

There is no doubt that this was Chiang’s desperate attempt to keep U.S. security assistance and to prevent the United States from establishing relations with the PRC.⁵ Nonetheless, it is possible to detect the shrewd and sophisticated intention of Chiang Kai-shek in this proposal. First, the ROC government considered that such agreements could be used to harass the PRC in its dealings with the Soviet Union in northern China. The November 25 document says:

The Agreement must be publicized as true copies of the Sino-Soviet Agreements 1945 concerning Manchuria. What the Chinese Communists condone about Dairen, Port Arthur and the Chinese Eastern Railway should also, from the nationalistic viewpoint, be acceptable to them regarding similar arrangements with the U.S. regarding Keelung, Kaohsiung and the Taiwan Railway. By acknowledging Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan without waiting for a traditional peace treaty with Japan, the U.S. would show boldness in recognizing the validity of the Cairo Declaration, the Potsdam Declaration and the Instrument of Surrender as legal and binding international agreements.⁶

By publicizing such an agreement, the ROC government believed that it could place the PRC in an awkward position. If the PRC had tried to blame the United States for the latter’s privileges obtained in the agreement, it would have inevitably highlighted the same problems that had been created between the Soviet Union and the PRC as a result of the 1945 Sino-Soviet agreement. Needless to say, the fact that the 1945 Sino-Soviet agreement was negotiated by the ROC, not by the Chinese Communists, made this tactic awfully wily. The following passage in the same document is even more interesting. It states:

Even if the Communists should succeed in invading Taiwan, the U.S. should not directly participate against them but should prepare to recognize the Peking government on the

⁴ 412/0006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (*Waijiaobu Dangan*), Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Emphasis added.

⁵ By that time, the U.S. White Paper on China had been already published, indicating to the ROC that the U.S. government was being prepared for abandoning the ROC.

⁶ 421/0006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives.

condition that the Peking regime would recognize and respect American rights under this agreement. The U.S. should insist upon its treaty rights just as Russia enjoyed its rights in Manchuria under both regimes. Alternatively, withdrawal of the U.S. from Taiwan could only be made condition on Russia's withdrawal from Manchuria.⁷

Here, the ROC government was probably trying to demonstrate to the U.S. government the benefits of concluding the proposed agreement with itself. On the one hand, the passage reassured the United States that it would not have to intervene even if the ROC was defeated by the PRC. Even if such a result occurred, on the other hand, the United States would still be able to use the agreement to harass Soviet-PRC relations by highlighting Soviet privileges in the PRC. By emphasizing these points, the ROC government probably tried to reassure and persuade the U.S. government to conclude treaties with the ROC, enhancing the chance of the latter's survival.

This document undoubtedly shows the dire situation in which the ROC government found itself. At the same time, however, the document is interesting as it shows that Chiang Kai-shek, even in such a dismal situation, tried to devise a rather sophisticated diplomatic strategy.

After President Dwight Eisenhower took office in January 1953, the new Republican administration abandoned the previous policy of "neutralizing" Taiwan and instead advocated the policy of "unleashing Chiang Kai-shek."⁸ The Eisenhower administration stated that the Seventh Fleet would no longer prevent the ROC's military activities against the PRC. According to conventional wisdom, this policy change was considered nominal with little change in substance.⁹ Put differently, "unleashing Chiang" was regarded merely as a psychological tactic to put indirect military pressure on the PRC government, and the United States had tight grips over the ROC government in order to deter its military operations for returning to the mainland.¹⁰

However, it should be questioned whether or not this policy change was truly superficial as this historiography suggests. What the recently disclosed ROC documents reveal is that at least some high-ranking U.S. officials gave the ROC government a strong signal that the U.S. policy change would be much more substantial than the aforementioned interpretation suggests. In the minutes of the meeting dated 1 February 1953 between Chiang Kai-shek and the U.S. Ambassador to Taipei Karl L. Rankin, for instance, Rankin indicated that the purpose of the U.S. military aid to the ROC had

⁷ 407.1/0185, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

⁸ See H. W. Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Su-Ya Chang, "Unleashing Chiang Kai-shek? Eisenhower and the Policy of Indecision toward Taiwan, 1953," Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 1991.

⁹ Chang, "Unleashing Chiang Kai-shek?" p. 382; Harry Harding, "The Legacy of the Decade for Later Years: An American Perspective," in Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, eds., *Sino-American Relations 1945-1955: A Joint Reassessment of a Critical Decade* (Washington, D.C.: Scholarly Resources, 1989), p. 321.

¹⁰ Nancy B. Tucker, "John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan Roots of the 'Two Chinas' Policy," in Richard H. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 239; Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Policy toward Communist China, 1949-1969* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), p. 131; Harding, "The Legacy of the Decade for Later Years," p. 321.

practically shifted from defense to offense. Rankin mentioned to Chiang as follows:

During the past week, I have been working on a comprehensive report to the State Department. The point in this report is a recommendation for increased military aid. I proposed in the first place that there should be a definite purpose of this aid. It has been often [said] that our aid is to defend Taiwan. However, the aid program has already gone beyond the defense stage. If this should mean that the purpose of the aid has changed from defensive to offensive, then let it be clearly said and we can work out a program accordingly.¹¹

This meeting was held the day before the U.S. government's declaration on 2 February 1953 that the U.S. Seventh Fleet would no longer stop the ROC from launching attacks against the PRC. That is, this document shows that the day before the declaration, the U.S. ambassador had indicated to the ROC president that his government should be prepared for policy change from defensive to offensive.

The conversation that took place between Chiang Kai-shek and the Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Arthur W. Radford on 4 June 1953 was even more revealing. Radford raised the question of a joint U.S.-ROC military command in case of operations against the mainland and explored whether President Chiang would be willing to give the ROC command authority to the United States. Radford mentioned:

In case the United States Air Force and Navy were to support a landing of Chinese ground forces on the mainland, would the President accept the American practices of giving command to the United States Navy from the time of departure of the invasion fleet to the moment when the ground forces were ready to take over command? Second, if American ground forces should participate in the initial operations on the mainland, would the President agree to have an American assume command of all ground forces until such time as the American ground forces were ready to retire?¹²

The idea that the ROC forces operate under the U.S. command, as Radford suggests, may have reminded Chiang of the UN Command that integrated South Korean forces with the U.S. military during the Korean War, implying that the United States would be willing to play a role in conducting a joint military operation against the mainland. Of course, this was a hypothetical question for Radford, but it is not too difficult to imagine that the mere fact that the top U.S. military official directly brought such a matter to Chiang must have raised ROC's expectations toward the United States. Chiang immediately responded that he would accept both of the proposals put forward by Radford. He also said that in order to implement the plan to put ROC forces under the U.S.

¹¹ 412.7/0011, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

¹² 412/0052, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

command, it was necessary to involve military officers and have them study more detailed procedures to do so.¹³

Chiang Kai-shek must have felt rejuvenated by Radford's proposal. On 5 June 1954, Chiang Kai-shek met Radford again, this time with a more concrete plan to implement a large-scale "counter-invasion" against mainland China. In the meeting, Chiang proposed to Radford that in support of invasion operations, he would want 10,000 paratroopers trained and equipped by the United States as soon as possible. Furthermore, Chiang argued that after the completion of the plan stated above, he would like to see another 25,000 paratroopers trained so that they could be used to support invasion operations. Radford politely dismissed Chiang's proposal, saying that the use of paratroopers in such a large-scale operation was too risky and had little prospect of success. However, they confirmed that further study should be done in preparation for a counter-invasion plan against the mainland.¹⁴

As these documents suggest, some Eisenhower administration officials hinted to Chiang Kai-shek that the policy of "unleashing Chiang" meant an important policy change in substance and that the new U.S. government was willing to take more risks than the previous administration in supporting the ROC's "return to the mainland." As a result, Chiang's attitude also changed from that of seeking just to survive, as before the Korean War, to a bolder attitude attempting to attain his ultimate goal, a return in force to the mainland.

The fact that Chiang Kai-shek became more confident can be seen in a series of meetings between U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Chiang during the former's visit to Taipei in November 1953. The ROC records on these meetings are noteworthy not just because they show that Chiang requested U.S. assistance to topple the PRC on the mainland but also because they show how seriously Chiang considered a counterattack against the mainland. They also show that Chiang was devising a concrete military plan based on his strategic view of East Asia and the ROC's role in it.

In the three meetings with Nixon, Chiang displayed his own view regarding the strategic situation in East Asia and laid out his idea on how to deal with the situation. First, Chiang elaborated how he viewed the Soviet strategy in East Asia. He argued that "[i]n Soviet strategy, cold war is hot war," indicating that the Soviet aim was to buy time to develop its own capabilities while keeping the United States engaged in constant Cold War tensions without any Soviet direct involvement. From this, Chiang predicted Soviet reaction to a counter-offensive against the PRC as follows:

It is my conviction that Russia will never intervene openly in the hostilities when we launch a counter-attack on the Mainland because that would defeat the Soviet policy of not taking an active part in war but of actually achieving its program of world conquest without getting itself directly involved militarily. To my mind, Russia will never enter into a war unless it is absolutely necessary. The question naturally arises as to when it will be absolutely necessary for Russia to enter into a war. I believe the time will come when the balance of power

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

between the United States and Russia will be drastically upset; that is, when most of the countries of the world are either pro-Communist or have adopted a neutral stand and the United States is placed in an isolated position.¹⁵

This logic was certainly self-serving. Since the ROC needed to get substantial U.S. support for launching its counter-attacks against the PRC, it wanted to persuade the U.S. government that Soviet involvement in a war against the PRC was unlikely.¹⁶ Even so, the logic that Chiang employed here was not inconsistent but rather close to the line of hawkish realists, although he still may have underestimated the possibility of Soviet intervention to support the PRC.

Furthermore, this document shows that Chiang was considering a concrete counteroffensive plan against the PRC. He stated:

I have now two plans in regard to our counter-attack. The first plan is to train 300,000 men in addition to our present armed force of 500,000 men. With the completion of this training program, we shall have a force of 800,000 men. By taking these 300,000 men into our armed forces, the present army strength of 27 divisions can be expanded to 40 divisions, including 35 infantry divisions, for armored divisions and one parachute division. The time needed for the training is a year-and-a-half. I mean, of course, accelerated training. The second plan, which is a three-year general plan for all arms with a 60 division army was handed to Admiral Radford in written form last May.¹⁷

Overall, these documents show that Chiang had regained his confidence in the survival of the ROC and had begun to entertain an idea of returning to the mainland more seriously than before. As discussed below, however, Chiang would be disappointed again by the U.S. government's ambivalent policy during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis.

The First Taiwan Strait Crisis and ROC-U.S.-PRC Interactions

At dawn on 3 September 1954, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which had deployed approximately 150,000 troops to Amoy, began bombarding the island of Quemoy, one of the offshore islands under the ROC's control. This marked the beginning of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. When the crisis began, 43,000 ROC troops were deployed to Quemoy, and within five hours after the beginning of the PRC bombardment, about sixty shells had hit Quemoy. As a result, two of the U.S. military advisors were killed and the remaining fourteen advisors evacuated the island. Although the bombardment halted for a while after midnight, it soon resumed and continued for several days.¹⁸

¹⁵ 407.1/0185 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ By this logic, Chiang put himself in parallel with Kim Il Sung, who three years earlier in spring 1950, had tried to reassure Stalin that the Americans would not intervene in Korea.

¹⁷ 407.1/0185, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, pp. 563-564.

In the West, the term “crisis” is often used to describe the situation in the Taiwan Strait after September 1954. However, “crisis” (*weiji*) in the Chinese language has a connotation that a situation is out of control, and in this sense, the term may not be appropriate to describe the situation. This is because at least in the perception of the PRC and Mao Zedong in particular, the PRC intentionally created this situation with clear goals in mind.¹⁹

Generally speaking, the PRC had three goals in initiating the crisis. First, the PRC took seriously the prospect that the United States and the ROC were going to conclude an alliance treaty, and it probably aimed at derailing the negotiation between the two by initiating the crisis. Since July 1954, the PRC had explicitly expressed its determination to “liberate Taiwan.” For instance, the July 23 editorial of *Renminribao*s stated that, “Chinese people proclaim once again to the world that Taiwan is a Chinese territory, and we will definitely liberate Taiwan.”²⁰ It is noteworthy that on the same day, Mao sent the following telegram to Zhou Enlai when the latter was on his way back from the Geneva Peace Conference to Beijing:

In order to break up the collaboration between the US and Chiang and to keep them from joining military and political forces, we must announce to our country and to the world the slogan of the liberation of Taiwan. It was improper of us not to raise this slogan in a timely manner after the cease-fire in Korea. If we were to continue dragging our heels now, we would be making a serious political mistake.²¹

Probably following the aforementioned direction set by Mao, the PLA General Commander Zhu De argued at the 27th anniversary ceremony of the creation of the Chinese military on August 1 that Taiwan's conclusion of a security alliance with the United States or joining a regional multilateral security framework would violate China's sovereignty. He called for achieving the liberation of Taiwan as soon as possible.

Second, related to the first, the PRC worried that Taiwan might join a regional security framework. There were sufficient reasons for the PRC's concerns. The U.S. government had expressed that the ROC could later join the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), which was scheduled to be created in September 1954. In addition, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated on August 3 that the U.S. government was considering the creation in the future of what might be dubbed Northeast Asian Treaty Organization (NEATO), including the US, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. On 11 August 1954, Zhou Enlai reported on foreign affairs, stating as follows:

Recently, the United States and traitor Chiang Kai-shek negotiated in Taipei and Washington to create a joint defense pact. At the same time, the United States, the aggressor, is trying to create a “Northeast Asian Treaty Organization.”... If any foreign aggressors dare to hinder

¹⁹ Zhang, pp. 189-190.

²⁰ *Renminribao*, July 23, 1954.

²¹ Quoted in Zhang, p. 193.

the Chinese people from liberating Taiwan, if they dare to infringe upon our sovereignty and violate our territorial integrity, if they dare to interfere in our internal affairs, they must take all the grave consequences of such acts of aggression upon themselves.²²

For the PRC, including Taiwan in multilateral as well as bilateral security arrangements was an infringement on China's sovereignty and military containment of the PRC. It is probable that the PRC initiated the campaign to "liberate Taiwan" to oppose and deter such initiatives. It is indicative that the PRC began its bombardment against Quemoy just as the parties to SEATO were gathering to conclude the treaty in Manila.

Third, the PRC's initiation of the crisis was triggered by its concern about the "three-front" concept ("*Sanluxiangxinyuhui*" *zhanlue*). It is well known that Mao Zedong considered that if China were to be attacked by an external aggressor, most likely the United States, it would be attacked from the Korean Peninsula, Indochina, or Taiwan. Furthermore, China believed that U.S. military posture ranging from the Korean Peninsula to Southeast Asia was not yet completed for offensive and that taking military actions in the Taiwan Strait would expose the weakness of the U.S. military strategy.

When the PRC's bombardment of Quemoy began, the U.S. government was taken by surprise. By then, the United States had consistently made clear that it would intervene to defend Taiwan and the Pescadores from the PRC.²³ However, the U.S. government had not seriously considered how to respond to a contingency around the offshore islands.

One important reason why the United States could not promptly hammer out its strategic response to the crisis was that there was no consensus within the U.S. government as to the significance of the offshore islands such as Quemoy, the very frontline of the clash between the PRC and ROC, for the defense of Taiwan and U.S. strategic interests. On 3 September 1954, the very day when the PRC began the bombing of Quemoy, the JCS conducted a meeting to deal with the crisis and agreed that the offshore islands were "important," but not "essential" for the defense of Taiwan and the Pescadores from the strategic viewpoint.²⁴ However, opinions were sharply divided on whether or not the United States should actively intervene in the defense of the offshore islands.

President Eisenhower himself expressed a reservation about U.S. intervention to defend the offshore islands. His view was that the strategic value of the islands, except for the psychological importance of maintaining the morale of the ROC military, was not very high. He noted the risk that U.S. intervention in the offshore islands might trigger not only a war with the PRC but also a total war between the United States and the Soviet Union.²⁵ It was a general view among military planners that it would be impossible to defend the offshore islands without fighting the PRC and that they

²² Zhou's statement, quoted in Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*, p. 35.

²³ China Telegram, 2-8, 9-15 September 1954, Records, Office of Public Opinion Studies, 1943-75, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, the United States.

²⁴ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, pp. 556-557.

²⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-56* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p. 464.

were not significant enough to risk a war with the PRC.²⁶ Eisenhower thus insisted on the use of non-military means to diffuse the crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

On the other hand, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles considered that the United States faced a “horrible dilemma” over the policy toward Taiwan.²⁷ Just as Eisenhower worried, U.S. intervention to defend the offshore islands might trigger a war with the PRC or even with the Soviet Union. However, Dulles additionally worried that U.S. inaction in the Taiwan Strait might embolden the PRC, which then might escalate its military activities and endanger the ROC in Taiwan and even the U.S. defense perimeter in the Western Pacific running through Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines.²⁸

As the crisis continued, whether or not to defend the offshore islands remained one of the most difficult issues for the United States and the ROC. In particular, the issue on how to deal with the Dachen Island, the northern part of the offshore islands, became a source of friction between Washington and Taipei. The conventional wisdom posits that the island's strategic value was not as high as those of Quemoy and Matsu, thus the United States proposed to the ROC that the ROC forces on the island should be withdrawn. However, Chiang Kai-shek refused to withdraw from the island. He only complied when the United States used both significant carrots and sticks for their withdrawal.²⁹ Because of this, it is often argued that Chiang was irrationally obsessed with the defense of the offshore islands despite the huge risk of causing a major military clash.

However, ROC archival records show that there was a legitimate reason why Chiang was so reluctant to accept the withdrawal request from Dachen. As it turned out, it was the United States that had encouraged and even instructed the ROC to fortify Dachen before the first Taiwan Strait Crisis. The ROC archival documents reveal that before the beginning of the crisis, the U.S. government had strongly encouraged the ROC government to enhance Dachen's defense. The U.S. government had even recommended the ROC to blockade the PRC's shipping around Dachen and other offshore islands before the crisis.³⁰

There remain numerous communications between the U.S. and ROC militaries concerning their discussions and the defense of Dachen and the blockade against the PRC around the island. In a letter written in February 1953 by William C. Chase, the head of the Military Assistance Advisory Group to Taiwan..., he suggested that “immediate thought be given and plans be made to blockade the China Mainland, with respect to Chinese Communists shipping only, from Swatow to Dachen, both inclusive.” Furthermore, he explained that the ROC military should consult with the United States regarding this plan so that the U.S. military would be able “to assist [ROC forces in] every

²⁶ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, pp. 845-846.

²⁷ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, p. 619; Ralph N. Clough, *Island China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 10-14; Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment*, pp. 157-183.

²⁸ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, pp. 613-624.

²⁹ Chang, “To the Nuclear Brink,” *op.cit.*, pp. 96-122.

³⁰ 409/0236, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

possible way.”³¹

It is important to note that the ROC military initially was not enthusiastic about the blockade plan near Dachen because it considered Dachen’s defense conditions as fragile and that it would be difficult to conduct blockade operations near the island without strengthening the ROC’s defense capabilities there.³² ROC even argued that if the U.S. government still wanted the ROC to strengthen the defense of the offshore islands, additional military aid and assistance from the United States would be required.³³ While this counter-proposal may have been partly a tactic by the ROC to receive more aid from the United States, the fact that the ROC was aware of the difficulty in defending the Dachen Island was significant.

The United States requested on another occasion that the ROC government increase the latter’s defense efforts for the offshore islands, particularly on the Dachen Island, as the U.S. military was in the process of reviewing defense plans for Taiwan and the offshore islands. During the meeting with ROC Foreign Minister George Yeh (Ye Gongchao) on 12 August 1953, U.S. Ambassador Rankin mentioned:

Washington very much hoped that the Chinese Government would make every effort to hold the islands, particularly Tachen (Dachen), while the matter of integrating those islands into the defense scheme of Taiwan and the Pescadores was being actively studied pending the assumption of office of Admiral Radford as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³⁴

As this message indicates, the U.S. government was actively encouraging the ROC to defend the offshore islands, including Dachen, by August 1954, just before the first Taiwan Strait Crisis erupted. The situation around that time did not allow Chiang Kai-shek to refuse such a U.S. request, as the ROC was in the midst of negotiation with the United States to conclude a mutual security treaty.

However, the U.S. government reversed its attitude toward the offshore islands after the first Taiwan Strait Crisis began as it recognized the operational difficulties and risks involved in the defense of these islands. When the U.S. government asked the ROC to withdraw its troops from Dachen, Chiang Kai-shek strongly criticized such sudden change in the U.S. policy. Chiang’s reaction was natural and understandable, given that he had been trying to improve the island’s defenses in accordance with the recommendations given by the United States. Therefore, Chiang’s attitude should not be considered as a symbol of his “reckless” attitude or his “groundless ambition” to return to the mainland. In the end, ROC forces on Dachen were forced to withdraw in February 1955. Consequently, the U.S. government’s sudden policy change made Chiang Kai-shek distrustful of the U.S. government.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ 426.2/0001, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, *op.cit.*

Three U.S. Initiatives to End the Crisis

As the crisis persisted, the Eisenhower administration gradually made up its mind to take a series of initiatives to settle the situation in the Taiwan Strait. The initiatives included (1) a diplomatic maneuver (Operation Oracle) in the United Nations to halt the crisis, (2) the conclusion of the U.S.-ROC security treaty, and (3) the passage of the so-called Formosa Resolution in the U.S. Congress.

In order to end the crisis, the U.S. government tried to utilize the United Nations (UN). By introducing into the UN Security Council the resolution that called upon both the PRC and ROC to stop the use of force and to discuss the issue of the Taiwan Strait at the UN, the U.S. government sought to resolve its "horrible dilemma" and to maintain the status quo.³⁵ The status quo here meant the pre-crisis situation wherein the PRC occupied mainland China while the ROC existed in Taiwan and the area covering the offshore islands. In order to realize this goal, the U.S. government began to prepare for the aforementioned resolution in cooperation with Britain and New Zealand.³⁶

However, the ROC government strongly opposed the initiative. In mid-October of 1954, the ROC Ambassador to the UN consulted with Foreign Minister George Yeh and Ambassador to the U.S. Wellington Koo and they concluded that trying to resolve the crisis in the Taiwan Strait through the UN could lead to the creation of "two Chinas."³⁷ From the ROC's standpoint, discussing the Taiwan issue at an international organization such as the UN could indicate that the ROC would give up "returning to the mainland" and admit the *de jure* existence of the PRC. The ROC was concerned that publicly agreeing to the proposal engineered by the United States at the UN could signal to the world the legal existence of two Chinas. This was not a position that the ROC was willing to take.

In the end, however, the ROC acceded to the U.S. initiative at the UN Security Council. It predicted that regardless of its own position on the proposal, the PRC would refuse to discuss the matter at the UN, thus the prospect that the proposal would be accepted at the UN would be nil.³⁸ In addition, the United States proposed to conclude a security treaty with the ROC if the ROC agreed not to block the UN discussion on the issue. As predicted, the PRC refused to come to the UN when New Zealand handed in the aforementioned proposal to the UN Security Council in January 1955.

As the crisis continued to escalate and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) resumed and intensified military actions around the offshore islands in November 1954. In order to deter the PRC from launching further attacks, the U.S. government decided to conclude a security treaty with the ROC in return for the ROC's agreement not to oppose New Zealand's proposal at the UN. At the same time, the U.S. government sought to prevent the ROC from launching military actions against

³⁵ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, pp. 619-623.

³⁶ Rosemary Foot, "The Search for the Modus Vivendi: Anglo-American Relations and China Policy in the Eisenhower Era," in Cohen and Iriye, eds., *The Great Powers in East Asia*, pp. 150-159.

³⁷ *Gu Weijun Huigulu (Wellington Koo Memoir) Vol. 11* (Beijing: Institute of Modern History, Chinese Social Science Academy, 1989) p. 360.

³⁸ Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance*, pp. 59-60; Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: China Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 474-475.

the PRC in order to avoid being dragged into the Chinese civil war (again).³⁹

As soon as the U.S.-ROC negotiation began secretly on 2 November 1954, the U.S. government found it difficult to deal with the ROC as the ROC government was working strenuously to get the maximum degree of U.S. security commitments, which, in Washington's standpoint, increased the risk of entrapment.⁴⁰ The most contentious point in the negotiations was the geographical scope of the security treaty. The original U.S. position was to limit U.S. defense commitments to Taiwan and the Pescadores. It expressed a negative attitude toward the defense of the offshore islands, such as Quemoy, Matsu, and Dachen. The ROC, on the other hand, emphasized the strategic importance of these islands for the PRC as stepping stones to "liberate" Taiwan and argued that it would be dangerous to allow the PRC to take occupy them.

On 1 December 1954, the U.S. and ROC governments issued joint statement about the conclusion of the U.S.-R.O.C. Mutual Defense Treaty.⁴¹ First, the statement noted that the geographical scope of the treaty clearly included "the Taiwan island and Pescadores," while remaining ambiguous on whether the offshore islands were included. It merely stated that the treaty might be applied to other areas determined by mutual agreement between the United States and the ROC. This was evidently a compromise between Washington and Taipei. This suggested that the defense of the offshore islands was not completely abandoned, and that the United States might defend these islands depending on the circumstances. Second, the statement emphasized that the purpose of the treaty was defensive, and not offensive.

By expressing these points, the United States hoped that it would prevent the PRC from taking military actions against the ROC and dissuade the ROC from launching offensive military actions against the PRC to return to the mainland. It is also arguable that by concluding this treaty, the United States hoped that the status quo in the Taiwan Strait would be maintained. This U.S. stance must have been unsatisfactory for the ROC, whose ultimate goal was to return to the mainland, and this could not be achieved without strong U.S. support for its offensive actions against the mainland. As it turned out, the ROC continued to dispute with the United States the legal interpretation of the treaty, and the disagreement ensued as to how strongly the United States had committed itself to the defense of the offshore islands even after the end of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis.

The PRC, whose goal was to dissuade the United States from concluding an alliance with the ROC, harshly criticized the U.S.-ROC treaty and escalated its military actions.⁴² The PLA resumed its attacks against Dachen on January 10, 1955 and Yijiang Island fell into the hands of the PRC. Against this background, President Eisenhower succeeded in getting the U.S. Congress to pass almost

³⁹ *FRUS, 1952-54, vol. XIV (1)*, p. 840.

⁴⁰ Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance*, pp. 56-59.

⁴¹ "Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China," in U.S. Department of States, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, 1955, vol.6, part 1*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), pp. 450-454.

⁴² Institute of Diplomatic History, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, ed., *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Huodong Dashiji 1949-1975*, p. 93.

unanimously the so-called Formosa Resolution on 29 January 1955.⁴³ By the resolution, the president was authorized to use any means that were deemed necessary to defend the ROC from the PRC's attacks, hinting that the United States might take military actions to defend the ROC, if offshore islands closer to Taiwan were attacked by the PRC.

In fact, the U.S. government secretly decided to intervene in the PRC attacks against Quemoy and Matsu and conveyed its will to the ROC.⁴⁴ However, the U.S. government did not make its commitments to the islands clear in the Formosa Resolution despite the ROC's strong request to do so. The U.S. attitude again disappointed the ROC government. However, from the U.S. viewpoint, one of the most important goals in adopting the Formosa Resolution was to stop the escalation of the PRC's military actions by signaling its willingness to use force, while minimizing the risk of actually engaging itself in a direct confrontation with the PRC or the Soviet Union.

As the crisis persisted, PRC Premier Zhou Enlai made a statement at the Bandung Conference in April 1955 that called for a ceasefire. Premier Zhou likewise proposed to discuss the Taiwan issue and related matters with the United States. The U.S. government accepted this proposal and the crisis finally deescalated. Subsequently, the U.S.-PRC Ambassadorial Talks began in July 1955. The U.S. attitude practically meant that it accepted the *de facto* existence of the PRC, thus indicating its tacit acknowledgement of the "two China" status quo. In the negotiation, the U.S. side persistently demanded that the PRC renounce the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue. The PRC side, however, refused to accept the U.S. demand, arguing that the Taiwan issue was China's internal matter and that the PRC would not discuss it with external powers. For the PRC, agreeing to the U.S. demand would mean its acknowledgement of Taiwan's international status, paving the way for the "two-China" formula. There was probably no chance for Beijing to accept it as its primary purpose in initiating the 1954 crisis was to avoid that very outcome.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the development of China's "border" along the Taiwan Strait. In so doing, it placed a special emphasis on the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and how it contributed to the development of the "border" issues surrounding Taiwan and the offshore islands. It began the analysis by examining the status of the ROC in Taiwan before the Korean War. It then examined how Chiang Kai-shek's confidence in the survival of the ROC recovered after the Korean War. The article also focused on the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and analyzed how Taipei, Washington, and Beijing conducted their policies.

⁴³ House Joint Resolution 159 (84th Congress, 1st Session), January 29, 1955, *U.S. Department of State, American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955 Basic Documents, vol.1/2*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957), pp. 2486-2487. See also Robert Accinelli "Eisenhower, Congress and the 1954-55 Offshore Island Crisis;" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, No.20 (Spring 1990), pp 329-344; Philip J. Briggs, "Congress and the Cold War: U.S.-China Policy, 1955," *China Quarterly*, No. 85 (March 1981), pp 80-95; James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 22-23.

⁴⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States FRUS 1955-57, vol. II: China*, pp. 99-104.

This article sufficiently shows that the First Taiwan Crisis was a catalyst for the dispute in the Taiwan Strait. Furthermore, it demonstrates that China's *quasi* "border" along the Taiwan Strait was fixed as it is because of complex interactions among the United States, the PRC, and the ROC. As far as the United States is concerned, it did not have a clear vision of how it wanted to shape the situation in the Taiwan Strait before the crisis began in September 1954. It once "abandoned" the ROC under the Truman administration, only to reverse its position after the Korean War. The Eisenhower administration signaled its willingness to support the ROC strongly, but it had to reconsider how far it should encourage Taiwan to be on the offensive when the PRC began the bombardment against Quemoy. As the crisis persisted, the United States gradually came to recognize its three goals in the area: 1.) they were to stop the PRC from attacking Taiwan, 2.) to dissuade the ROC from counterattacking the mainland thus entrapping the United States into a war with the Communist bloc, and 3.) to freeze the status quo surrounding the Taiwan Strait. In order to achieve these goals, the United States initiated Operation Oracle at the United Nations, concluded the U.S.-ROC Security Treaty, and obtained the congressional approval of the Formosa Resolution.

The ROC, on the other hand, had to adjust itself to the ever-changing U.S. policies. It tried to devise its diplomatic and military strategy as best as it could in difficult situations. As discussed above, the ROC was on the verge of collapse when the Truman administration contemplated abandoning it, but after the Korean War and the policy shift by the Eisenhower administration, it regained its confidence to the extent that Chiang Kai-shek conceived of a concrete, although not quite practical, plan to return to the mainland. When the First Taiwan Crisis began, however, it again faced U.S. reluctance to support Taiwan. While the ROC succeeded in concluding an alliance with the United States, it was evident that the United States was unwilling to support the ROC as much as the latter wished. The United States forced the ROC to withdraw from the Dachen Island despite its previous encouragements to hold the island. The United States also limited its defense commitments to prevent the ROC from launching counterattacks that would allow them to return to the mainland. As a result, Chiang Kai-shek and the ROC government remained very suspicious of U.S. leadership.

With regards to the border issue in the Taiwan Strait, the U.S. policy of dual deterrence—preventing the PRC from attacking Taiwan and dissuading the ROC from counterattacking the mainland—practically meant to freeze the status quo in which the PRC controlled the mainland while the ROC maintained Taiwan and its related areas. In other words, this meant the tentative creation of a "border" in reality.

It is important to note here that neither Taipei nor Beijing wanted a "two-China" solution. Both wanted "one China," even though they squarely disagreed as to who would control it. In that sense, neither ROC nor PRC governments were satisfied with the status quo after the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. Their dissatisfaction paved the way for the second crisis in 1958 and Chiang's unfulfilled plan to counterattack the mainland in 1962 concerning the issue of where in the Taiwan Strait the "border line" should be drawn.

