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**TAIWANESE SOVEREIGNTY & THE UNITED STATES' ASSURANCE AND
DISSUATION ALLIANCE TO COMBAT CHINESE USE OF FORCE**

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Abstract

The unthinkable possibility of a US-Sino contingency may not be as far-fetched a notion as once imagined. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has unrelentingly maintained their stance on a “One China principle” which seeks the eventual unification of the Republic of China (ROC – Taiwan), with the mainland.¹ With tensions rising since the 2016 election of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (whose political platform favors independence and has openly rebuked Beijing’s effort to undermine their democracy) and festering territorial disputes across the Western Pacific, (illuminating the rising Chinese aggression demonstrated near the Taiwanese border) one may beg to question, what will the United States do if one of the two countries cross the line? A US-Sino force on force contingency would be disastrous on a world-wide stage both economically and diplomatically, while leading to further destabilization across the world.² In the event of a PRC-ROC dispute, the United States would need to rally clear headed thought and seek to leverage allies, international organizations and non-militarized instruments of power. This paper will seek to examine how the US could muster support in order to assure and dissuade the use of force in a Taiwan Scenario.

¹ Council, 2021.

² Cevallos, 2016.

Introduction

Since 1949, Taiwan has been governed independently from Mainland China. Beijing has perpetually viewed the island as part of its Territory, with the central aim of unifying the countries under the PRC government.³ Both the PRC and ROC ascribe to the one China principal, which is reunification on both sides of the strait, however, they each see themselves as the one true China and the other as the “rogue” entity that needs to realign. There is a two-camp split regarding this issue among the Taiwanese. The Pan-Blue Coalition believe “the ROC is the sole government of China (including mainland and Taiwan) and supports eventual unification.”⁴ The Pan-Green Coalition, on the other hand, regard Taiwan as “an independent, sovereign state, opposing reunification with China, and seeking wide diplomatic recognition.”⁵ The PRC holds steadfast to their “red line” ideology, where two relevant points include preserving their view of territorial integrity, and opposing Taiwan’s independence; to the extent that use of force remains an option on the table, “The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) will resolutely defeat anyone attempting to separate Taiwan from China and safeguard national unity at all costs.”⁶ This stance by the PRC could possibly draw the US into a contingency due to its Taiwan Relations Act, where the US “maintains the ability to come to Taiwan’s defense, while not actually committing to doing so, leveraging a policy known as strategic ambiguity.”⁷

There are many strategic advantages to reunification for the PRC. The first and most symbolic, is the attempt to fully recover from the “century of humiliation,” where the country was colonized and divided by outside powers. Unification would culminate the expected end to

³ Chen, 2016.

⁴ Countries, 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Pearlman, 2021.

⁷ Cevallos, 2016.

the decades old civil war and fortify the one China vision; solidifying the power, solidarity and legitimacy of the regime.⁸ Reunification would also give the PRC further power projection and create a dissolution of US-Taiwan relations, deterring US influence and projection in the region. With high stakes on the line, there are a myriad of non-military options and organizations the US should seek to leverage in order to assure and dissuade a conflict in the Western Pacific. This paper will highlight the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional partners, in addition to garnering the support of the United Nations (UN) to align in combating Chinese use of force.

NATO and the European Union

NATO and the EU involvement could wield significant impacts in assuring and dissuading a conflict in the Western Pacific. Both entities are tied to peace, security and economic interests in the region. “Most relevant to addressing China are [NATO’s] long-standing relationships with key democracies of the Indo-Pacific region. NATO established Global Partnerships with Korea, New Zealand, and Mongolia in 2012, Australia in 2013, and Japan in 2014... most of these partners have contributed to NATO missions, including in Afghanistan.”⁹ NATO proved to be a helpful ally during 9/11, but there are current internal factions, most notably between Turkey and other member states, that could diminish the readiness and ability of the organization to support a conflict in the Western Pacific; particularly, if Russia decides to capitalize on the voids left in the region by the shifting resources of state actors supporting a large scale contingency between the US and China. NATO may be best

⁸ Chen, 2016.

⁹ Brzezinski, 2020.

served to focus its efforts on thwarting Russia, rather than supporting the US and allies, in an offensive against China.

However, as one of the leading instruments for safeguarding freedom and security collaboration of its members (namely the US) by political and or military means,¹⁰ NATO should contribute (preemptively) in three important ways regarding combating Chinese hostility: First, NATO can foster a shared awareness of China’s capabilities with its allies and partners that “minimize risk, while providing leverage and opportunities for the stakeholders;”¹¹ NATO has long served as a vital medium for cross collaboration of intelligence and data needed to facilitate cooperative action. Second, “NATO can help develop and promulgate a transatlantic security strategy and posture regarding China.”¹² One which should include “a mutual relationship... as well the dissuasion of China from undermining the interests of the transatlantic community.”¹³ There should be on-the-shelf, phased-approached options that are initiated by the triggering of certain “red lines” denoted by NATO and partnering nations. Lastly, NATO’s military and civilian entities should be used to “facilitate the defense and security component of a Western strategy addressing China—including in the tasks of engagement, deterrence, and defense.”¹⁴ Not limited to, but including deepening engagements with its Pacific partners and possibly offering the establishment of a NATO-China Council; similar to the NATO-Russia Council construct, in order to “recognize and respond to the reality of China’s growing influence and

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

reach, while also identifying and fostering opportunities for constructive collaboration between China and the transatlantic community.”¹⁵

The EU support would be similar to the aforementioned, where approx. 20 of its 27 members are also part of NATO¹⁶, but more economically focused due to many of the associated states having close financial ties to China, “The EU and China are two of the biggest traders in the world. China is now the EU's second-biggest trading partner behind the United States and the EU is China's biggest trading partner.”¹⁷ Europe could place economic pressures on China, but the pain would be felt both ways. In addition to an economic strategy, the EU would need to be a unified front in any offense against this adversary. China is considered a world superpower with a myriad of resources at its disposal, and it will take a majority effort to inflict a blow that would have an effect.

Working in the favor of Taiwan, is a growing skepticism between the EU and China, most notably due to China’s handling of the Coronavirus on the world stage, “The pandemic brought to light the differences in Taiwan and China’s political systems: China was accused of suppressing news of the disease, thereby allowing the virus to spread across borders, but Taiwan won plaudits for mobilizing quickly, closing its borders and setting in place a stringent quarantine and testing system – moves that have kept the island’s COVID-19 cases below 500 and fatalities at just seven.”¹⁸ European dignitaries have visited Taiwan and openly lauded their valiant efforts during the pandemic, “Czech Senate speaker Milos Vystrcil declared ‘I am Taiwanese’ during a speech at Taiwan’s parliament, referencing JFK’s similar statement in

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ European, 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hale, 2020.

defiance of communism during the height of the cold war...he was met with a standing ovation [from Taiwanese and partner attendees].”¹⁹ The praise continued even amidst threats from China, “Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own, had already threatened to make Vystrcil pay a ‘heavy price’ for his visit...they warned the Czech legislator he had crossed a ‘red line’ with his six-day trip.”²⁰ This move is stanchly different from previous as many EU states have tried to steer clear of triggering China’s “red line”; but even more eye opening were a few major European powers that jumped to Vystrcil’s defense, “France called China’s threats ‘unacceptable’ and Germany urged Beijing to ‘show mutual respect.’”²¹ This combined front shows promise for unity and solidarity of effort in the event of a future Taiwan scenario.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other Regional Partners

ASEAN and other regional partners such as Japan, ROK and Australia could be mitigating factors in dissuading a conflict just by virtue of threat proximity and location. These nations would need to be sold on the premise of “a threat to one is a threat to all,” relative to the South China Sea disputes, but regarding a Taiwan scenario. There are many bonds that tie these nations to China and vice versa, and akin to the NATO/EU position, it would take a joint effort and preemptive action on the part of all these nations to effectively thwart a regional power such as China. A contingency involving China is assessed to take place in the Western Pacific, which is right in their locale. This would not only create the threat of being in a warzone for ASEAN and other regional partners, but also illuminates the secondary effects of catastrophic political and economic setbacks. Highlighting these scenarios and the rapid development of China’s

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hale, 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

military capabilities, could be a vital piece in getting these nations on board to support an effort regarding a Taiwan scenario.

China is looking to expand to more of a Blue Water Navy capability, which would extend its reach and power, ultimately affecting the posture of these nations. Not only has China made numerous advancements in their cyberwar and Anti-Satellite (ASAT) capabilities, but they are also improving their current SAM systems and anti-access and area denial (A2AD) technologies, which enhances their ability to conduct first-strike options while minimizing an adversary's ability to gain operational control, and in turn, air superiority.²² If China were able to engage, defeat and occupy the island of Taiwan, it would have a huge strategic advantage over the nations surrounding the East and South China Sea, both symbolically and militarily. The bowing out of support by these nations could possibly embolden China to officially lay its claim to the many surrounding islands that it has already begun to occupy and operate from. It would be incumbent on the ASEAN and regional partners to take unified non-military measures, ahead of a contingent, to protect their interests, assure that a strategic gap remains in the Western Pacific and to dissuade China from further aggression.

The United Nations (UN)

The UN could play a critical role by recognizing Taiwan as its own sovereign state and including it within the organizational framework, which would harmonize with Taiwan's Pan-Green Coalition ideology. While Taiwan holds member status in more than forty world and regional organizations, membership in the UN would solidify and openly declare their sovereignty as a nation state. Beijing constantly blocks and rejects Taiwan's participation in the

²² Cevallos, 2016.

UN or any organization that limits its membership to states; this is due to Beijing's stance that they are the only China and Taiwan is a "rogue" state that will be eventually reunited with the mainland. The US and many allies have skirted a fine line regarding their relations with Taiwan due to this. The US does not officially regard or disregard Taiwan as a sovereign state, but does continue to push for its participation in organizations that require state membership.²³ The most significant impact of world organizations continuing to ban Taiwan from such memberships was seen when Taipei criticized the World Health Organization (WHO) for giving in to Beijing's demands and continuing to bar Taiwan, when they proved to have one of the world's most effective responses to the Coronavirus pandemic.²⁴ Due to this, many of the G7 ministers have called for Taiwan's inclusion in the WHO.

This would most certainly be a definite red line for China, but the packaging of the plan and pressure of the UN and international community could affect the course of action China might seek to implement. A multi-lateral agreement between China, Taiwan and international partners could be implemented on how Taiwan would participate and be recognized by these state organizations. The UN should lead the effort on this initiative as a strong intergovernmental organization and set the example for similar entities to follow. The UN would need a strong united front, as defiance and non-conformation would be anticipated from China; but the continued brushing off and indifference to the situation by the world's bystanders is never going to solve the problem and will eventually have to be dealt with one way or another. A planned, multi-lateral diplomatic approach can afford a viable solution to a growing regional issue.

²³ Winkler, 2021.

²⁴ Countries, 2021.

Conclusion

The unthinkable notion that a US-Sino contingency could erupt over Taiwan and cause tremendous political, diplomatic, economic and military fall out across the globe, is a tangible reality. China has expressed that use of force is a viable option, and they will use any means necessary to see their vision of unification of the ROC (under the One China PRC umbrella) eventually come to fruition. It is up to the US, its allies and regional partners, to secure a plan in order to assure and dissuade the use of force in such a scenario. There is a vast array of world players, instruments of national power and preemptive measures that can be leveraged and employed to support this effort, but the bottom-line is there must be a pre-positioned strategy and solidarity among stakeholders to hold the line when the time comes. China is growing in its supremacy and influence across the globe, but even China in all of its strategic glory cannot overcome multiple nations assembled toward a common goal of maintaining the security, stability and legacy of a viable world and thriving Taiwan for generations to come.

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