

The Abortive Liberation of Taiwan

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On 1 October 1949 the People's Republic of China was formally established in Beijing. On 7 December Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), who had earlier moved to Taiwan to secure a final base of resistance in the civil war, ordered the Kuomintang (KMT) regime to withdraw to the island from Chengdu, Sichuan, its last seat on the mainland. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) declared its commitment to the goal of unifying the nation under the People's Republic, and thus called for the "liberation" of Taiwan. Although Taiwan represented the final phase of the still unfinished civil war, it was the strategic significance of the island that became of paramount concern to the CCP, the KMT and the United States. The crucial question for both the CCP and the KMT was whether the United States would resort to direct armed intervention to thwart the "liberation" of Taiwan. The CCP maintained throughout the civil war that Washington would not willingly abandon its role as a participant in Chinese politics and eventually pointed to Taiwan as the likely target of a last-ditch American intervention. Indeed, as early as 1948 the growing strategic importance of Taiwan was recognized in Washington, where there was already a consensus among the joint chiefs of staff that the island should be kept separated from a communist-controlled mainland by means short of direct military intervention. By the spring of 1950, when the collapse of Chiang's Taipei regime seemed probable, the interventionist argument, based upon fundamental anti-communism and post-war concepts of national security, gained urgency. In June 1950, immediately following the outbreak of civil war in Korea, President Truman announced the "neutralization" of the Taiwan Straits, whereby Taiwan was formally made an integral part of the American strategic frontier for the "containment" of monolithic communism.¹

Washington's decision to intervene in the Taiwan Straits was at the heart of the subsequent Sino-American cold war. Shunning the People's Republic, the United States upheld the Taipei regime's claim to be the sole legitimate government of China. Diplomatically, the United States supported Taipei's continued control of Chinese representation at the United Nations, where in the Security Council China, as a permanent member, could exercise the right of the veto. Despite the onset of détente between Washington and Beijing at the beginning of the 1970s, the transfer of China's UN representation from Taipei to Beijing in 1971, and the normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic at the end of that

1. See Jon W. Huebner, "The Americanization of the Taiwan Straits," *Asian Profile*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 1985), pp. 187-99.

decade, Taiwan remains an important issue in the evolving Sino-American relationship. Beijing has never relinquished its claim to sovereignty over the island, and, indeed, the reunification of Taiwan with China is still a major publicly stated goal, however distant, of the current leadership of the People's Republic.

Thus, the inability of the CCP to extend its rule to Taiwan remains an unresolved problem in the history of the People's Republic, and the origins of that problem in the failure of the Party to liberate the island as it came to power and consolidated its authority throughout the rest of the country merits study. This article utilizes available sources to explore how, during 1949–50, the CCP approached the problem of liberating Taiwan and then failed to achieve its objective.

The Background

Before 1943 the position of the CCP – and that of the KMT – regarding the status of Taiwan was ambiguous.² However, both the CCP and the KMT did not recognize either the Treaty of Shimonoseki, by which China had been forced to cede Taiwan to Japan in 1895, or the legitimacy of the Japanese colonial occupation; both subsequently took the position that the island was Chinese territory and an inalienable part of the Chinese nation. That position received international recognition in the Cairo Declaration, issued by Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang in 1943, which called for the restoration of all territory seized from China by Japan, specifically including Taiwan and the Penghu (Pescadore) islands, and was reaffirmed by the Potsdam Declaration in 1945. Moreover, the Chinese Government had been designated by the Allies to accept the surrender of Japanese forces on Chinese soil and, in October 1945, Chinese sovereignty was thereby restored to Taiwan.

The unpopularity of KMT rule led to the outbreak of major anti-government disturbances on the island on 28 February 1947, which were ruthlessly suppressed with thousands of civilians killed.³ The despotic nature of the local administration, headed by General Chen Yi (not to be confused with General Chen Yi of the People's Liberation Army), was generally held responsible for the unrest.⁴ Chiang Kai-shek, however, categorically rejected any government

2. See Frank S. T. Hsiao and Lawrence R. Sullivan, "The Chinese Communist Party and the status of Taiwan, 1928–1943," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Fall 1979), pp. 446–67.

3. On the 28 February 1947 incident, see the U.S. diplomatic reports in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1947, VII, pp. 423 ff.; George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Ch. 12, 14.

4. See especially *Dagong bao* (*Impartial Daily*) (Shanghai), 6 March 1947; *Shun [Shen] bao* (*Shanghai Daily*) and *Wenhui bao* (*Literary Daily*) (Shanghai), 6 March 1947 in United States Consulate General, Shanghai, *Chinese Press Review (CPR)*, No. 288; *Zhongyang ribao* (*Central Daily*) (Shanghai), 7 March 1947 in *CPR*, No. 289; *Xinmin wanbao* (*New People's Evening News*) (Shanghai), 10 March 1947 in *CPR*, No. 292.

culpability; on 10 March 1947 he publicly defended Chen's conduct and accused the CCP of having been behind the riots.⁵ Following his arrival in Taipei, General Bai Chongxi, the minister of defence, who had been sent from Nanjing to investigate the situation on the island, asserted that the unrest had, at least in part, been instigated by the CCP.⁶ Chiang's minister of the interior claimed that CCP agitators had come to Taiwan from Hainan.⁷

The allegations of CCP complicity in the disturbances were overwhelmingly contradicted by the reports of U.S. consular personnel in Taiwan, the substance of which was summarized in a memorandum drafted by Vice-consul George H. Kerr and submitted to Chiang Kai-shek by Ambassador John Leighton Stuart on 18 April 1947. According to that document, no evidence could be found to substantiate Chiang's contention that communists had contributed to the unrest; on the contrary, the evidence was conclusively against any significant communist agitation on the island. Kerr's memorandum concluded that communism exerted no influence in Taiwan, but warned that unless wide-ranging reforms were undertaken by the government, the future development of a local form of communism was likely to occur.⁸

During the colonial era Taiwan, where an intense anti-communism had been fostered by the Japanese, did not provide fertile soil for a communist underground. Taiwanese communists were isolated and of no local importance.⁹ There had been no CCP-led anti-Japanese resistance movement in Taiwan during the Sino-Japanese War, in sharp contrast to the situation on Hainan island, which was much more accessible from the mainland and where CCP resistance activities were well established.¹⁰ Although it lacked a base of popular support in Taiwan, the CCP maintained that local self-determination could only occur under the leadership of the Party. The CCP rejected the idea that the Taiwanese possessed an identity or destiny separate from the rest of the Chinese nation. According to the Party, the island's principal distinctions were the geographical isolation imposed by the Taiwan Straits and the effects of 50 years of Japanese occupation.¹¹

5. *FRUS*, 1947, VII, pp. 439–40, 449.

6. Nanjing radio, 19 March 1947 in United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (Far Eastern Section) (*FBIS*), No. 19–1947.

7. *FRUS*, 1947, VII, p. 442.

8. *Ibid.* pp. 451–55.

9. *Ibid.* p. 452. On Taiwanese political developments under Japanese rule, see George H. Kerr, *Formosa: Licensed Revolution and the Home Rule Movement, 1895–1945* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974); Edward I-te Chen, "Formosan political movements under Japanese colonial rule, 1914–1937," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (May 1972), pp. 477–98; Frank S.T. Hsiao and Lawrence R. Sullivan, "A political history of the Taiwanese Communist Party, 1928–1931," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (February 1983), pp. 269–89.

10. *Dagong bao*, 28 October 1948; *Xinhua* (*New China*) *News Agency* (*XHNA*), 12 May 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 93–1949.

11. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 961.

CCP Strategic Perceptions: Chiang, the United States and Taiwan

During the civil war the CCP maintained that the United States, which it identified as the leading imperialist power, presented the greatest threat to the Chinese Revolution. By early 1949 Taiwan had assumed strategic importance for the Party; a persistent theme of CCP propaganda was that the United States, faced with the failure of its policy in China, was seeking to secure the island as a sphere of influence regardless of the outcome of the conflict on the mainland. The CCP assembled a catalogue of accusations. On the one hand, the Party charged that Chiang, with United States support, planned to make Taiwan a final base of refuge and resistance,¹² and had therefore undertaken a massive campaign of arrests on the island to stamp out all opposition to his rule.¹³ On the other hand, the Party insisted that the Chiang regime, in exchange for its continued survival in Taiwan, was prepared to reach secret agreements with the United States by which the island would virtually become an American colony.¹⁴ The CCP saw sinister motives behind American assistance programmes in Taiwan, specifically denouncing the activities of the Economic Co-operation Administration as furthering American economic penetration of the island.¹⁵ According to New China News Agency, a secret agreement had been reached in November 1949, whereby the United States would provide the Chiang regime with additional aid and diplomatic support. In return, Washington expected the KMT administration in Taiwan to be reformed, at least superficially, in compliance with American wishes; thus Wu Guozhen, who had been mayor of Shanghai during 1946–49, was appointed provincial governor in December 1949, and General Sun Liren was given the task of defending the island. The Party expected an influx of American advisers and new assistance programmes to increase Washington's influence over military and economic affairs in Taiwan.¹⁶

In March 1949 the CCP claimed that President Truman had received a proposal from the National Security Council calling for the defence of Taiwan and Hainan at all costs, since they could be used as embarkation points for a future invasion of south China,¹⁷ for which, it claimed, extensive preparations were already under way.¹⁸ By the end of May the CCP asserted that the United States intended to make Taiwan part of its defence system in the western

12. *XHNA*, 16 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 51–1949; Beiping radio, 15 April 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 73–1949.

13. *Xinhua* (New China) radio, (Beiping), 2 May 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 84–1949.

14. North Shaanxi radio, 2 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 41–1949.

15. North Shaanxi radio, 15 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 50–1949; *XHNA*, 16 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 51–1949.

16. *XHNA*, 3 January 1950; *Jiefang ribao* (*Liberation Daily*) (Shanghai), 6 January 1950.

17. *XHNA*, 16 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 51–1949.

18. North Shaanxi radio, 19 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 53–1949.

Pacific.¹⁹ The visit to Manila by Chiang Kai-shek in July caused the Party to speculate that he and the Philippine president, Elpidio Quirino, were, along with the Syngman Rhee regime in Seoul, about to launch an anti-communist Pacific alliance directed primarily against China. The CCP viewed such an alliance as a counter-revolutionary *cordon sanitaire*, with Taiwan at the centre of a strategic line extending from Japan in the north to the Philippines in the south, from where it would then extend through Indonesia towards India.²⁰ In liberated Shanghai, the *Dagong bao* expressed the view that the United States was attempting both to encircle China and to resurrect, in a new guise, the "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere" of Imperial Japan,²¹ and said that Taiwan, under "imperialist" control, would take on the attributes of an unsinkable aircraft carrier to be used in carrying out attacks against the Chinese mainland.²² The Party's perception that Washington had linked the defence of Taiwan to that of the Philippines was reinforced by the December 1949 conference at Baguio attended by the American ambassador to the Philippines, Myron Cowen, Chiang's envoy to Manila, Chen Zhiping, and President Quirino, where the co-ordination of defence plans and the indirect shipment of American arms to Taiwan using the Philippines as an intermediary were discussed.²³ As 1950 began the CCP argued that the United States would proceed more openly with a policy of using the Chiang regime to establish Taiwan as a base of aggression against China.²⁴

Taiwan, along with the remaining KMT naval bases in Fujian and Zhejiang, played a strategic role in efforts to curtail shipping to the liberated areas. On 20 June 1949 the Chiang regime's Foreign Ministry formally announced the closure to shipping of coastal waters extending from the Min River in Fujian to the Liao River in Liaoning; shipping was specifically prohibited at Ningbo, Tianjin and Qinhuangdao, as well as at all other ports that ceased to be under KMT control.²⁵ During the following months the closed area was extended southward, reflecting the course of the civil war.²⁶ From a strictly legal standpoint, however, the closures did not constitute a blockade, which required effective enforcement.²⁷ Interestingly enough, the United States had immediately expressed reservations about the legality of any action taken by the Chiang regime to close ports and adjacent territorial waters unless a formal blockade was declared and main-

19. Beiping radio, 29 May 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 103–1949.

20. *XHNA*, 18 July 1949; *Wenhui bao*, 10 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 946.

21. *Dagong bao*, 3 September 1949 in *CPR*, No. 964.

22. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 962.

23. *XHNA*, 4 January 1950.

24. *Ibid.* 3 January 1950.

25. United States Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No. 523 (11 July 1949), p. 34.

26. *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 548 (2 January 1950), p. 24.

27. See John J. Nolde, "The U.S. and the Chinese 'blockade,'" *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 6 (22 March 1950), pp. 57–59.

tained.²⁸ Although incidents involving foreign – especially American – merchant vessels intercepted and held in violation of the closures caused friction, the United States adopted an attitude of acquiescence.²⁹ The CCP, however, maintained that Washington was behind the Chiang regime's maritime policy. The interference with shipping exacerbated economic hardships in ports under CCP control, especially Shanghai.³⁰

From Taiwan the Chiang regime conducted indiscriminate bombing raids against the population centres south of the Changjiang (Yangtze River) using American-supplied aircraft. Shanghai was a principal target. The 25 January 1950 raid on Shanghai included 12 B-24 "Liberators," the heaviest bomber in Chiang's arsenal, which inflicted a high toll on civilian life (around 400 killed and wounded) and property, and was considered the most severe attack since the city had been liberated.³¹ Shanghai suffered greater devastation in the raid of 6 February, which again included a dozen B-24s. A thousand people were killed and wounded and municipal water and electricity services were disrupted;³² Shanghai radio declared the city calamity stricken.³³ In Taibei the raid was termed a complete success, with all aircraft having returned safely to base after dropping some 40,000 pounds of bombs.³⁴ One of the targets hit was the huge electricity generating plant of the American-owned Shanghai Power Company; the CCP found this conclusive evidence that the raid had been approved in Washington, for otherwise, it asserted, the Chiang regime would not dare to attack American property. The CCP also claimed that Japanese volunteers, recruited for the KMT air force with the collusion of the American occupation authorities in Japan, participated in the raids as pilots and bombardiers.³⁵ In a propaganda campaign following the 6 February raid, the CCP alleged that the United States had sent an additional 25 combat aircraft to Taiwan and was assisting in the construction of a new air base in the Zhoushan islands so that the KMT could make good its threats to bomb Beijing, Tianjin, Qingdao, Hankou and Chongqing, and that the Chiang regime was also seeking the use of South Korean air bases from which it could bomb the cities of north and north-eastern China. The CCP maintained that Washington had dictated the policy of

28. *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No. 523 (11 July 1949), p. 35.

29. Cf. Nolde, "The U.S. and the Chinese 'blockade,'" pp. 59–61.

30. See, e.g. *Jiefang ribao*, 27 July 1949 in *CPR*, No. 938.

31. *Jiefang ribao*, 26 January 1950.

32. *Ibid.* 7 and 8 February 1950; *XHNA*, 8 February 1950.

33. Shanghai radio, 9 February 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 29–1950.

34. Taibei radio, 6 February 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 26–1950.

35. *XHNA*, 10 February 1950. During the autumn of 1949 the CCP circulated unsubstantiated reports that approximately 4,000 former Japanese air force and naval personnel had, with the assistance of the American occupation authorities in Japan, been recruited for the Chiang regime and sent to Taiwan for combat duty. *XHNA*, 15 September 1949; *Dagong bao* and *Wenhui bao*, 22 November 1949 in *CPR*, No. 1002. On the use of Japanese by both the Chiang regime and the CCP, see Donald G. Gillin with Charles Etter, "Staying on: Japanese soldiers and civilians in China, 1945–1949," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (May 1983), pp. 497–518.

bombing the mainland and had provided the Chiang regime with the means to carry it out.³⁶

While the CCP identified the KMT with American policy, it also cautioned that Washington would keep its options open with regard to Taiwan. Of particular concern to the Party were American attempts, using, in its view, specious legal arguments, to cast doubt on the status of Taiwan as Chinese territory. General MacArthur had expressed the opinion that, until its status had been determined by a peace treaty with Japan, Taiwan was actually surrendered Japanese territory that was theoretically under his jurisdiction as the commander of the occupation forces in Japan.³⁷ In early September 1949 the CCP predicted that the United States would vehemently condemn any action to liberate Taiwan as an act of aggression against the territory of another state and a threat to international peace and security in violation of the UN Charter.³⁸ The Party also warned that if the Chiang regime lost viability, a direct American occupation of Taiwan would be undertaken on the pretext of establishing a UN trusteeship.³⁹ The CCP also saw the United States behind the Taiwanese independence movement, which could have provided Washington with an alternative to the Chiang regime. The two brothers, known in the west as Joshua and Thomas Liao, who led the movement in exile, were vilified by the CCP as traitors who were working under the direction of General MacArthur.⁴⁰ In Beijing, President Truman's statement of 5 January 1950 disavowing any immediate American designs on Taiwan was greeted with incredulity as an expression of actual American intentions towards the island.⁴¹

The Approach to Liberation

After the People's Liberation Army (PLA) crossed the Changjiang in April 1949 and continued its offensive southward, the CCP

36. *XHNA*, 2 March 1950. These are precisely the conclusions that the Chiang regime wanted to be drawn; on this point, and for indications of official American concern over the ramifications of Chiang's urban bombing raids, see *FRUS*, 1950, VI, especially pp. 306–307, 312–13.

37. Xinhua radio (North Shaanxi), 15 March 1949 in United States Consulate General, Beijing, *Radio Broadcasts of Communist Hsin Hua Station, North Shensi*, 15 March 1949; North Shaanxi radio, 15 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 50–1949; *XHNA*, 16 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 51–1949. Such an argument regarding the status of Taiwan was also contained in a 19 January 1949 draft report of the U.S. National Security Council. *FRUS*, 1949, IX, pp. 271–73.

38. *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily) (Beijing), 4 September 1949 in *Taiwan wenti* (The Taiwan Problem) (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1950), pp. 1–3; *XHNA*, 5 September 1949.

39. *XHNA*, 3 January 1950.

40. Harbin radio, 16 March 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 52–1949. Also see Zheng Liufang, *Meiguo dui Taiwan de qinlue* (U.S. Aggression Against Taiwan) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1954), Ch. 3, especially pp. 21–23. For a viewpoint sympathetic to the independence movement, see Douglas Mendel, *The Politics of Formosan Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). Regarding U.S. support for Taiwanese separatism, see the National Security Council report of 3 February 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, IX, p. 281; Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum, 10 February 1949, *ibid.* p. 286.

41. *Renmin ribao*, 14 January 1950; *XHNA*, 15 January 1950.

declared the goal of liberating Taiwan to be a major priority inasmuch as it held the key to final victory in the civil war. Shanghai, following its liberation, became the headquarters of the East China regional administration, which was to include jurisdiction over Taiwan, as well as the provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangsu and Shandong. Rao Shushi, the head of the Party's East China Bureau and the chairman of the East China Military and Administrative Committee, exercised routine political and administrative authority, while military affairs were under the direction of PLA's General Chen Yi, who commanded both the East China Military Region and the Third Field Army, and was second secretary of the Party's East China Bureau under Rao. Chen and the Third Field Army were assigned the task of invading Taiwan.⁴²

During the summer of 1949 the Third Field Army advanced along the Fujian coast. On 17 August Fuzhou, the provincial capital and a major KMT naval base, was liberated, thus bringing the PLA to a point about 120 nautical miles directly across the Taiwan Straits from Jilong. The Party's East China Bureau and the Shanghai Municipal Committee emphasized the strategic importance of the victory at Fuzhou in eliminating the KMT's outer defence of Taiwan and exhorted the Third Field Army to wipe out remaining KMT resistance in Fujian and to prepare to carry the struggle across the Taiwan Straits.⁴³ The Party asserted that preparations for the invasion of Taiwan began in September 1949,⁴⁴ and that it expected Taiwan, along with Xinjiang and Tibet, to be liberated during 1950.

The PLA command anticipated that a major stumbling block would be encountered at Xiamen due to KMT artillery positions deeply entrenched in the rocky offshore islands.⁴⁵ In fact, the Xiamen campaign became a test of the PLA's ability to stage a large-scale water-borne assault against what had proved to be an impregnable enemy position on Jinmen (Quemoy) island, dominating the sea approach to Xiamen harbour. Early in the morning of 25 October 1949 the assault began. Organs of the CCP remained mute regarding the outcome. The KMT, however, reported a major defeat of the PLA. According to KMT reports, three divisions of the PLA's 28th Army, totalling about 5,000 troops, were committed to the attack; during a battle lasting more than 10 hours, KMT positions remained intact while all of the PLA's artillery positions were destroyed by air attacks.⁴⁶ Radio broadcasts from Taiwan claimed that more than

42. *Renmin shouce (1950) (People's Handbook [1950])* (Shanghai: Dagong bao chubanshe, 1950), pp. 16, 19. On the regional administrative structure, see also Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 210–16; H. Arthur Steiner, "New regional governments in China," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 11 (31 May 1950), pp. 112–16.

43. *XHNA*, 19 August 1949; cf. *Jiefang ribao*, 22 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 954.

44. *XHNA*, 30 May 1950.

45. *Dagong bao*, 23 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 956.

46. Chongqing radio, 26 October 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 208–1949.

eight PLA regiments had simultaneously attacked Jinmen,⁴⁷ meeting with disaster as the KMT forces at Jinmen, commanded by General Tang Enbo, killed around 20,000 of the invaders and took 6,500 prisoner,⁴⁸ thus winning one of the greatest victories ever achieved by the KMT in its “bandit suppression campaign.”⁴⁹ The KMT declared this to be the first significant setback experienced by the PLA since it crossed the Changjiang, with the entire attacking force at Jinmen either killed or captured.⁵⁰ In addition, the KMT claimed another victory at the offshore island of Dengbu, where a 60-hour siege by more than 7,000 troops from the PLA’s 51st and 53rd Armies ended on the morning of 6 November with 5,000 of the attackers killed and over 1,000 captured.⁵¹

The East China command, however, optimistically announced that, when comparing the relative strengths of the PLA and the Chiang regime, the liberation of Taiwan would not present insurmountable difficulties. Of crucial importance to crossing the Taiwan Straits would be adequate naval and air power; another significant factor was the demoralization of the KMT forces in Taiwan.⁵² According to the scenario published in *Dagong bao*, a large amphibious force was to land in Taiwan – the most suitable sites were the northern and southern ends of the western coast of the island, although the mid-coast might also be feasible; meanwhile, PLA air force units operating from Fuzhou, Xiamen, and other airfields along the mainland coast were to provide the necessary air cover, eliminating KMT naval opposition and establishing complete dominance of the Taiwan Straits.⁵³ Undoubtedly the PLA expected to obtain sufficient aircraft for such an operation from the Soviet Union.

The CCP maintained that the Chiang regime, relying solely upon its own forces, could not hold out for long in Taiwan, despite the considerable material support that had been provided in the past by the United States. It is therefore of interest to note the CCP’s quantitative assessment of KMT military strength in Taiwan. According to a PLA estimate announced in Shanghai at the end of August 1949, a total of 70–80,000 ground troops were gathered on the island, and a future maximum total strength of 150,000 to 200,000 was projected. In addition, the Chiang regime had concentrated its air force in Taiwan, along with a substantial naval force consisting mostly of converted American LSTs. Coastal defences facing the Taiwan Straits had been reinforced, and incorporated fortified gun emplacements constructed by the Japanese during the colonial period.⁵⁴ The

47. Taiwan radio, 8 November 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 217–1949.

48. Taipei radio, 31 October 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 211–1949.

49. Taiwan radio, 8 November 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 217–1949.

50. Chongqing radio, 29 October 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 211–1949.

51. Taiwan radio, 7 November 1949 in *FBIS*, No. 217–1949.

52. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 961.

53. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 962; *Dagong bao*, 19 October 1949 in *CPR*, No. 994.

54. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 962.

PLA, however, regarded this military presence as qualitatively weak, and the Party publicly expressed the view that even if only a portion of the PLA's invasion force succeeded in landing in Taiwan, the KMT forces would disintegrate in panic and, left with no further avenue of escape, would lay down their arms in surrender.⁵⁵ Moreover, the *Jiefang ribao* conjectured that a landing by the PLA would precipitate a Taiwanese uprising against the Chiang regime.⁵⁶ The CCP, however, presumed that its constituency on the island was limited, and warned that the Party would have to accompany the PLA to Taiwan and subsequently win the support of the island's people.⁵⁷

At the beginning of 1950 the liberation of Taiwan and preparations for land reform were accorded the highest official priorities in the East China region. These subjects were discussed by the East China Military and Administrative Committee in an 11-day conference that ended on 6 February. The vice-chairman of the Committee, General Su Yu, declared that the campaign to cross the Taiwan Straits would be one of the largest in the annals of modern warfare and unprecedented in Chinese history. Su insisted that the liberation of Taiwan was a realistic and attainable objective, with success a certainty; after all, he pointed out, during the previous three years the PLA had eliminated over two million enemy troops in East China alone, and the Chiang regime was left with no more than 300,000 troops on Taiwan and the offshore islands.⁵⁸ The chairman of the Committee, Rao Shushi, sounded a more cautious note by warning that past successes should not be allowed to engender a sense of superiority and complacency in dealing with the enemy, and urged that the entire population of East China mobilize to support the troops at the front. He announced that the mobilization of all the available manpower, as well as the material and financial resources, of the region would be required to liberate Taiwan. Rao, moreover, called for the establishment of strong supply, support and medical facilities for the troops, declaring that all of East China constituted the front line of national defence.⁵⁹

By the beginning of 1950 reports of preparations for an invasion of Taiwan were increasing in number. According to *Jiefang ribao*, the Third Field Army had begun building up its supply and transportation corps in the rear areas in order to sustain a crossing of the Taiwan Straits⁶⁰; meanwhile, army units along the Fujian coast were receiving intensive training and the construction of a navy had begun, with naval officers and men instructed to train themselves in amphibious warfare and to strengthen their political consciousness.⁶¹ In February one unconfirmed report reaching Hong Kong said that the PLA had

55. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 961.

56. *Jiefang ribao*, 27 July 1949 in *CPR*, No. 939.

57. *Dagong bao*, 29 August 1949 in *CPR*, No. 961.

58. *XHNA*, 8 February 1950.

59. *Jiefang ribao*, 4 February 1950.

60. *Ibid.* 13 February 1950.

61. *Ibid.* 16 and 19 February 1950.

embarked upon a programme to construct 10,000 motor launches to be used in crossing the Taiwan Straits.⁶² According to another such report in early May, thousands of workers had been mobilized in Fujian to build new airfields, such as the one at Changting, and to enlarge existing ones, such as the former KMT bases at Xiamen, Zhangzhou and Fuzhou, with much of the work planned and supervised by Soviet advisers. Moreover, some 150 combat aircraft may have been available for PLA use on this front.⁶³

Repeated pronouncements by the Chiang regime that Hainan was indispensable to the defence of Taiwan gave the PLA all the more reason for jubilation when, after a two-week campaign ending on 30 April, it succeeded in routing the KMT forces on the island.⁶⁴ The People's Revolutionary Military Council in Beijing declared that the Hainan operations provided invaluable practical experience to be utilized in preparing for the campaign against Taiwan.⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter KMT forces were driven from Dongshan island, leaving Jinmen as the principal remaining KMT naval base along the Fujian coast.⁶⁶ On 18 May, three days after commencing amphibious operations, the Third Field Army gained control of the Zhoushan islands, off the Zhejiang coast. This was hailed by the CCP as another major strategic victory, ending the KMT stranglehold on Shanghai's shipping.⁶⁷ Chen Yi declared that this latest success, along with the victory on Hainan, had created conditions even more favourable for the liberation of Taiwan.⁶⁸ Beijing radio announced that the liberators of the Zhoushans had expressed determination to press on to Jinmen and Taiwan.⁶⁹ At the end of May the director of the Political Department of the East China Military Headquarters, Xu Tong, stated that, except for a relatively small number of military men assigned to garrison duty in Shanghai, most of the PLA troops in the East China region were undergoing intensive training in amphibious warfare in preparation for the liberation of Taiwan.⁷⁰

The Party's official account of the Zhoushan campaign emphasized its strategic importance and its amphibious nature. Preparations for an amphibious assault against the Zhoushans had begun as early as August 1949, and by the autumn of 1949 hundreds of thousands of civilians had been mobilized in support of the Third Field Army, repairing roads and bridges so that military supplies could reach the coast, while thousands of workers from Shanghai, Ningbo and other cities were employed in the construction of ship-building and repair facilities. Thousands of troops were instructed in seamanship by

62. Hong Kong radio, 13 February 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 32–1950.

63. Hong Kong radio, 8 May 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 90–1950.

64. *XHNA*, 2 May 1950.

65. *Ibid.* 6 May 1950.

66. *Ibid.* 15 May 1950. There is no reference to Mazu, however.

67. *Ibid.* 18 and 20 May 1950.

68. Shanghai radio, 18 May 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 98–1950.

69. Beijing radio, 29 May 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 106–1950.

70. *XHNA*, 30 May 1950.

coastal fishermen, some of whom were recruited from as far away as Shandong. Care was taken to ensure the smooth flow of troops and supplies to the front by land and water. Heavy and long-range artillery were transported considerable distances and put into positions that gave the PLA command of the beaches and sea along the Zhejiang coast. The Party attributed the success of the amphibious operations to the supportive role of the people of East China and to the methodical and exhaustive preparation and co-ordination of the Third Field Army.⁷¹

The Hainan and the Zhoushan campaigns unquestionably required extensive military preparations, the mobilization of the civilian population in support of the PLA, and large-scale amphibious operations. However, David G. Muller, Jr, in his recent study of the development of Chinese naval power since 1945, has pointed out that both the Hainan and the Zhoushan campaigns utilized tactics adopted by the PLA for riverine warfare, in which assault forces were transported relatively short distances from the coast aboard rafts towed by motorized junks. Such riverine tactics, while successfully used against offshore islands, would not be of practical use for an invasion of Taiwan, a campaign that would necessitate crossing nearly 100 nautical miles of open water.⁷² Preparations for amphibious operations against Taiwan would have required assembling a large flotilla of vessels suitable for open water, such as motorized junks, possessing sufficient total capacity to transport an invasion force across the Taiwan Straits.

By the spring of 1950 the Chiang regime announced its own perceptions of the PLA threat, although it was in Taipei's interests to exaggerate that threat in order to promote further American involvement on Chiang's behalf. On 14 May Chiang's son, Jiang Jingguo, claimed that an invasion of Jinmen had been decided upon in late April by the PLA's General Chen Yi at a conference in Shanghai, and erroneously predicted that it would occur later in May; he added that, in conjunction with the Zhoushan campaign, new airfields to accommodate Soviet-built jet aircraft were under construction in the vicinity of Ningbo. Regarding preparations for an attack on Taiwan, he said that captured documents indicated that invasion forces were gathering to the north at Qingdao and Lienyungang, and to the south at Shantou.⁷³ Furthermore, reports reaching Hong Kong said that KMT military authorities expected the PLA to attempt an invasion of Taiwan during the summer, but no later than the end of August since any additional delay would require an undesirable postponement of the campaign until the following March, when the weather and sea conditions in the Taiwan Straits would once again be favourable.⁷⁴ By

71. *Ibid.* 20 and 26 May 1950.

72. David G. Muller, Jr, *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), p. 16.

73. Voice of Free China (Taipei), 14 May 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 94–1950.

74. Hong Kong radio, 16 May 1950 in *FBIS*. No. 96–1950.

early June radio broadcasts from Taiwan claimed that an invasion was imminent, with an invasion force of 600,000 front-line and 400,000 second-line troops assembled under Chen Yi's command; the view from Taipei was that the campaign had been delayed by an insufficient number of vessels to transport the invaders across the Taiwan Straits.⁷⁵ Later in the month a report from Taipei announced that intensive KMT bombing raids against PLA troop concentrations, installations and air bases near the coast had inflicted heavy damage on the invasion force.⁷⁶

Following the defeat of the KMT in the Zhoushans, American diplomatic personnel in Taiwan did not believe that the Chiang regime would be able to survive. The U.S. chargé d'affaires in Taipei, Robert C. Strong, estimated that the invasion of the island would occur some time between 15 June and the end of July.⁷⁷ In Washington the secretary of defence, Louis A. Johnson, reported that during June PLA troop strength opposite Taiwan increased from "slightly more" than 40,000 to approximately 156,000, backed by a force of around 300,000 additional troops.⁷⁸ Muller's 1983 study, citing declassified U.S. military intelligence reports, states that by early June 1950 preparations for an invasion of Taiwan were "well advanced," with probing operations scheduled to begin in July and the invasion itself set for early August, for which the PLA had assembled approximately 4,000 motorized junks at Haimen, Wenzhou, Xiamen and Shantou, where an estimated total of 200,000 troops with at least some training in amphibious warfare had been sent for embarkation.⁷⁹ The joint chiefs of staff, however, questioned the adequacy of the sources of information upon which American intelligence estimates were based.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, CCP propaganda directed at Taiwan emphasized the Party's goals of liberating the island and capturing Chiang Kai-shek alive. Appeals were made for local assistance in overthrowing the Chiang regime. Thus the Beijing branch of the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League, a united front organization, called upon the people of Taiwan to cultivate the spirit of struggle represented by the 28 February 1947 uprising.⁸¹ League members in Shanghai advised their fellow provincials in Taiwan that they could expect to be liberated rather soon, and urged them to use every means at their disposal to weaken the Chiang regime; specifically recommended were

75. Voice of Free China, 8 June 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 112-1950.

76. Voice of Free China, 20 June 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 120-1950.

77. Strong to Secretary of State Acheson, 17 May 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VI, p. 340.

78. United States Congress, Senate, *Military Situation in the Far East* (Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, 82nd Congress), Pt 4, p. 2621.

79. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, pp. 16-17.

80. Joint chiefs of staff to Secretary of Defence Johnson, 28 July 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VI, p. 395.

81. *XHNA*, 1 March 1950.

resistance to conscription, seizure of grain and tax collections, and anticipating the arrival of the PLA on the island.⁸²

Propaganda from the mainland also suggested the hope that the liberation of the island would be facilitated by the large-scale defection or surrender of military officers still loyal to Chiang, resulting in the collapse of the Taibei regime and perhaps even a negotiated CCP take over of Taiwan. On 29 April Liu Shaoqi, the vice-chairman of the Central People's Government, issued an ultimatum to high-ranking KMT military officers. They were to cease their resistance, sever their ties with the United States, and send emissaries to negotiate a surrender. Their last chance was to join – or at least to lay down their arms in co-operation with – the PLA or else face inevitable defeat.⁸³ On the night of 25 June four former KMT generals urged the military forces in Taiwan to break immediately with the Chiang regime inasmuch as neither American assistance nor the Taiwan Straits could save it. The appeal warned that there was little time left in which to vacillate.⁸⁴

Abortive Liberation

On 25 June 1950 civil war erupted on the Korean peninsula. This led to the American decision, announced by President Truman on 27 June, to intervene militarily not only in Korea, but also in the Taiwan Straits. The latter action was termed the “neutralization” of the Taiwan Straits, with the Seventh Fleet under instructions to position itself so as to prevent any attack against Taiwan from succeeding while at the same time ensuring that the Chiang regime ceased military operations against the mainland from Taiwan. Truman declared that the determination of the future legal status of Taiwan would have to await either the establishment of peace in the Pacific, a peace treaty with Japan, or consideration by the UN.⁸⁵ Along with its moves in Korea and the Taiwan Straits, the United States began to reinforce its military position in the Philippines and to increase its support of French colonial rule in Indo-China.⁸⁶

In Beijing the response to Truman's announcement of 27 June was predictable. Premier Zhou Enlai declared that the American decision to use armed force to prevent the liberation of Taiwan was an act of aggression that had been fully anticipated. He asserted, moreover, that the United States had instigated Syngman Rhee to initiate the

82. *Ibid.* 28 February 1950.

83. *Ibid.* 30 April 1950.

84. *Ibid.* 27 June 1950.

85. *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 574 (3 July 1950), p. 5. See also *FRUS*, 1950, VII, pp. 157–58, 179–81, 202–203, 240–41; Harry S Truman, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 334 ff.; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), pp. 405–409.

86. *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 574 (3 July 1950), p. 5, and Vol. 23, No. 578 (31 July 1950), pp. 165–66; *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 187.

Korean conflict as part of a grand strategy designed to provide the justification for simultaneous American aggression in Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines.⁸⁷ In addressing the State Council on the evening of 28 June, Mao Zedong emphasized the duplicity of Truman's statement of 5 January 1950, which had seemingly disavowed American designs on Taiwan, remarking that Washington had now made an open declaration of its imperialist policies, thereby removing any pretence of non-interference in Chinese internal affairs. China, proclaimed Mao, would not be intimidated by the United States.⁸⁸ The immediate official reaction of the People's Republic stressed the following points: Taiwan was historically and indisputably Chinese territory; Taiwan had, in fact, been restored to China following the Japanese surrender in 1945; Truman's 27 June statement was in violation of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations, the UN Charter and Truman's own policy statement of 5 January 1950; and the outbreak of civil war in Korea had merely been a convenient pretext for American intervention in the Taiwan Straits.⁸⁹ Zhou stated that Taiwan would still be liberated since the Chinese people were united in their determination to recover the island and to drive the United States from Chinese territory.⁹⁰

By 30 June a nation-wide propaganda campaign had begun in response to calls by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou for the Chinese people to strengthen their unity and to continue with preparations to liberate Taiwan.⁹¹ Beijing radio reported that military and political leaders were receiving a continuous stream of messages from the commanders and troops of the East China region and the Third Field Army vowing to carry the liberation struggle through to completion.⁹² The Party issued a call for anti-American rallies to be held on 7 July, the anniversary of the Japanese invasion of China in 1937,⁹³ with which American policy towards Taiwan was compared.⁹⁴ Statements broadcast from Beijing on 7 July declared that Truman's announcement of 27 June was the most ominous international event to have occurred since the end of the Second World War, demonstrating the extent of American post-war expansionism.⁹⁵ Subsequently, the

87. *Taiwan wenti wenjian (TWWT) (Documents on the Taiwan Problem)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1955), pp. 9–10; *Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo duiwai guanxi wenjian ji (WJJ) (Collected Documents on the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China)*, Vol. I (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1957), pp. 130–32; *XHNA*, 28 June 1950.

88. *TWWT*, p. 8; *WJJ*, I, p. 130. See also *XHNA*, 28 June 1950; Beijing radio, 29 June 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 127–1950.

89. *TWWT*, pp. 9–12; *Renmin ribao*, 29 June 1950; *XHNA*, 29 June 1950; Beijing radio, 29 June 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 127–1950.

90. *TWWT*, pp. 9–10; *WJJ*, I, pp. 131–32.

91. *XHNA*, 30 June 1950; Shanghai radio, Xian radio, and Wuhan radio, 30 June 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 128–1950.

92. Beijing radio, 1 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 128–1950.

93. Beijing radio, 4 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 130–1950.

94. *XHNA*, 1 July 1950.

95. *XHNA*, 8 July 1950; Beijing radio, 8 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 132–1950.

pronouncements disseminated by the CCP emphasized that the Party's long-standing perceptions about the nature of American behaviour and of Washington's designs on Taiwan had been proven correct.⁹⁶

On 10 July in Beijing at a meeting of 42 leaders of mass organizations it was announced that a nationwide mobilization campaign against American intervention in Taiwan and Korea would be launched on 17 July.⁹⁷ An open letter to the people of Taiwan from the committee set up to oversee the campaign asserted that even direct intervention by the United States could neither save the Chiang regime nor prevent the PLA from liberating Taiwan.⁹⁸ General Chen Yi reported to the East China Military and Administrative Committee on 16 July that the Third Field Army stood ready to proceed with its task of liberating the island, despite the mission assigned to the Seventh Fleet by President Truman,⁹⁹ a position echoed by the statements made in Beijing on 1 August in celebration of Army Day.¹⁰⁰ On Army Day there were huge demonstrations against the United States, in which over one million people participated. Beijing radio attributed the large turn out to the effectiveness of the mobilization campaign. Committees had been formed in most of the cities of the East China region to conduct mass rallies, neighbourhood meetings, and informal discussion groups, as well as propaganda activities by cadres, workers and students; the Party considered the organizational work to have been especially successful in Shanghai, Fuzhou, Hangzhou and Jinan.¹⁰¹

During July American intelligence estimates indicated that the PLA had concentrated enough troops and vessels along the coast to launch an invasion force of 200,000 men across the Taiwan Straits, for which "moderate" air support could be provided. Moreover, the joint chiefs of staff predicted that, due to the diversion of American naval strength to the Korean conflict, the PLA might reach the coast of Taiwan in numbers sufficient "to jeopardize seriously" the survival of the Chiang regime.¹⁰² From Taiwan KMT reports indicated that the PLA continued to maintain its strength along the Taiwan Straits throughout the summer. At the end of July Taipei radio reported that five armies totalling 150,000 troops were in the Xiamen area with enough boats, about 3,000, to send a force of 100,000 troops in an

96. *Renmin ribao*, 5, 7, and 28 August 1950; *XHNA*, 6 and 13 August 1950; Beijing radio, 5 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 152–1950.

97. *XHNA*, 11 July 1950; Beijing radio, 11 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 134–1950 and 15 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 138–1950.

98. *XHNA*, 23 July 1950.

99. Beijing radio, 20 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 141–1950.

100. Beijing radio, 1 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 149–1950. See also *Jiefang ribao*, 31 July 1950; *XHNA*, 5 August 1950; Beijing radio, 4 August 1950 and Shanghai radio, 6 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 153–1950.

101. Beijing radio, 11 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 158–1950.

102. Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defence Johnson, 28 July 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VI, p. 395; Johnson to Secretary of State Acheson, 29 July 1950, *ibid.* p. 401.

assault on Jinmen ¹⁰³ – an attack that again failed to materialize. According to KMT estimates in August, about 200,000 troops of the Third Field Army were massed in Fujian and Zhejiang, with the total number of troops under Chen Yi's command put at approximately 585,000.¹⁰⁴ A KMT army spokesman observed that, whereas major propaganda campaigns had preceded the PLA's offensives across the Changjiang and against Hainan, the CCP was limiting itself to vague statements promising the future liberation of Taiwan.¹⁰⁵ At no time did the PLA launch air strikes across the Taiwan Straits, although during the spring the Chiang regime had announced that such attacks were imminent. The authorities in Taipei believed that each passing day lessened the danger that the island would be invaded.¹⁰⁶

As the summer progressed, American intelligence assessments increasingly indicated that the prospects of a PLA invasion of Taiwan were rapidly receding. Early in August General MacArthur expressed doubt that an invasion of the island would occur inasmuch as American aerial reconnaissance of the China coast "has not yet disclosed such concentrations of shipping, junks or other crafts as would indicate that an attack on Formosa is imminent."¹⁰⁷ From Hong Kong came a report in late September that, "for the first time," the U.S. Consul-General had "received evidence believed reliable" that there would be no attempt to invade Taiwan during 1950.¹⁰⁸ At the Department of State the director of the Office of Chinese Affairs, O. Edmund Clubb, said that there were indications that the invasion of Taiwan had been temporarily postponed.¹⁰⁹ As late as 12 October, however, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that, despite definite deficiencies in naval and air strength, and "probable" deficiencies in amphibious training and doctrine, the PLA was then capable of sending an invasion force of "about 200,000 troops and moderate air cover" against Taiwan, with the Soviet Union providing, "at a minimum," tactical advice and technical and logistical support. The Chiang regime's capacity for self-defence remained questionable. Nonetheless the available intelligence reports provided no evidence that the PLA planned to invade Taiwan in the near future; moreover, problems encountered by the CCP in consolidating its control were thought to work against an early invasion. The CIA

103. Taipei radio, 31 July 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 148–1950. The Chiang regime openly resented Truman's prohibition against bombing troop concentrations and other targets on the mainland.

104. Taipei radio, 17 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 161–1950.

105. Taipei radio, 24 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 166–1950.

106. Taipei radio, 12 August 1950 in *FBIS*, No. 157–1950.

107. Secretary of State Acheson to Embassy in Great Britain, 13 August 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VI, p. 432.

108. Consul-General at Hong Kong (Wilkinson) to Secretary of State Acheson, 22 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, p. 765.

109. Clubb to assistant secretary of state for far eastern affairs (Dean Rusk), 27 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, VII, pp. 795–96. Clubb did not spell out what these indications were.

concluded that it was most improbable that an attempt would be made to invade Taiwan during the remainder of 1950.¹¹⁰

The question of liberating Taiwan was rapidly overtaken by events in Korea, where the civil war had turned into a major international conflict that threatened to engulf China's north-east. In October American forces operating under the flag of the United Nations crossed the 38th parallel in a northward offensive to the Yalu River and the People's Republic responded by sending its "volunteers" to resist the advance. MacArthur was of the opinion that the intervention of the People's Republic in Korea diverted manpower from the Third Field Army's Taiwan invasion force.¹¹¹ In his study of the PLA high command, William Whitson has stated that elements of the Third Field Army were redeployed along the Shandong coast, that the main forces in Fujian were put on alert for defence against an American invasion, and that half of the Third Field Army's regular forces were eventually sent to Korea.¹¹² By the spring of 1951 the Chiang regime had reached the conclusion that its position was incomparably more secure than it had been a year before, and that the threat of an invasion had virtually vanished. The optimistic view from Taipei was based upon the enormous diversion of PLA manpower to Korea, the deterrent effect of the Seventh Fleet, and an apparent American commitment to prevent Taiwan from falling into unfriendly hands.¹¹³

The People's Republic maintained that Taiwan was inextricably linked to the cessation of international hostilities in Korea and the assumption of the People's Republic to its rightful place in the UN. From Beijing came the insistent and inseparable demands that American and other foreign military forces be withdrawn from Korea, thus ending the conflict there; that the United States immediately disengage from Taiwan, thereby signifying its intention to cease aggression against Chinese territory; and that the United States accept and recognize the legitimate status of the People's Republic in the UN, thus indicating its willingness to deal with Beijing as a member of the international community.¹¹⁴ However, when the stalemated Korean conflict eventually ended in 1953 after protracted negotiations, the armistice agreement made no reference to Taiwan. That was because, from a technical standpoint, the People's Republic had been fighting against UN forces in Korea, whereas the United States had unilaterally intervened in the Taiwan Straits. Moreover, due to the

110. CIA memorandum, 12 October 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, VI, pp. 529–31. On 31 September 1950 Zhou Enlai reported to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference that the Chiang regime had left behind on the mainland more than one million agents, and that PLA mopping up operations during the preceding year had reduced that number to about 200,000. *XHNA*, 1 October 1950.

111. *Military Situation in the Far East*, Part 1, p. 22.

112. William Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927–71* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 247–48. Unfortunately, no source is given.

113. Taipei radio, 26 April 1951 in *FBIS*, No. 87–1951.

114. *Renmin ribao*, 23 December 1950; *XHNA*, 23 December 1950.

Korean conflict, in which the People's Republic had been branded as the aggressor by the UN, Beijing found itself shut out of the UN, where Chinese representation remained firmly in the hands of the Chiang regime. With peace in Korea, the Seventh Fleet remained in the Taiwan Straits to preserve the status quo.

Conclusion

Despite the official expressions of militancy before and after 27 June 1950, the CCP leadership adhered to a cautious approach towards Taiwan. The Party's proclaimed goal of liberating Taiwan was indeed unequivocal, but should be interpreted more as a declaration of principle that did not signal precipitate military action against the island. Even before the United States intervened in the Taiwan Straits the new regime most probably saw the actual extension of its rule to Taiwan as being a relatively long-range objective; meanwhile, it asserted in no uncertain terms its claim to sovereignty over the island by announcing its intention to achieve complete national unification under the People's Republic. If, prior to 27 June 1950, the People's Republic had already reached a decision to launch an invasion on or by a certain date, we do not know about it. Early in the summer of 1950 American intelligence reports indicated that an invasion of Taiwan was imminent, but it must be emphasized that the available CCP sources do not provide specific confirmation of this; on the contrary, official statements and propaganda emanating from the People's Republic were curiously vague about the promised invasion.

In his 1983 strategic assessment, Muller has concluded that an invasion of Taiwan launched before 27 June 1950 "might have succeeded"; in the PLA's favour were its own momentum and the weaknesses of the KMT forces on the island, which, he writes, "were poorly equipped, demoralized, and disorganized."¹¹⁵ However, there were several important constraints that diminished the likelihood of an invasion at that time. In 1950 the PLA's naval forces, which had been virtually put together from scratch during 1949 with defections from the Chiang regime's navy, were rudimentary in terms of manpower, training and equipment. Sending a poorly-led, trained and equipped invasion force across the Taiwan Straits in a vulnerable flotilla of motorized junks with inadequate naval escort and air cover would have been an extremely hazardous venture. Enormous casualties could have been expected in the crossing and while landing and establishing secure beach-heads on the island. Extended and exposed supply lines would have to be maintained across the Taiwan Straits to sustain the invasion. The CCP, moreover, lacked a base of popular support in Taiwan, and the PLA could not count on the unpopularity of the Chiang regime to translate into local enthusiasm for the invasion of the island. The PLA command, therefore, surely must

115. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, p. 52.

have had grave second thoughts about the advisability of such an undertaking, and the new regime's political leaders would have been more judicious than to launch an invasion that ran the risk of ending in catastrophic failure. The PLA needed time to create a well-organized, indoctrinated and politically reliable military force sufficiently trained and equipped to attempt an invasion of Taiwan. To further its objectives, the People's Republic would have looked to the Soviet Union for assistance under the terms of the 1950 Sino-Soviet pact in building up the PLA's naval and air strength.

Another constraint was the perceived threat of American military action to thwart the liberation of Taiwan. For the CCP, Taiwan came to represent the blurred line between domestic and international politics in China. By 1949 the Party had become acutely aware of American strategic interests in Taiwan and correctly predicted that Washington's policies would lead to direct American intervention to prevent the new regime from gaining control of the island. The large concentrations of PLA troops along the Taiwan Straits in Fujian early in the summer of 1950 can be explained by the need to consolidate control along the coast and to maintain an active defence against future harassment or attack, possibly by Chiang's forces in Taiwan under the protection of American naval and air power. Truman's statement announcing the "neutralization" of the Taiwan Straits forced Beijing tacitly to concede to the status quo in the realization that an attempt to invade Taiwan would be met by an American military response, which could have included heavy bombing of military targets on the mainland. Muller has pointed out that a single American aircraft carrier accompanied by a modest cruiser and destroyer force would have been adequate to crush any invasion attempt.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the subsequent involvement of the People's Republic in Korea made heavy military demands that drained men and resources from a potential Taiwan invasion force. In the final analysis, it was the international situation that caused the goal of liberating Taiwan to be indefinitely postponed. After 27 June 1950 Beijing, faced with an American commitment to defend Taiwan and with open Sino-American hostilities in Korea, found that the risk of wider war had become unacceptably high.

116. *Ibid.*