

THE IMPACT OF THE KOREAN WAR ON SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

If there had not been a Korean War, the CCP invasion of Taiwan would probably have taken place in 1950. Whether the already-begun KMT reorganization program and ROC land reform could continue to materialize was a question that worried KMT policymakers.

In the beginning of 1950, the Truman administration was ready to abandon the KMT regime. The US reversed its position on the Taiwan issue after the eruption of the Korean War. The Korean War first compelled the Truman administration to grant military aid to Formosa, and then to dispatch the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait. US policymakers then decided to establish a MAAG on Taiwan, and to utilize the Nationalist forces, if necessary, to blockade the mainland and deter Chinese Communist expansion in Southeast Asia. It was the Chinese Communist intervention in Korea and its stubbornness in armistice talks that forced the Eisenhower administration to deem necessary a defense pact with Formosa when Quemoy was bombarded in September 1954.

The outbreak of the Korean War further forestalled deterioration of ROC international status. The legal status of Taiwan became undetermined in eyes of US policymakers, but this posed slight challenge to the KMT rule over the island. Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War prevented their admission into the United Nations, and forced the US to recognize the ROC as the sole legal government of China. The KMT chose national security rather than political liberalization, and wanted its rule unchallenged in Taiwan and kept it that way by forbidding the formation of any US-supported

opposition party.

US economic aid prevented Taiwan from sliding into an economic depression in the 1950s, and greatly contributed to the island's later economic take-off. US economic assistance program, diversified by the Korean War, was aimed at stabilizing Taiwan. The US government encouraged the KMT to conduct political liberalization on the island, however, Washington policymakers refrained from using the threat to halt economic aid as a sanction against KMT impairment of human rights. To both the KMT and US policymakers, a militarily secure and economically viable Taiwan was a higher priority than a democratic Taiwan during the Korean War era.