

THE U.S. FACTOR IN
TAIWAN-MAINLAND CHINA RELATIONS

Cheng-yi Lin

Abstract

In this paper, the role of the United States in Taiwan-China relations is analyzed in its political and military dimensions. The continuing U.S. arms sales to Taiwan since the Carter Administration have been a positive influence on the security of Taiwan, but the issue has triggered much controversy between Peking and Washington. On the other hand, US technology and arms transfers to the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) emerged in the early 1980s and caused Nationalist leaders much annoyance. Taipei criticized the August 17, 1982 Communique, but in this very document, the U.S. achieved in setting a linkage between reduction of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and Peking's pledge to settle the Taiwan issue through peaceful means. If the U.S. desires to prevent Taiwan from seeking better quality military equipment, it is better for Washington to move slowly in its military cooperation relationship with the P.R.C.

Whether the United States should, at the request of the P.R.C. leaders, get involved in a dialogue between Taipei and Peking or stand neutral as an outsider is not an easy question for Washington to answer. The U.S. welcomes a continuing and evolutionary process toward a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. Washington also tries to foster an environment for increasing human interchange between Taiwan and Mainland China. Nevertheless, the U.S. is not ready for the role of good officer or mediator to help the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to settle their rivalries.

There is no doubt that Washington opposes any military solution to the Taiwan issue, but to what degree the United

States is willing to endanger its relations with the P.R.C. and to support Taiwan's defense against P.R.C.'s invasion is questionable. The majority of China experts and decision-makers in the United States tend to believe that the P.R.C. has acquired no military capabilities or political intentions of launching an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. However, a naval blockade, rather than an outright invasion, is broadly deemed as a possible means of bringing Taipei to its knees. A legal approach alone will not be enough to deter a possible P.R.C. naval blockade. If the United States has an interest in not seeing Taiwan fall under the Chinese Communist domination, it may be necessary for Washington to maintain, as it has done since the 1950s, the military balance in the Taiwan Strait.