

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF TAIWAN IN
THE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING,
1941-1950

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Abstract

In the 1940's, American policy-makers defined the primary American interest in Taiwan as a strategic one which originated in the American war experience with Japan during the Second World War. American strategists and statesmen believed that the island had little direct strategic value to America's security, but that in an enemy's hands it could pose a serious danger to American interests in the Far East. Therefore the Truman administration viewed the pro-American Nationalist Chinese control of the island as desirable for the postwar American interest in the Pacific.

In 1949, American policy-makers foresaw the ultimate collapse of the Nationalist government in the Chinese civil war on the mainland. They began to separate their deliberations on Taiwan from the disengagement policy in China. Truman and his advisers did not consider Taiwan's strategic position to be worth an American military commitment, but hoped to avoid a Communist takeover there by economic and diplomatic means. After one year, however, American policy-makers found that the United States could not prevent the island from coming under the control of the Communist regime without American military involvement. Secretary of State Dean Acheson thus intended to tolerate a Communist Chinese occupation of the island if the United States could woo Peking away from Moscow. By early June 1950, Acheson, however, perceived that there would be no Titoism in China. When the Korean crisis came, in order to stand firm in facing the Communist military expansion and to prevent the Communist manipulation of Taiwan against the United States, Truman announced that a naval force would be sent to "neutralize" the Taiwan Straits. The President's decision was to protect the island, not the Nationalist government on Taiwan.