

MEMORANDUM
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POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF
POSSIBLE FUTURE U.S. AIR BASE
DEVELOPMENT ON TAIWAN (U)

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PREFACE

This Memorandum is a product of research conducted under an Air Force Project RAND study of Asian security issues. The study of the political implications of basing on Taiwan reported herein will be followed by a complementary Rand analysis of the military logistics implications of such basing.

The author, a professor at the Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, is a consultant to The Rand Corporation.

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SUMMARY

u x Taiwan possesses distinct advantages for base security against local insurgency, especially when compared with conditions in Thailand. Moreover, the political climate is propitious for American base needs so long as the Chinese Nationalists remain in control of the island. These conditions are only marginally offset by the remote possibility of a Taiwanese movement against Chinese Nationalist control, whose eruption would so complicate U.S. policy that the existence of an American B-52 base would be only an ancillary problem. The even more remote possibility of a Chinese Nationalist accommodation with the Chinese Communists could nullify the availability of the base, but barring this extremely unlikely development, we would seem to have assured access over a foreseeable future of five to ten years.

u x Militating against these considerations, however, is the limitation on U.S. policy options implicit in a strategic base on Taiwan. Such a base could increase Taiwan's resistance to unpalatable U.S. requests by raising Chinese Nationalist estimates of the importance of Taiwan to the U.S. It presents an added obstacle to accommodation between the Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communists. More serious, the base would likely confirm and perpetuate the Chinese Communist belief that U.S. policy is implacably hostile to the regime's interests, if not to its actual survival. The issues of civil war, irredenta and great power rivalry would become inextricably fused with the incorporation of Taiwan into the formal U.S. strategic offensive base posture. Without the base, a *quid pro quo* might emerge, with the Chinese Communists relinquishing their claim to Taiwan in return for elimination of the GRC as a rival claimant to mainland rule and representation. This could come as a result of changing leadership in Peking or increasing Chinese Communist concern over a Soviet threat. In the context of the Sino-Soviet conflict, should Peking's fear of a Soviet attack grow, this fundamental policy reversal would become a distinct possibility. Development of a U.S. base on Taiwan would lock us into the status quo and perpetuate the danger of a U.S.-China military confrontation. Furthermore, it would link us more with the Soviet position in the Sino-Soviet conflict.

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u X (S) On balance, the political disadvantages are sufficiently important to argue against a permanent U.S. strategic base on Taiwan.*

(U) * I am indebted to criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper by Albert Rosen, Helmut Gurov, and Thomas Robinson. None of them, of course, bears responsibility for this version.

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I. INTRODUCTION

u (S) In the context of contingency planning against the possible loss of Okinawa as a strategic base for U.S. Air Force use, consideration has been given to developing a base at Ching Chuan Kung on Taiwan as an alternative. The purely military aspects of this question are being investigated in a separate Rand study. We shall assess Taiwan's political advantages and disadvantages, both absolute and compared with Thailand and the Philippines (assuming the possibility of converting Clark into a regular B-52 base), for base security, relations with the host government, and relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, against which the base presumably would be directed.

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II. PHYSICAL AND POLITICAL SECURITY

~~U X (S)~~ A salient advantage of Taiwan for U.S. basing is its physical security against local Communist attack. The Taiwan Strait presents a formidable obstacle to infiltration and support of subversive forces, particularly when compared with Thailand's jungle border with Burma and river frontier with Laos, both also abutting mainland China. In Taiwan, twenty years of Chinese Nationalist security operations plus United States military protection have reduced the threat of infiltrated insurgency to nil. High-level Chinese Communist intelligence penetrations do occur in the Chinese Nationalist government. But for operations of the kind and size necessary to threaten a base, no Communist threat exists, nor is one likely to arise in the foreseeable future.

~~U X (S)~~ Moreover, the political security of a Taiwan base is attractive when compared with conditions in the Philippines and Thailand. The Chinese Nationalists' dependence on U.S. weapons and security guarantees predisposes them not only to cooperate with U.S. military requests but to augment and safeguard the U.S. military investment in Taiwan. Chinese Nationalist surveillance and repression capabilities provide an impressive check against any potentially inimical activity. A multiplicity of secret police nets, complete control over communications media, nearly total control over personal movement, and a monopoly of command over the instruments of violence, both military and civilian, insure Taiwan against any large-scale organized dissidence. While Taiwanese comprise the bulk of enlisted personnel in the armed forces, Chinese Nationalists hold most officer positions, occupying all of those at top levels and in such sensitive command structures as air and armor.

~~U X (S)~~ Presumably, the greater the U.S. military presence on Taiwan, the stronger would be these advantages. Chinese Nationalist security would be enhanced by more U.S. assistance. Dissidents planning action against U.S. or Chinese Nationalist targets would have to take account of the likelihood of U.S. forces joining in the defense of the targets. Thus both the actual and potential threat seems low at present and would lessen with further U.S. military support for the status quo.

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U ~~S~~ This likelihood does not rule out the development of a more unstable situation. On the one hand, large sectors of Taiwanese society have a vested interest in the political status quo and the economic growth it engenders. On the other hand, Chinese Nationalist confidence that Taiwanese have accepted Chinese Nationalist rule remains low, as evidenced by continued political repression. Fragmentary evidence of recent years, manifested in political arrests, press censorship, and restrictions on Taiwanese students, both on the island and in foreign countries, indicates continued apprehension among Chinese Nationalist leaders.

U ~~S~~ The probability of serious Taiwanese trouble in the near future remains extremely low. Chinese Nationalist vigilance deters any such development. In addition, the absence of strong leadership in the overseas Taiwanese independence movement leaves it largely a futile hope nurtured by small groups of intellectuals and students. It is possible to envisage a situation in which Taiwanese resentments and frustrations would interact with Chinese Nationalist anxieties and repression -- perhaps immediately after the death of Chiang Kai-shek -- to trigger a desperate, irrational act by a small group to call international attention to Taiwanese aspirations for independence. Such an act might also occur should real or imagined Chinese Nationalist efforts to turn the island over to the Chinese Communists spur a Taiwanese ploy to win U.S. support. It is difficult even in these extreme cases, however, to envisage a Taiwanese movement having sufficient indigenous success to pose a real threat to the Chinese Nationalists and to require the United States either to join in its suppression or to acquiesce in its ascendancy. In any event, the problem of Chinese-Taiwanese relations poses a dilemma for U.S. policy only marginally increased by allegations that our support for a "colonial" regime stems from strategic base needs.

U ~~S~~ More serious might be the way such a base could complicate our options in the disposition of the legal issue of Taiwan. Conceivably, an independent Taiwan could continue base arrangements, deny the island to Chinese Communist takeover, and offer the United States access to extant facilities. Alternatively an independent Taiwan

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regime might seek a U.S. defense commitment without an American base, hoping thereby to exclude the island from involvement in conflicts elsewhere in Asia or from implicit association in any future U.S.-mainland confrontation other than that directly affecting the island. Finally, an independent Taiwan might seek a wholly neutral position with a multilateral guarantee, either with Asian nations or the United Nations, to replace the bilateral American defense commitment. (Re-union of Taiwan with mainland China will be discussed below.)

U & (S) None of the foregoing arrangements violates the original rationale for interposing the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. That rationale was strategic in its denial of Taiwan to the People's Republic of China in offensive operations in the West Pacific. It was also political in preventing Peking from resolving its claim to Taiwan by the use of force. Both desiderata could be met by any of the foregoing arrangements, but not all of them would perpetuate U.S. base access. A permanent U.S. base would add an offensive interest to our policy of defensive denial and as such would narrow our policy options. Should a decision to abandon the base be even theoretically possible, its practical implications might be sufficiently unsettling to argue decisively against what otherwise might be tolerable or desirable policy alternatives.

U & (S) We have an interest in resolving Taiwan's eventual disposition, both in terms of our relations with Taiwan on the one hand, and Taiwan's relations with mainland China on the other, and in terms of other relationships in Asia and the United Nations. Until we have fully resolved our own position, we should not predetermine it by any action inconsonant with our original Taiwan rationale, such as development of a strategic posture dependent on Ching Chuan Kung.

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III. BARGAINING AND NEGOTIATING WITH THE GRC

~~U X (S)~~ Proponents of a Taiwan base also claim an advantage in relations with the host government, especially as compared with Thailand and the Philippines. Except for an accommodation with Peking, politically unlikely in the foreseeable future, the GRC truly has "no place to go." So long as it is locked in a civil war with the mainland, its vital interests remain exclusively dependent on the U.S. defense guarantee. This places definite limits on "base blackmail," either to raise the price for facilities or as leverage for winning concessions on other matters. The degree to which this is true, of course, depends on the alternative bases and weapon systems available in the West Pacific for U.S. strategic attacks against the mainland. But the fundamental asymmetry of the bargaining situation is unlikely to be altered to U.S. disadvantage by the existence of a U.S. base on Taiwan.

~~U X (S)~~ This bargaining and negotiating advantage is strengthened by the degree to which the GRC is physically isolated from and politically insulated against the "atmospherics" of its non-Communist neighbors. Student demonstrations in Japan are unlikely to have spillover effects among the highly police-penetrated and controlled student groups on Taiwan. Filipino political caterwauling over U.S. bases and competitive posturing in pro-Peking or anti-Washington stances will not be emulated by GRC legislators or Taiwan's public media. This is not to say that anti-Americanism, legitimate or manufactured, is wholly absent on Taiwan. The sacking of the American Embassy and U.S.I.S. offices in May 1956 testifies to the contrary. But such a phenomenon is almost certain to be *sui generis*, associated with local circumstances, and not a function of the political currents that tend to sweep successively through other Asian countries.

~~U X (S)~~ Against the foregoing analysis it might be argued that the GRC has played brinkmanship with political blackmail, threatening to walk out of the United Nations in the event of certain moves inimical to its interest. This has been directed toward securing U.S. assurances of resisting such moves. Conservatively Taiwan could threaten

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an accommodation with Peking to counter undesired U.S. moves, with the expectation that U.S. dependence on Taiwan as a base would force American compliance with GRC wishes. Such a possibility cannot be ruled out altogether, but a passive U.S. response to such a threat would eliminate the *raison d'etre* of the Chinese Nationalist government, making it a wholly illogical and therefore unlikely gambit.

U (S) The reverse consideration, namely U.S. leverage on the GRC, is pertinent, however. The greater the "assets" on Taiwan, whether for intelligence collection or base facilities, the less favorable are GRC responses to unpalatable U.S. requests likely to be. Evacuation of the offshore islands, for instance, would widen the distance between Chinese Nationalist and Chinese Communist forces, thereby lowering the possibility of armed conflict involving U.S. forces with mainland China. As a hostage against a "two-China" policy, however, and as a stimulant for GRC "return-to-the-mainland" morale, possession of these islands is prized by the Chinese Nationalists. Although unlikely, the possibility of an American attempt to obtain evacuation of the offshore islands would be virtually ruled out if there were a major U.S. strategic base on Taiwan. Even at less dramatic levels of U.S.-GRC confrontation, as in a possible change in the U.N. handling of the "China question," existence of the base would appear to enhance Chiang's willingness to stand firm, confident of his island's utility to U.S. strategic interests.

U (S) To look beyond the death of Chiang Kai-shek, there is at least a theoretical possibility that U.S. interests might be best served by facilitating an accommodation between Taipei and Peking. An accommodation would leave open the option for China to move toward a pro-U.S. position in the Sino-Soviet conflict. If indeed a Peking-Taipei accommodation could occur, the U.S. would no longer have need for a Taiwan base. But should a base already have been acquired, its existence might make it difficult for us to favor an accommodation, even if it were desirable on other grounds. Moreover, existence of the base could strengthen elements in the Chinese Nationalist

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leadership who oppose accommodation with Peking, on the grounds that U.S. vested interests were so strong that we would resist accommodation, perhaps to the extent of supporting a Taiwanese move against Chinese Nationalist authority.

u ~~CS~~ Seen in this perspective, an American strategic base on Taiwan would impose serious limitations on the eventual resolution of Taiwan's status.

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IV. U.S.-PRC RELATIONS

U ~~(S)~~ So far we have confined the analysis to questions that turn primarily on U.S.-GRC relations. This is the area in which proponents of a Taiwan base argue advantages most convincingly. The main political impact of such a base, however, will be on our relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The most salient issue in the Chinese Communist perception of U.S. policy is our interposition of the Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait in June 1950, between Chinese Nationalist forces on Taiwan and their Chinese Communist opponents preparing an amphibious attack from the mainland. No matter what other modal changes have marked Peking's propaganda and diplomatic posture since that time, Peking has consistently held as the *sine qua non* for normalized U.S.-China relations the withdrawal of all U.S. armed forces from Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait.

U ~~(S)~~ A strategic U.S. base on Taiwan could affect Peking's perceptions of U.S. willingness to accept changes in the status quo and could thereby present Chinese Communists with the hard choice of abandoning their claim to Taiwan or remaining locked in confrontation with United States power in the West Pacific. Abandonment of the Chinese claim to Taiwan is most unlikely so long as the island is controlled by the Chinese Nationalists as a declared province of mainland China. This introduces a dimension of "face" to the situation that tends to negate alternative political solutions. Adding a U.S. strategic base to the island would confirm the Chinese Communist belief that U.S. policy is implacably hostile to Chinese Communist interests, if not to the actual survival of the regime. Thus the issues of civil war, irredenta, and great power rivalry would become inextricably fused, perpetuating confrontation and tension in U.S.-China relations instead of permitting them to be gradually normalized.

U ~~(S)~~ It may be objected that Chinese Communist perceptions of U.S. policy are so rigid and distorted that nothing we do on Taiwan can affect those views. Several points counter such an objection. First, it is by no means certain that Peking has held a rigid and monolithic view of strategy and tactics toward the United States and

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Taiwan since 1949. Among the Cultural Revolution accusations leveled against Liu Shao-ch'i is the charge that in early 1962 he supported a policy of détente with the United States at a time of acute economic crisis in China resulting from the Great Leap Forward, withdrawal of Soviet economic assistance, and natural disasters. The logic of Liu's alleged remarks makes this a plausible charge, whatever may have been the context of his position. To the extent that U.S. base facilities make Taiwan appear vital to U.S. strategic interests directed against the Chinese mainland, proposals for détente in Peking are unlikely to be voiced and even less likely to get a favorable hearing.

U (S) Second, besides militating against change in Peking's perceptions and policy, a Taiwan base would lessen the possibility of Peking-Taipei accommodation. Given the weapon systems likely to be available to the United States and the People's Republic of China in the mid-seventies, one of the original objectives of our Taiwan policy, denial of hostile offensive operations in the West Pacific, may no longer hold. (This topic will be discussed fully in the military study referred to above.) Our remaining rationale, resolving Taiwan's status by peaceful means, explicitly leaves open the island's disposition. On several occasions in the nineteen-fifties, Chou En-lai hinted at a formula whereby Taiwan would enjoy "autonomy," and top GRC officials, including Chiang Kai-shek, would receive "cabinet" positions in Peking. Setting aside the question of how this might be received in Taipei or by the Taiwanese people, such a formula is not *a priori* necessarily inimical to U.S. interests. The existence of a U.S. strategic base on Taiwan, however, would tend to make it inimical to our interests and at least would inhibit our acquiescence in such an accommodation between Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists. It would certainly be so perceived by one or both parties.

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V. SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

U X OX We do not know what men or views will dominate policy in Peking in the future. We can postulate a wide range of alternatives, but all that is certain is uncertainty. However, the chances for change are high, if only because of the inevitable passing of Mao from the scene and the question of his successor. U.S.-China relations are further open to change because of the vicissitudes of Sino-Soviet relations. Should border relations remain strained or the leadership in Peking feel threatened by Soviet attack, Chinese policymakers would probably consider a détente with the United States in order to minimize the likelihood of a two-front war.

U X OX The only area where such a détente is feasible and mutually relevant for Peking and Washington is Taiwan. As *quid pro quo* for abjuration of an American-Chinese Nationalist attack, the Chinese government might be willing to give formal acceptance of Taiwan's independence and a guarantee to Washington not to use China's conventional and nuclear forces to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Should Peking grow increasingly concerned over a possible Russian attack, this fundamental and far-reaching policy reversal would become a distinct possibility.

U X OX The probability, as distinct from the possibility, of such a *quid pro quo* by Peking cannot be determined with any confidence at this point. One can envisage a Maoist type of leadership operating in a rigid framework of perceptions that would fix the Chinese Nationalists, "Taiwan irredenta," and "U.S. imperialism" in a totally hostile posture, unsusceptible of compromise. Alternatively one can envisage a less ideologically compulsive elite that would weigh threats and opportunities presented by the two dominant nuclear powers, Russia and the United States, and attempt to maneuver one against the other in traditional Chinese fashion. But whatever odds are placed on various Chinese leadership "mixes," a U.S. strategic base on Taiwan increases the odds against change in Chinese policy in the direction of lessened tension with the United States.

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U ~~S~~ ~~(S)~~ The triangular relationship whose possible variations are sketched above runs counter to the images of a U.S.-Soviet plot against China proliferated by Peking's propaganda media over the past ten years. We do not know to what extent this propaganda reflects the actual perceptions of policymakers. However, the propensity to exaggerate indicators of hostile intent and to project a pervasive threat in China's external environment has conditioned policy in Peking at critical junctures in the past. One such occasion occurred in 1952. Without any buildup of GRC invasion forces or any overt indications of U.S. willingness to improve Chiang Kai-shek's "return to the mainland" prospects, calculations in Peking prompted a massive emergency deployment of more than 100,000 troops on the coast facing Taiwan and a demarche in Warsaw warning the United States against supporting a Chinese Nationalist invasion of the mainland. This unprecedented effort to deter what in reality was a nonexistent threat illustrates the degree of subjectivity and sensitivity which can condition Chinese Communist perceptions of the general environment and particularly Taiwan.

U ~~S~~ ~~(S)~~ These circumstances argue positively as well as negatively against a U.S. strategic base on Taiwan. Negatively, they suggest that Peking will place a very high threat value on such a base, regardless of whatever other efforts are made by the U.S. to signal willingness to relax tensions and normalize relations. Moving our base facilities from Okinawa to Taiwan would increase the appearance of importance we give to a China-directed capability. Positively, it appears that elimination of the U.S.-GRC "threat" in the absence of such a base might induce the Chinese Communists to abandon claim to Taiwan, particularly should perceptions of a Soviet threat remain strong in Peking. Precisely what elimination of the GRC "threat" would mean for Taipei, seating in the United Nations, etc., is beyond the purview of this paper. So far as U.S.-China relations are concerned, however, an independent Taiwan, or a "one-China, one-Taiwan" solution acceptable to both sides would be the only point of immediate military confrontation between the United States and China.

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U ~~(S)~~ On balance, the political liabilities of a U.S. strategic base on Taiwan would lock us into a continuing confrontation with mainland China and seem to greatly outweigh the advantages of such a base for relations with the host country, the GRC.

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