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Practice without Theory: Fragile Stability in the Taiwan Strait

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**Tension Sources in East Asia**

Northeast Asia has been an area attracting worldwide concern since mid-1990s. There are three sources for the worldwide concern: the Korean Peninsula, China-Japan tension over the disputed East Sea oil field, and Taiwan Strait.

The Korean Peninsula involves North Korea's nuclear development and consequent crisis. On 10 February 2005, the North Korean Foreign Ministry announced that Pyongyang had manufactured nuclear weapons. On 10 January 2003, North Korea notified the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Security Council that Pyongyang was withdrawing from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that the withdrawal would be effective the next day.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in 1998, a mid-range Taepo Dong ballistic missile was test launched by the North Korea,<sup>2</sup> and the range of the missile was reportedly able to cover the whole Japan and northwest area of the

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<sup>1</sup> The treaty requires 90-day notice before a withdrawal, but North Korea claims this is not necessary since Pyongyang already declared its intention to withdraw in 1993, only to "suspend its intention withdraw" 89 days later. For a comprehensive outline of DPRK's nuclear issue, see *North Korea Nuclear Profile*, in <[http://nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/index.html](http://nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/index.html)>, and for a North Korea's nuclear development chronology, see <[http://nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/46.html](http://nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Nuclear/46.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive profile and development chronology of North Korea's missile, see *North Korea Missile Profile*, in <[http://nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/NK/Missile/index.html](http://nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Missile/index.html)>, and <[http://nti.org/e\\_research/profiles/NK/Missile/65.html](http://nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Missile/65.html)> respectively.

US.

The North Korea's action has attracted many concerns, and the foremost has been the proliferation issue and possible US preemptive strike against the DPRK's nuclear facilities, along with potential arms build-up in Northeast Asia. President Bush, accusing DPRK, Iran and Iraq as Axis of Evil, had attempted to wipe out North Korea's nuclear facilities by launching surgical strike. This act would definitely bring disaster to the northeast Asia. Japan, frightened by the DPRK's nuclear and missile development, and China's military modernization drive, joined the US missile defense program, and enhanced its security tie with the US. The enhanced alliance relationship would in turn give justification to those in Beijing advocating for more resources to military modernization.

China-Japan tension over the disputed East Sea oil field was the second one. As China's economy keeps growing, demand for energy has sharply risen. Import has accounted for almost 50% of its annual consumption; oil import has exceeded 100 million ton in 2003; and China has become the second largest oil importer in the world since 2003. Japan's energy import accounted for more than 90%. Both China and Japan heavily depend on energy import, and both have to compete for limited oil supply in the world.

China's rising energy demand has brought increasing risk for its national security. As the communist ideology continues to wane, the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party hinges on two pillars: economic development and nationalism. As the economy grows, legitimacy can be assured, but energy demand goes up. The opposite is also true: the less supply of energy, the worse economic development, and shaky political regime. In other words, economic development, energy, and legitimacy are tied together.

However, supply of energy cannot be taken for granted for China, and China has encountered many challenges. These include: looking for crude oil and natural gas sources in China and overseas, test exploration, mass production, delivery and shipping. Of these challenges, the shipping route is a challenge for China, because most of China's energy imports come from the Mid-East region, and 80% of China's oil cargoes go through the Indian Ocean, Malacca Strait, South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait. However, for long, the shipping route has been dominated by the US naval force. In case of conflict, China's energy supply can easily be easily cut off by the US and US-Japan coalition force.

The oil field dispute in the East Sea should be viewed from this perspective. Japan claimed that the Chunxiao oil field, which can provide 2.5 billion cubic meter of natural gas annually from 2007, and last for at least 13 years, is located at the middle line demarcating China and Japan, and Japan should also has a share of the oil source. In addition to historical feud since late 19<sup>th</sup> century, increasing rival in the context of China's rise, maritime territory, Japan's textbook issue, shrine issue, and Taiwan issue, the oil field dispute is merely to play a catalyst factor triggering the tension.<sup>3</sup>

Taiwan Strait has been the third source. Despite the fact that Taiwan-China relations improved beginning in late 1980s when the both sides started to contact again, many undercurrent factors have stymied the cross-strait relations. Of them, China's outdated mentality that Republic of China, the formal name of Taiwan government, has not existed, has been the most prominent one, while Taiwan has sought international status commensurate with its economic achievement. The tug war in the international area led to the 1995/1996 Taiwan Strait crisis in which China test fired two rounds of short range ballistic missiles targeting the water area of Taiwan's two major ports, along with live fire demonstration and amphibious military exercises in July 1995 and March 1996 respectively.<sup>4</sup>

The cross-strait tension has entered another turning point in 2000 after Taiwan's then opposition party, Democratic Progress Party (DPP), had won the presidential election in March that year. Beijing has been very suspicious of the DPP, because the DPP as a Taiwan born political force has had no any tie with China. The worse is that the DPP had advocated Taiwan independence in the party's charter ratified in 1991. The 1991 charter stipulates to establish an independent and sovereign Republic of Taiwan and a new constitution. In 1999, the DPP, switching to a moderate line, ratified a new resolution to replace the old clause, propagating that Taiwan has been an independent country, and its name is Republic of China. However, Beijing's suspicion remained.

President Chen Shui-bian's campaign strategy for the 2004 presidential election

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<sup>3</sup> For a brief analysis on the oil field dispute, see Arthur Ding, "China's Energy Security Demands and the East China Sea: A Growing Likelihood of Conflict in East Asia?" *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, November 2005, pp. 35-38, in [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Arthur\\_Ding.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Arthur_Ding.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> For analyses on the origin of the crisis, see Suisheng Zhao, *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and 1995-1996 Crisis* (NY: Routledge, 1999), and John Garver, *Face Off: China, the US, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998).

has reinforced the Beijing's established dis-trust toward the DPP and him. In order to fully mobilize his constituents' support, in the campaign, Chen advocated to establish a new constitution in 2006, and to have the new constitution effective in 2008. Earlier, he, speaking to a group of overseas Taiwanese businessmen in 2002, advocated "each country in each side of the Taiwan Strait." In addition, he, in order to mobilize his supporters, echoed those advocating to change the government name currently used.

### **In Need of Conflict Prevention and Management**

There are differences among the three flashing points. The first is that there has been international involvement in the Korean Peninsula crisis, and a mechanism has been developed as witnessed by the six-party talk to stability the peninsula crisis. The six include China, Japan, South and North Korea, Russia and the US.

Since August 2003, five rounds six-party talk have been held with a goal to halt the potential international crisis as of today.<sup>5</sup> On 19 September 2005, after the fourth round of six-party talks concluded, the six parties signed a "Statement of Principles" whereby North Korea would abandon its nuclear programs and return to the NPT and IAEA safeguards at "an early date." The United States agreed that it has no intention of attacking North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons, and Washington affirmed that it has no nuclear weapons deployed in South Korea. The parties also agreed that the 1992 "Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," which prohibits uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing, should be observed and implemented.

Though no concrete progress has been made with regard to completely resolving the North Korea's nuclear issue, the six-party has somewhat shown its stability function. The US has promised not to undertake regime change against and endorsed the peaceful solution toward North Korea, while the North has stopped taking calculated radical behavior. At least, the mechanism has worked, and the crisis has been defused.

As for the China-Japan tension, the likelihood for escalation into conflict is low. Focusing on economic development as its priority, there is no need for China to escalate the tension. This is particularly the case when China's new development

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<sup>5</sup> For a recent analysis on the development of the six-party talk, see James L. Schoff, Charles M. Perry, and Jacquelyn K. Davis, *Building Six-Party Capacity for a WMD-Free Korea* (Boston, MA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2004).

program, the Eleventh Five-Year Economic Plan<sup>6</sup> announced on October 2005 at the Chinese Communist Party's Fifth Plenary Meeting of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, is shifting toward emphasizing sustainable development by building a harmonious society and narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor and between regions, and improving energy consumption efficiency among others. This shift is a daunting task for the transformation of Chinese economic and social system, and China cannot afford to have conflict with Japan over the disputed area.

Japan has no attempt to escalate the tension, too. What Japan's Koizumi government has attempted to do was to take the oil field dispute to maximize his own domestic political interest. In other words, for Japan, the oil field dispute was for domestic political consumption. Analyses had that the location of the disputed oil field is geographically far away from Japan's own land, and it is not feasible to build oil pipeline connecting to Japan's four islands.

Bilateral dialogue over the East Sea issue between China and Japan has been taken. At least, as of late October 2005, three rounds have been undertaken. As expected, China has upheld the position that the middle line, proposed by Japan unilaterally, cannot be accepted. Nevertheless, closer economic tie has constrained the escalation.<sup>7</sup>

For the Taiwan Strait case, situation is different. There is no any direct dialogue similar to that between China and Japan. Exchange and interaction at official level has been completely cut off since 1999, and there is no sign of resumption any time in the near future. There is no any mechanism like that of the six-party talk in the Korean Peninsula, because Beijing, regarding the Taiwan issue as internal affairs, has adamantly opposed any third party to get involved.

Negative consequences may incur. Due to lack of direct communication, both sides negatively interpreted the other side's behavior, and the both sides tend to prepare for the worst. This is particularly the case when Taiwan has perceived that China's decision makers, under the domestic and political pressures, have stepped up its military modernization with the option of preemptive strike against Taiwan. Amid this circumstance, many have been concerned that China and Taiwan are entering an arms race game, and a potential conflict is unavoidable.

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<sup>6</sup> For the full text of the program, see  
<[http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2005-10/18/content\\_3640318.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2005-10/18/content_3640318.htm)>.

<sup>7</sup> Howard French and Norimitsu Onishi, "Economic ties binding Japan to rival China," *New York Times*, October 31, 2005.

Coupled with the rising nationalism and self identification in each side of the strait, the Taiwan Strait can easily be flamed into a conflict. No direct communication, deep dis-trust, domestic political pressure, military modernization to prepare for the worst scenario, strong nationalism and self identification, all these can be added up to brew a crisis. What is lacked is a triggering incident to flame into a conflict. In the case of a crisis, domestic pressure may force the political leaders of the both sides into a corner of no return, further pushing up the crisis into a direct conflict or war.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the Taiwan Strait is more dangerous among the three sources of tension. Under this circumstance, it is necessary to find out an exit for unstable source. Concept relating to conflict prevention and management should be an appropriate one so that potential conflict can be avoided, and peace and stability can be maintained in the Taiwan Strait.

### **Practice without Theory?**

There is a strong need for conflict prevention in the Taiwan Strait. Nevertheless, it has long been argued that tacit practices have been existed for five decades between Taiwan and China. To some extent, this observation is right because no war has erupted except minor skirmishes in the past five decades, although an intensive artillery bombardment by China erupted in 1958, and a severe tension arose in the 1995/96 Taiwan Strait crisis. Nevertheless, it has to be argued that it is a fragile stability without formal signed commitment.

### **Phase I**

Development of conflict prevention related observation in the Taiwan Strait can be roughly divided into three phases. Both Taiwan and China had different strategy dealing with the other side in the three phases, and conflict prevention and management, if there was any, was subordinate to the overall strategy of the both sides.

The first phase started from 1949 when the new regime of the People's

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<sup>8</sup> Some argues that the economic inter-dependence between Taiwan and China can help prevent conflict. See "Dancing with the Enemy," *Economist*, January 17, 2005, in [http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=3535207](http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3535207)>. However, this school of argument is flawed, because economic inter-dependence has been formed since 1990s, while tension and hostility rose simultaneously.

Republic of China was established in Mainland China after the Communist Party of China won the civil war, and the KMT moved to Taiwan. This phase lasted for more than three decades until mid-1980s.

During the period between 1949 and late 1980s, the both sides of the Taiwan Strait were locked in a mode of military confrontation in which each side attempted to militarily overwhelm the other side so that re-unification of Mainland China or Taiwan could be accomplished. During this period, Taiwan under the KMT government attempted to militarily recover the mainland China, while Beijing attempted to “liberate” Taiwan by force.<sup>9</sup> Under this zero-sum game context, it was completely impossible to apply conflict prevention and management in the Taiwan Strait.

Defense strategy adopted by Taiwan during this period reflected this trend. “Taiwan maintained a large number of forces and an offensive defense policy, believing the armed struggle would continue until a final resolution.”<sup>10</sup> During the period, Taiwanese military launched some military actions raiding Chinese military installations in the southeast coast areas without making substantial damage to the regime.

Entering the 1980s, Taiwan’s strategy was altered. Actually, Taiwan’s strategy has been gradually changed since 1970s when the US had started to normalize relationship with China. Taiwan realized that the objective of recovering Mainland China faded away rapidly. Beginning late 1970s, Taiwan’s political strategy was switched to echo Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s slogan: “re-unification with the three principles of the people,” and military confrontation was replaced by political offensive approach. In other words, it was a shifted focus of competition amid the improved atmosphere from previous military confrontation.

Nevertheless, force remained a critical element for the both sides of the Taiwan Strait. China did not renounce the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue, while Taiwan employed a defense strategy of “converging offense with defense,” emphasizing mobilization, readiness, and military modernization. Despite that

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<sup>9</sup> Immediately after 1949, the slogan by the Beijing side was to “bloody” Taiwan, and the slogan was amended to “liberate” Taiwan later. Taiwan had attempted to recover the mainland China as early as possible right after 1949. Taiwan’s goal was changed in 1970s when Taiwan encountered diplomatic isolation.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief analysis on the development of Taiwan’s defense strategy, see Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, “Homeland Defense with Taiwanese Characteristics: President Chen Shui-bian’s New Defense Concept,” in Andrew Scobell (ed) *The Costs of Conflict: The Impact on China of a Future War* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, October 2001), pp. 130-132.

competition was shifted to political strategy from military confrontation, Taiwan did not rule out a possible military offensive against Mainland China.

During this period, Taiwan's air force and navy had edge over those of China. Assisted by the US which provided advanced equipment and training, Taiwan had air superiority in the Taiwan Strait, and frequently, Taiwan's air force could reportedly approach or fly over China's coastal area for reconnaissance included missions. In most cases, China fired anti-air artillery against Taiwanese jet fighters.

Contrary to Taiwan's aggressive approach, China adopted defensive approach. Probably due to less sophisticated equipment as a result of worsened relationship with the Soviet Union which refused to provide advanced systems to China, and poor training, along with the concern of possible defect by China's jet fighter pilots, China's jet fighters seldom flied beyond China's shore line.<sup>11</sup>

China's navy also employed a defensive approach during this period. It was reported that China's warships always navigated along the shore line, and frequency of navigating beyond 12 nautical miles of maritime territory was not high. A major reason contributing to the defensive approach is not difficult to image: most of China's warships at that time were small size patrol boats, and these patrol boats can not withstand strong wave and high wind in the sea.

Further, China's warships of the three fleets, i.e., North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet and South Sea Fleet, seldom cruised to other regions, and one of the exceptions was to dispatch several warships from the North Sea Fleet to the South China Sea in 1974 for a sea battle with South Vietnam government over the ownership of the Paracel Island. Each fleet was instructed to stay at their respective defense area for undertaking their own defense mission, and formation of elite force was not included in the China's operational concept.

Contrary to China's defensive approach, Taiwan's navy was outgoing. Taiwan's warships had to approach China's shore line for various missions, and the most frequent mission has been to escort transport or replenish vehicles to Quemoy or Matsu for logistical purpose. For this logistical purpose, Taiwan's warships crossed the virtual middle line demarcating the Taiwan Strait.

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<sup>11</sup> It should be emphasized that China completely placed strategic focus on the Soviet Union during this period, while Taiwan could pose no real threat to China although Taiwan had control of air space in the Taiwan Strait.

If there is something which can be called broader conflict prevention and management, that is shelling on the odd day and stop shelling on the even day [*danda shuangbuda*]. Right after the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis in which China launched heavy bombardment against Quemoy and the US warships escorted Taiwanese replenish and transport vehicles for logistical supply to the small island,<sup>12</sup> Beijing announced the policy of shelling on the odd day and stopping shelling on the even day as a good will posture toward Taiwan, and most of shelling were propaganda materials.

Military strategy is always subordinate to political objective. Recovering the Mainland China or Taiwan was the objective, and military confrontation was the means to accomplish the objective. Under this circumstance, there was no role for conflict prevention and management, and no practice of conflict prevention and management could be developed.

Stability and peace in the Taiwan Strait, if there was any, could be attributed to different strategic focus and asymmetrical capability. China placed strategic focus on the north toward the Soviet Union, and perceived that Taiwan's air superiority in the Taiwan Strait posed no real threat to China's national security. Conflict prevention played no role at all.

## **Phase II**

The second phase roughly started from mid-1980s through the late 1990s. Politically, the both sides of the Taiwan Strait entered a honeymoon period after Taiwan opened the door of family visit for those coming to Taiwan along with the KMT government in 1949. Further, Taiwan pronounced the lift of "the period of mobilization in suppressing Communist rebellion," indirectly recognizing the legality of Beijing's rule over the Mainland China.<sup>13</sup>

China also altered its focus. After 1978 when China's reform and open door policy started, economic development has always been the core of national strategy, and all others have had to be subordinate to this core mission. Externally, China has attempted to create and maintain a peaceful environment conducive to the reform policy.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be mentioned that the US escorting ships stopped at 12 nautical miles of Quemoy, and had Taiwanese take escorting job, because Quemoy administratively belong to Fukien Province.

<sup>13</sup> It should be pointed out that Beijing has not made reciprocal response toward Taiwan. What Beijing has done was to announce that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have not been re-unified by Hu Jin-tao, the Secretary-General of the CCP. Nevertheless, the policy announcement is not a legal action.

Taiwan's defense policy was made concomitant change to suit the new environment. Taiwan's defense policy was altered to "pure defense," and this implied that Taiwan would not seek preemptive military actions against the Mainland China and focused on homeland defense, although Taiwan procured new jet fighters and frigates through technology transfer from the US.

China's defense policy remained defensive during this period, although Chinese navy started to procure new warships and go to the high sea. Under the aegis of Adm Liu Huaqing, who was appointed as China's navy commander, Chinese navy started to form a flotilla navigating to the far south of the South China Sea and northern Pacific region, and at the same time, new flag warships were added to its fleets. China's naval activities were expected to grow. In other words, China's navy gradually obtained the capability cruising away from their own shore line

Taiwan ceased to take military actions against China's southeast coast during this period. Except for providing escort to logistical supply to Quemoy and Matsu, Taiwanese surface combatant warships gradually took self restraint action avoiding across the virtual middle line. It was reported that if the navies of the two sides met in the Taiwan Strait, the both sides took self restraint action, waiting for the other side to pass first.

It was reported that Taiwanese warships were ordered no first shot instruction when meeting Chinese counterparts in the sea. The reason can easily be imaged that confrontation has declined and there was no need to jeopardize the improved cross-strait relations by deliberately or unexpectedly firing the first shot. Nevertheless, it could be seen that sailors remained nervous although no mutual fire exchange could be expected.

Taiwanese jet fighters did not fly over Mainland China, either. With the introduction of new reconnaissance equipment installed in the reconnaissance aircraft, air photo, to some extent, can be taken from a deep slope away from China's shore line, and there was no need to fly over the mainland any more for taking picture. As long as there was no such need, Chinese jet fighters would not be ordered to monitor and chase after Taiwanese reconnaissance aircraft, and likelihood for conflict in the air has diminished.

China unilaterally made good will posture toward Taiwan. After formally

establishing diplomatic tie with the US, Beijing announced to drop an old practice adopted after the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis. That was to formally drop the policy of “odd-day shelling and even-day off.” China tried to send a good will signal to Taiwan.

This was a period of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. With the self restraint by the both navies, and installation of new photo equipment in Taiwanese reconnaissance aircraft in the context of changing defense strategy toward defensive approach, peace and stability were made although no treaty or conflict prevention like document was signed.

### **Phase III**

Phase III roughly started from mid-1990s through present. This period was characterized by sour relationship in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan attempted to break diplomatic isolation and tried every effort to establish ties in the world, while Beijing perceived Taiwan’s diplomatic effort as pursuing de jure political independence, cutting off any tie with China. Beijing attempted to employ coercive measures to deter Taiwan from taking de jure independence and to send warning signal to the world.

Dis-satisfied with the US decision issuing travel visa to Taiwan’s president Lee Teng-hui in 1995, China launched large scale exercises in July 1995 and March 1996.<sup>14</sup> China test fired short range ballistic missiles targeting the water area of Taiwan’s two main ports, and undertook amphibious attack in their exercises by mobilizing both navy and air force.

What was relevant to the peace and stability the most was that China’s military force started to move beyond its 12-nautical miles and approach the virtual middle line. On the one hand, the amphibious attack exercises were undertaken in an area close to the Dong Shan Island, and the outer periphery of the exercise area was in the virtual middle line. In other words, China’s naval and ground forces exercised in the immediate west of the line.

China’s jet fighters also approached the middle line during the exercises.

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<sup>14</sup> For analyses on the origin of the crisis, see Suisheng Zhao, *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and 1995-1996 Crisis* (NY: Routledge, 1999), and John Garver, *Face Off: China, the US, and Taiwan’s Democratization* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998). As for the US’ China policy, Harry Harding argues that in the first term of President Clinton in 1993 and 1996, policy priority was placed on economy, while China policy was left to nobody to take care. In the end, the China policy was left to manipulation by the Congress and media, and the executive branch did not have proactive measures at all. See Harding, “Clinton Missteps: Asia Policy to the Brink,” *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1994.

Taiwan's media reported that China's SU-27s squadrons, along with other models of fighters flew north and south in the immediate west of the middle line, and this was the first time for Chinese air force to fly beyond the 12-nautical miles and to formally patrol in the Taiwan Strait.

Worse was that several fighters flew across the virtual middle line. Taiwan media had that during the exercises, the PLA jet fighters flew across the middle line, probably, with a purpose to demonstrate that Beijing had the determination to take Taiwan by military force if Taiwan went independent. The signal might also be sent to the US.

There was another explanation for the crossing action. Some Taiwanese media said that after the PLA jet fighters were found across the middle line in the air, they were called by the ground station controller through radio to step back immediately. If that was the case, the crossing action could be regarded as un-intended actions because the SU-27s could easily fly across the middle line in full speed after taking off.

Taiwanese military was ordered to take self restraint attitude. During the exercises, Taiwan heightened its alert by dispatching more manpower to Quemoy and Matsu for strengthening defense because it was reported that China attempted to take one or two small islands in that area by force to demonstrate its capability and determination. Also, pilots and sailors were instructed not to fire first shot against their counterparts when meeting in the air or sea.

Large squadron of PLA jet fighters flew across the middle line again in summer of 1999. After President Lee Teng-hui made the statement that the cross-strait relations should be of special state-to-state relations to a Germany media, large squadron and multi-sorties of PLA jet fighters flew across the middle line again, and it was not difficult to imagine the reason.

The PLA's action concerned the US, worried that the PLA's action was likely to escalate the tension. Media had that the US urged the both sides to self-refrain from pushing so that potential crisis could be averted.

Taiwan also took cautious step with regard to the PLA's action. It was reported that two measures were employed by Taiwanese military. The first was to have experienced fighter pilots patrol in the Taiwan Strait, and the reason for this

arrangement was that experienced fighter pilots would not be nervous for un-usual situations and could make better judgment.

The second measure was to enforce strict discipline. All units and fighter pilots in the front line and air respectively were instructed not to fire first shot at any condition unless instructed from the General Chief of Staff who, at that time, was the highest decision maker in the military. Any one violating this instruction would be put to a trial under relevant military law.

Several factors contributing to PLA's changed action. The first one probably was the addition of new jet fighters to its air force inventory. Since mid-1990s, more capable SU-27s and SU-30s were delivered to the PLAAF, and these new fighters gradually become operationalized. The PLAAF was, subsequently, more confidence of their capability, frequently flying across or along the middle line. The second reason was of political signal, as said above.

What observation that we can draw from the third phase? It is apparent that the balance of power has had slight change in the Taiwan Strait with China's rapid military modernization. A more capable and confident Chinese military could easily project its force further away from its shore line and approach the middle line, brewing potential crisis.

On the other hand, the PLA is self-restraining at present. It seemed that flying across the middle line since mid-1990s, except those deliberately sending signal to Taiwan and the US, was more of un-intended accident, such as weather or un-familiarity with air space. In most case, PLA jet fighters flied along the middle line.

## **Conclusion**

What can we conclude from the above analysis? The foremost that we should bear in mind is that the state in the Taiwan Strait is ambiguous. There has been no peace treaty like agreement/accord between the two sides since 1949 when PRC established itself in the mainland, while Republic of China has evolved in Taiwan; there has been no actual war for long. But, Beijing has never publicly renounced the use of force, although condition has been attached for the use of force in recent years.

On the other hand, there has been a persistent divergent trend in the both sides.

Economically, the both sides has become closer and closer and this is particularly the case for Taiwan as China's economy has kept growing and Taiwan's reliance upon China market has grown substantially. Nevertheless, politically, the distance between the two sides has widened. Growing economic tie has not been able to reduce political difference or to act to buffer potential crisis.

Under the above circumstance, a state of "ambiguous tacit practice" has existed. The militaries of the both sides have restrained themselves from crossing beyond the virtual middle line, and subsequently, a state of "ambiguous peace and stability" was kept.

However, this is a state of fragile stability. Practice based on self restraint and good will is not sufficient to assure the long term peace and stability. Further, as analyzed above, the stability and peace was developed based on the balance of power: China has not been able to launch successful attack against Taiwan because of the US factor, and a change of the balance of power is to alter the political landscape.

The problem is why and how to translate this established practice into written agreement. As for why, the answer is simple: there is a growing need to do it as stated earlier in this paper. Although the tacit practices had been existed for fifty years, the political environment has changed substantially in the past forty years, and there is a growing need to transform these tacit practices into written agreement.

The largest change has been in domestic politics. There has been increasing self-identification in Taiwan, while in China, leaders of revolutionary generation have been replaced by technical bureaucrats whose legitimacy has been constantly challenged and leadership has been constrained. This is particularly the case in the context of rising nationalism for the Chinese leaders. The changed political environment will make the tacit practices difficult to sustain in case of crisis.

In other words, tacit practice built in the past fifty years has not been enough to deal with the emerging tension. A written agreement can serve as a buffer arrangement giving legitimate reason to respective political leaders to take self restraint action for the possible mis-fire in the context of rising nationalistic and self-identification sentiment.

Militaries of the both sides also need the written CBMs to constrain each other's behavior. Taiwan media had report that Taiwan's jet fighters were locked in by

China's jet fighters' radars in the fall of 2003. Taiwan's pilots of the locked jet fighters have been instructed not to fire back under any condition without prior permission. However, unilateral self-restraint is not enough to avoid conflict, because pilots under stress condition are likely to make stupid reaction. Under this circumstance, a written CBMs can serve as an order from above, which has to be executed rigorously.