

Conflict Mechanism between China and Taiwan

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In 2000, first time in history the government of Taiwanese started. And in 2004, Chen Shui-bian, the leader of Taiwanese Party was reelected. At this point, the movement of independence had good possibility to move forward rapidly. And “one China” seemed fading away. In this process, Chinese military threat and the policy of “one country two systems” did not work effectively. China realized that military capability at that time was not enough to pressure Taiwan effectively. After these incidents, the speed of Chinese military modernization was accelerated. In last ten years China was expanding its military budget by more than 10% annually. According to the Annual Report of the US Department of Defense, Chinese military capability will overwhelm Taiwan and will have the capability to control the East China Sea. Chinese military influence has reached the territory of Japan.

1, Political and Military Conditions

(1) Asymmetry Balance between China and Taiwan

□ Geopolitical conditions

China has vast land and strategic depth. On the contrary, Taiwan is a small island and surrounded by the sea. Taiwan has serious vulnerability in logistic support.

②. The objective of the war

Taiwan does not have the strategy to start war to achieve the independence and does not have the strategy to invade the mainland China. On the contrary, Chinese strategy is to invade and occupy Taiwan. China needs to have the military capability to achieve air superiority and sea superiority, and have the capability to maintain military occupation. But Taiwan does not need to have such military capability. Taiwan needs to have only defensive capability to resist Chinese invasion.

③ Nuclear weapons

China has more than 400 nuclear weapons and many ballistic missiles. On the contrary, Taiwan has no nuclear weapon. Therefore, in case of nuclear war, there is no

chance for Taiwan to win the war. And China has option to use nuclear weapons as a tool to intimidate Taiwan. Taiwan has no such option.

④ Conventional weapons

China has many offensive weapons such as ballistic missiles, bombers and nuclear submarines. On the contrary, Taiwan has only defensive weapon systems.

⑤ Political system

Taiwan has democratic political and social systems. Democratic and open society is very vulnerable to sabotage, terrorism and other unconventional attack. On the contrary, China is a closed society. It is very difficult for Taiwan to attack China by unconventional war.

⑥ Number of weapons

China has superiority in quantity of weapons. On the contrary, Taiwan has superiority in quality of weapons. It is very difficult to judge which side has the advantage. This might cause serious misunderstanding on both sides.

(2) US Military Intervention

Considering the existence of “Taiwan Relation Act,” tens of thousands of Taiwanese Americans and the strategic interest of the United States, it is likely that the United States will intervene in the conflict between China and Taiwan.

But if the United States has difficulties in another war (middle east or Korean Peninsula), China might think that the United States does not have remaining power to intervene in the conflict between China and Taiwan.

And China might think that if Chinese surprise attack and military occupation is quick enough, the United States does not dare to take military actions to restore the status quo ante.

2, War between China and Taiwan

(1) Limited War

China has many submarines and has the capability to cut the sea lanes of Taiwan. But the blockade of Taiwan will give time for Taiwanese counterattack, sanctions by international society and the US military intervention.

China has the capability to occupy the small islands (Jinmen and Matu), which are very close to the mainland. But this military operation will incur international sanctions

and the US military reactions. In this case, unwounded Taiwan will immediately declare independence. By this military operation, China can get very limited benefits and lose many things.

(2) Military Strength

Taiwan is an island which is 100 miles away from the mainland and a heavily defended island. Taiwan is not a good battlefield for Chinese military forces. Chinese military forces are originally organized for the people's war within the country.

Chinese military forces are basically playing the role of super police whose first duty is to maintain public order. Therefore, the most of the army divisions cannot be moved to other areas. And Chinese army still lacks the force projection capability.

On the other hand, Taiwan had enough time for establishing effective defense structure. Taiwan has repeated military exercises and can mobilize the most of the divisions for checking Chinese military invasion. Taiwan purchased many modernized weapons from the United States and the United States gave the strategic information of the Chinese military forces to Taiwan. Taiwan has the advantage of intelligence and the quality of weapons. But Taiwan military forces do not have the experience of joint military exercise with the US forces. Without joint military exercise, it is difficult for both military forces to work smoothly in case of emergency. This is one of the weak points of Taiwan military forces.

3, War Scenarios

(1) Ballistic Missiles

First phase of Chinese military invasion on Taiwan will be missile attack on the center of command and control of the Taiwan military forces. Targets of missile attack will be the C4I center and the core military bases. China expects that missile attack causes panic among the people.

It is estimated that China already deployed more than 600 SRBMs on the coastal area. On the other hand, Taiwan has Patriot missile systems (PAC-2 Plus), but Chinese SRBMs (M-11, M-9) can reach Taiwan within 5 to 8 minutes. It is impossible to check Chinese missile attack by Taiwanese anti-air missile systems. But if the warhead of missile is a conventional explosive, missile attack cannot cause serious damage to Taiwan society. In case of Iran-Iraq War, the average damage caused by SCUD missile

was 20 to 100 casualties. From military point of view, Chinese missile attack cannot cause serious damage to the Taiwan military structure. But missile attack can cause psychological effect on people in Taiwan.

(2) Air Superiority

China has more than 3000 fighters, but the 4th generation fighters are around 150. And China does not have enough maintenance capability for new generation fighters. On the other hand, Taiwan has 200 4th generation fighters. And Taiwan has the dense anti-air missile network (ex. Taiwan has more than 1,800 Stinger Missiles). It is not easy for Chinese air force to get air superiority over Taiwan Straits. But China is accelerating the speed of acquiring the new fighters from Russia. Probably in some years, the balance of air power will be shifting favorable to China.

(3) Sea Superiority

To occupy Taiwan, China has to have the naval capability to control the Taiwan Straits. For that purpose, China needs to have the capability to check the intervention by the US navy. Recently China built and bought some modern destroyers, frigates and submarines. But still most of the ships are obsolete. On the other hand, Taiwan has some new destroyers and frigates. But the number of ships is limited. And Taiwan cannot buy new submarine because China put pressure on European countries not to sell submarine to Taiwan.

Meanwhile Chinese ships have serious vulnerability to ASMs. Therefore, it is difficult for Chinese navy to get sea superiority without air superiority.

Military Balance between Chinese Navy and Taiwanese Navy

	Chinese Navy	Taiwanese Navy
Strength	290,000	50,000
Submarine	60	4
Destroyer, Frigate	60	28
Patrol Boat	530	116
Mine Sweeper	250	30
Amphibious Ship	198	26
Landing Craft	380	370

4, Occupation of Taiwan

Considering the military balance between China and Taiwan, it is difficult for Chinese military forces to succeed in landing operation on Taiwan.

Probably the key point of success of Chinese occupation is the cooperation of Taiwanese people. In Taiwan, there are many pro-China groups. If China can get collaboration of these groups prior to military operation, there will be a chance for Chinese military forces to succeed in landing operation on Taiwan. But even in that case, Chinese military forces have to face the resistance of local Taiwanese. Under international criticism, it will take time for China to establish Chinese authority in Taiwan.

5, Cost of military invasion

At present, China does not have enough military capability to occupy Taiwan. If China open the war against Taiwan, it is probable that China will lose its important part of the military forces and will face harsh criticism from the international community. War might bring the political isolation and the economic disaster. War will be a very dangerous gamble to China.

But in five to ten years, Chinese military forces will be highly modernized and be expanded. And the military balance will be much favorable to China. In that case, the cost of military operation will be reduced significantly. If China can occupy Taiwan quickly and easily, it will reduce the chance of US military intervention and it will not give chance for international community to criticize China.

This possibility is not low. The economy of Taiwan is not in good shape in these days. Taiwan cannot afford to buy very expensive newest weapons from abroad. On the contrary, Chinese economy is developing very rapidly. Now China has enough economic capability to support very expensive military modernization and expansion.

6, Conclusion

(1) Military Background surrounding Taiwan

① Considering military balance between China and Taiwan, it is difficult for China to get air superiority over Taiwan Straits. Without air superiority, it is impossible for China to succeed in landing operation on Taiwan.

② US navy has enough capability to check Chinese invasion and occupation of Taiwan.

Even if China could succeed in occupying Taiwan, it is easy for the US navy to cut the logistic line from mainland China to Taiwan.

China is now modernizing and expanding its military forces very rapidly. But at present it is difficult for China to occupy the heavily armed and hostile island. Mao Ze-dong once said in his book that China should not make war without enough preparation and a chance of winning.

(2) Political Movements in China and Taiwan

① If military pressure is not effective, China would opt for political and economic pressure upon Taiwan. For that purpose, China tries to establish close economic relation with the United States. Economic interdependence between the United States and China will raise the cost of US intervention in the Taiwan problem.

② Chinese military expansion is very rapid. Therefore, if Taiwan wants to be independent, it is reasonable to declare independence as soon as possible. But the United States would not support the declaration of independence.

③ If Taiwan wants to maintain present favorable military balance, it is necessary for Taiwan to promote economic development and buy more weapons from the United States. For economic development, Taiwan needs to establish good economic relations with China and the United States.

④ Chinese policy toward Taiwan is relatively simple. Good economic relation with the United States reduces the possibility of US military intervention and good economic relation with Taiwan reduces the benefit of independence.

⑤ But Taiwanese policy is complicated. Military expansion contradicts good economic relation with China. Taiwan needs to balance good economic relation with China against military buildup. This confuses domestic politics of Taiwan.

⑥ In Taiwan, there are many pro-China groups. And Taiwan military forces are originally the army of KMT. They are not sympathetic to the independent movement of Taiwan. Chinese military invasion might push those people to the independent of Taiwan. Therefore, the best way for China to occupy Taiwan is not made by military means, but by economic or political means.

*This paper is a preliminary draft. Please do not quote