

Taiwan Fellowship Program 2011

Research Proposal

Taiwan between the United States and the People's Republic of China

Author: Dario Kuntić

Velika Gorica, August 23, 2011

Methodological framework for research

The aim of this research is to answer the research question: Is Taiwan going to remain a focal point of clashing strategic interests between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the 21st century?

Main thesis: The US considers Taiwan as a critical component of the protective shield blocking PRC geopolitical rise in the West Pacific and its expansion in Eastern Asia and further to the Pacific. Therefore, the US is going to be devoted to keep the island in its sphere of influence in coming decades.

In order to answer the research question, this study is going to elaborate position of Taiwan in the context of strategic studies, use of force as an instrument of foreign policy, US and PRC foreign policy and geostrategic interests in Eastern Asia, Taiwan-US cooperation, cross-strait relations, and political status of Taiwan.

Relevance of research:

The final result of this research should be very helpful to the teachers, scholars, students and other parties interested in the field of international relations and global security issues because it should provide constructive framework for observation of future relations between the US, Taiwan and the PRC. Since Eastern Asia is one of the most important parts of the world it is necessary to completely understand security situation in this region in order to discover all traps that could be devastating for the regional and world security.

Research methods:

1. Review of literature and available documents
2. Interviews with scholars
3. Data analysis
4. Description
5. Argumentation
6. Conclusion

Theoretical framework

In the context of strategic studies this research is going to examine the ways in which actors use their military capability to achieve political goals, in particular, with the way in which the threat and the use of force has served these ends. This branch of inquiry is generically part of the realist paradigm which focuses on the nation-state as the principal actor in international relations. Realists argue that nation-states are the most important actors in international relations; that world politics is driven by competitive self-interests; and international relations represent a struggle for power and peace. Hans Morgenthau in his book *Politics among Nations* argues that anybody who operates in international relations enters a conflict with others who also wish to achieve their interests by force. Before Morgenthau, father of the school of political realism Tukidid in his *History of Peloponnesian War* wrote that the state is a major actor in war and peace, and that the state must take care of its security by making alliances with other states. Security was preoccupation of Machiavelli as well, who had warned his *Principe* about the need of preserving the security. Another realist Thomas Hobbes in *Leviatan* claimed that the state of nature was prone to a war of all against all, while Henry Kissinger strongly believed that power is the most important prerequisite for successful foreign politics. Therefore, peace is possible only on the basis of a balance of power among the major powers. In his book *Diplomacy* Kissinger stated that the balance of power is the natural form of international relations.

To completely understand Taiwan position between US and PRC domain of interest it is important to include geographical factor in this study as well. As Geoffrey Sloan and Colin Gray stated in the book *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, geography can be described as the mother of strategy, in that the geographical configuration of the land and sea, with respect to a state's strategic policy, or an alliance between states, can exercise a twofold strategic conditioning influence: on locations important for defense, and on the routes and geographical configurations which favor an attacking force, be it on land or sea.

Problem statement

Regarding Taiwan position in Eastern Asia and US-PRC policy towards the island it can be said that Taiwan is a big stake in the balance of power in the region. In the hands of the US Taiwan presents "an unsinkable aircraft carrier", as General Douglas MacArthur once referred to the island. With Taiwan in its grip, geostrategic location of the island enables the US to block the PRC virtually at its gates, to preserve existing balance of power in the region and to ensure its military presence in Eastern Asia. The US is concerned that Taiwan in the hands of

the PRC would serve as a main harbor for its naval expansion in the Asian waters and further which could threaten its interests in the Pacific. Henry Kissinger in his book *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* claims that to coerce attempts of any power to gain predominance in the Asia is in American national interests. Moreover, with Taiwan as its ally the US can control East Asia waterways and also PRC domestic waterway linking South China Sea to East China Sea. Taiwan is also close to the Western Pacific sea lanes of communication which run from the Straits of Malacca to Japan, South Korea and eastwards.

In order to hold its position as the main creator of international relations, so powerful it could shape the world according to its preferences, the US is decisive to keep the present balance of power in Eastern Asia. In order to restrain other powers which could challenge its imperial ambitions the US expanded its network of military bases and set up a number of military alliances with its allies in order to secure its influence in the important regions. One of those forms of alliances is Taiwan Relations Act from 1979 which promises to supply Taiwan with defensive weapons. It is also stressed that any attack by the PRC would be considered of “grave concern” to the US. This policy has been persistent to these days since the US is resolute to hold its military presence and political influence in Eastern Asia. In his book *The Sorrows of Empire* Chalmers Johnson argues that in 2001 the Pentagon began regular high-level military talks with Taiwan over defense of the island, ordered a shift of army personnel and supplies to the Asia-Pacific region, and worked strenuously to promote remilitarization of Japan.

Despite military arrangements Washington is very careful about political status of Taiwan. As Ted Galen Carpenter argues in his book *America's Coming War with China*, on one hand, Washington officially adheres to a “One China” policy and does not dispute Beijing’s contention that Taiwan is part of China. On the other hand, the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act mandates that the United States sell defensive arms to Taiwan and regard any PRC effort to coerce Taiwan as a grave breach of peace. Therefore, US policy in that matter has been described as one of “strategic ambiguity”.

In order to restrain PRC interests in the region and prevent its possible expansion further to the Pacific that could challenge US supremacy, Washington has been resolute to hold Taiwan in its sphere of influence. In his book *Why Taiwan?* Alan M. Watchman argues that President Truman’s decision to neutralize the Taiwan Strait by sending in the Seventh Fleet during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, for fear that any hostilities would mark the beginning of a vast Communist offensive, established the rules of the game for decades to come.

From Beijing point of view, Taiwan is a renegade province of the PRC in the first place. Beijing is dedicated to “One China” policy and is resolute do defend it by all means, including the military force, although Chinese officials usually state that the PRC wants to settle the dispute by peaceful means. Zbigniew Brzezinski in one of his major works *The Grand Chessboard* noticed that the return of Taiwan is going to be the first task of the PRC in the first decade of the 21st century. Having recovered Hong Kong and Macao, PRC concern over its territorial integrity is most associated with resumption of sovereign control over Taiwan. Beijing’s primary worry about US intentions is that Washington seeks to slow or block PRC emergence as a great power and that this strategy includes permanent separation of Taiwan from the mainland. Therefore, China’s military doctrine, force structure, defense acquisition strategy, planning, and operational training all appear focused primarily on Taiwan scenario, including taking into account the possible intervention of the United States, as it was written in *China: the Balance Sheet* by the CSIS and Peterson Institute. From Beijing’s strategic point of view, in the hands of the US Taiwan has been perceived as a substantial threat to the coast and mainland of the PRC. On the other hand, if the PRC controlled Taiwan it could utilize Taiwanese ports for its battle ships, future aircraft carriers and submarines to operate freely throughout the Pacific. Besides, control of Taiwan means control of the northern entrance of the South China Sea. Then, the large part of the South China Sea would become a kind of inner waters of the PRC. This is a big stake in “Eastern Asia game” and Beijing will strive to win it. On the other hand, it must not be neglected that in the minds of China’s leaders, the Taiwan issue is also inextricably linked to legitimacy of Chinese Communist Party rule.

As for Taiwan, it is caught between two big powers – the US as his ally and the PRC as his dangerous neighbor. It is also dissatisfied with the status quo built around Taiwan’s acceptance of being in political and diplomatic limbo. Many Taiwanese want to change current political status of the island and separatist sentiments are growing. Carpenter claims that Taiwan has developed separately from the mainland, and it is understandable if many Taiwanese want that reality ratified by having an independent state that enjoys full international recognition. But the PRC continues to increase, upgrade, and modernize its military forces deployed opposite Taiwan, which Beijing claims is meant to deter Taiwan independence. In return, the US has been supplying Taiwan with modern weapons in defensive purposes, which has been strongly criticized by Beijing. This vortex of interests and the absence of compromise, confidence and honest intentions have increased the chance of a conflict resulting from miscalculation or accident.