
Defense Report

AUSA



Mainland China and Taiwan—We Should Stand With a Friend

It is becoming more and more apparent that the major impediment to normalization of United States relations with the People's Republic of China is the status of the government on Taiwan—which still calls itself the Republic of China.

When the government of the late Chiang Kai-shek was ejected from the Chinese mainland in the late 1940's it set up shop on Taiwan, a poverty-ridden island liberated from the Japanese and turned over to China after World War II. The native Taiwanese had seen many foreign administrations and the displaced Chinese were not very popular. All this changed over the years, however, as hard-work and an imaginative economic program created an Asian industrial giant to replace a tattered agricultural weakling. Through the bad years of confrontation between the United States and Communist China the old Generalissimo—Chiang—and his successors provided unwavering friendship. Today, Taiwan is a major Asian trading partner of the United States and the relationship between the two nations has lost the purely political overtones that marked the years of confrontation.

Now the United States is anxious to have better relations with the mainland Chinese. The communist regime, in turn, is anxious to gain control of Taiwan. There is growing fear on the part of the people on Taiwan that the United States will offer them up as bait for full diplomatic relations with mainland China. The Taiwan Chinese look with foreboding at the on-going efforts by the Carter administration to improve Latin American relations by relinquishing control over the Panama Canal and just before he left for his questionably successful trip to China Secretary of State Cyrus Vance said in a speech, ". . . we acknowledge . . . that there is but one China."

The United States and the government on Taiwan have a long-standing mutual defense treaty but over the years the U.S. military presence in the area has drastically shrunk. To Taiwan, the announcement that U.S. ground forces will be withdrawn from Korea is just another sign that adherence to defense commitments in Asia have given way to political expediency.

In the context of its often-troubled relationships with friends and ex-friends around the world it seems inescapable that a U.S. decision to stand aside for a mainland Chinese takeover on Taiwan would have immeasurable negative impact. The People's Republic of China needs U.S. trade and expertise at least as much as we need their formalized friendship. We don't need to bargain away a friend to achieve that end.