
Defense Report

AUSA



The United States, China and Taiwan— Will the End Justify the Means?

The normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China is one of the most complex acts of international relations in our nation's history. In terms of long range impact it might be likened to our participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has had profound economic, political and strategic ramifications on the United States and the world for the past 30 years. By recognizing the most populous communist nation in the world the United States has reopened the door to the vast, mostly untapped, resources of China and created a huge market for American technologic expertise. The door opening has also created some very real problems.

The problem that has received most attention is the future of Taiwan, the Republic of China. The government on Taiwan still considers itself the rightful rulers of all China, and even if there is little practical possibility of their returning to govern mainland China, it is an emotional issue of great importance to the Chinese on Taiwan. By withdrawing recognition from them and recognizing the communist mainland government we have offended a government that stood beside the United States through many years of peril in the Far East. We have also imperiled our commercial relationship with a booming economy and one of our most significant trading partners in Asia.

News reports of the negotiations which brought about this diplomatic coup say that the People's Republic of China made no promises to let the Chinese on Taiwan go their own way. To them, Taiwan is still a province of China. The Peking government has not promised to leave Taiwan alone but the United States, confident there will be no invasion from the mainland, has abrogated our mutual defense treaty with Taiwan before its 1979 expiration date. The Taiwan government has already begun looking for non-U.S. sources of the sophisticated weaponry it believes it will need to defend itself from an eventual attack from the mainland. In the glow of its new relationship with the Chinese communists our government has declined to make any commitment to Taiwan for the future except to say that cultural and commercial ties should be continued.

Admittedly, the economic ramifications of our new ties with China are potentially great. Over the long haul there may even be an opportunity here to stabilize all of East Asia so it can develop its vast resources and become a full participant in world affairs. But only time will tell if the long-range gain will justify our abandonment of a moral commitment to a friendly nation.