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/U.S. ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN/ A CRITICAL ISSUE
IN SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

by

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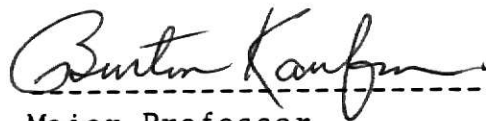
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INTRODUCTION

Since 1950 the "Taiwan Question" has been the most sensitive issue in Sino-American relations. Simply stated, the question involves a conflict between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists in an incomplete civil war that became internationalized in a number of fundamental respects after the outbreak of the Korean War in June of 1950. Since then, Taiwan has maintained a separate existence, under the Nationalists (Republic of China or ROC) control but supported by the United States, while the Communists (People's Republic of China or PRC) have remained committed to extending their sovereignty over the island. In a formal sense, the civil war between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists has not ended. Both Beijing and Taipei still claim to be China's sole legal government, and officially declared that Taiwan is a part of China. China remains, therefore, a divided country.

For almost three decades after the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States continued to recognize the Nationalist government in Taipei as the legitimate government of China, and to pursue a policy of nonrecognition toward the PRC. In the early 1970's, however, after two decades of intensive hostility, relations between the United States and the PRC started to thaw as both sides moved toward normalizing relations between the two countries. At the end

of President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China on 27 February 1972, a joint communique was issued in Shanghai, in which the United States and the PRC expressed their wish to normalize relations. But one major disagreement between the two parties was over Taiwan. Beijing reaffirmed its claim as the sole legal government of China, including Taiwan, and stated that the "liberation" of the island was strictly China's internal affair. The PRC also demanded that all U.S. military forces be withdrawn from the island.

On its part, the United States cautiously stated that it "acknowledged" both Beijing and Taipei's claim "that there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China," remarking that America "does not challenge that position." But it did not recognize explicitly the PRC's sovereignty over the island. It also stated its "interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves," and it affirmed as its ultimate objective "the withdrawal of all U.S. forces" from Taiwan. But it stated that it would "progressively reduce them as the tension in the area diminishes."¹ Furthermore, Washington continued its recognition of, and defense treaty with, the Nationalist regime.

Between 1972 and 1978 considerable progress was made in improving U.S.-PRC relations, but Taiwan remained the main problem. To normalize relations, Beijing asked Washington to accept three conditions: the severance of U.S. diplomatic ties with Taipei, withdrawal of American military forces from

Taiwan, and abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Nationalist government. On 15 December 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced to the world in a dramatic move that the United States and the PRC had agreed to establish full diplomatic relations on 1 January 1979. Under this agreement Washington accepted Beijing's three conditions and recognized that the PRC as the sole legal government of China. At the same time, however, Washington asserted that it would maintain "commercial, cultural, and other unofficial relations with Taiwan," and declared that it "expects that the Taiwan issue will be settled peacefully by the Chinese themselves."²

During the negotiations leading to normalization Washington also made it clear to Beijing that it intended to continue to sell defensive arms to Taiwan. Although Beijing regarded this as illegitimate and highly objectionable, it decided, nevertheless, to proceed with full normalization of relations. Arms sales to Taiwan was the crucial issue in the negotiations. Indeed, it gradually became the major problem between Washington and Beijing during the postnormalization period.

Despite completion of the normalization of relations, the Taiwan question remained unresolved. Both in 1972 and 1978, Washington and Beijing tended to put the question aside, so that it would not prevent the improvement of relations in other areas. After a decade of relative quiescence, the Taiwan issue reemerged in 1981 forcing the

United States and the PRC to rethink, once again, their mutual relationship. The confrontation over the issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan during 1981 was significant because it was the first major conflict between the two countries since their normalization of relations in 1979. An analysis of the arms sales issue may, therefore, provide some insight into the handling of the Taiwan question in the era of normalized Sino-American relations.

In this report I will analyze the fundamental issues underlying the confrontation over U.S. arms sales to Taiwan through the conclusion of the joint communique on that issue on 17 August 1982. I will examine the different perspectives the United States and the PRC held toward the Taiwan issue, reviewing their interactions leading to the crisis of early 1982 and the agreement reached in August of that year.

ENDNOTES

1. English text in Beijining Review, 3 March 1972, p. 5; Department of State Bulletin, 20 March 1972, pp. 435-38.
2. English text in Department of State Bulletin, January 1979, p. 26.

Chapter 1

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TAIWAN QUESTION AND THE STATUS OF TAIWAN

In 1661, Cheng Ch'eng-kung, a Chinese general of the Ming Dynasty (1386-1644), drove the Dutch from Taiwan (Formosa) and formally established a Chinese administration there. Since then the island had been administered as a part of China.¹ But in 1895, after China was defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), Taiwan was ceded to Japan in the treaty of Shimonoseki. During World War II, the Allied Powers pledged first in the Cairo Declaration of 1943 and then in the Potsdam Proclamation of 1945 the return of Taiwan to China. In October, 1945, the ROC accepted the surrender of the Japanese forces in Taiwan and thereafter ruled the island as a province. It was widely expected that the peace treaty with Japan would explicitly provide for the return of Taiwan to China. However, in mid-1949, when fighting in the Chinese civil war drew to a close and the defeated Nationalists withdrew to Taiwan, that the question of Taiwan gradually emerged.

The Truman administration, expecting that the fall of Taiwan to the Chinese Communist forces was a matter of time, adopted a hands-off policy toward the ROC.² On 5 January 1950, President Truman made a statement on Taiwan at a press

conference. He pointed out that the United States "has no predatory design on Formosa,... nor does it have any intention of utilizing its armed forces to interfere in the present situation." Specifically, "the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa."³

However, the outbreak of the Korean War five months later changed drastically the American position toward Taiwan. On 27 June 1950, President Truman declared that he had ordered the Seventh Fleet to "prevent any attack on Formosa," stating that the occupation of the island by Communist forces would be a "direct threat" to the security of the Pacific area and to U.S. forces performing functions in that region. At the same time, he requested the Nationalist government on Taiwan to cease military operations against the mainland. In reference to the status of Taiwan, the President also changed his previous position by saying that the determination of the island's future status "must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations."⁴

Thus because of the unexpected Korean War, the United States reversed its policy with respect to Taiwan. Fearing that the Communist attack in Korea might be the signal for increased aggression elsewhere, the United States moved to block the Communist military threat to Taiwan. But because Washington was unwilling to be involved in any Nationalist attempt to "recover" the mainland, it merely claimed that

Taiwan's status was still "undetermined." It also imposed constraints on military action by Taipei both during and after the Korean War. During the offshore island crises in 1954 and 1958, the Eisenhower administration took concrete steps to "leash" the Nationalists and preclude any major action by them against the mainland. In other words, even though American support of the Taipei government steadily increased after the Korean War, particularly after the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954, it was unambiguously defensive.

Gradually, in the early 1960s, the United States appeared to move toward a de facto two-Chinas policy, and even made efforts to test Beijing's willingness to accept a "two Chinas" solution of the Taiwan problem. On 13 December 1963, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger W. Hilsman delivered a speech on China policy, in which he pointed out clearly that the United States would "fully honor" its "close and friendly ties" with the Nationalist government on Taiwan. But at the same time he also indicated that America would pursue a "open door" policy toward Beijing. "We are determined to keep the door open to the possibility of change," the Assistant Secretary said, "not to slam it shut against any developments which might advance our national good."⁵ This obvious overture to the PRC, together with other similar speeches made by the high officials of the State Department, was adamantly rejected by Beijing, which insisted on American withdrawal from Taiwan and the Taiwan

Strait as a precondition for improving relations.⁶

By the early 1970s when Beijing and Washington decided to explore the possibilities of detente, the PRC gave up its insistence that the Taiwan problem must be solved before any steps toward improving U.S.-China relations could be taken, but it reiterated all of its basic claims. As a result, the United States abandoned the two-China idea as an option, while it continued to maintain its existing relationship with Taipei.

From 1950 until the issue of the Shanghai Communique in 1972, the status of Taiwan was held by the United States as "undetermined." Taiwan might or might not be a part China; the question should be decided, Washington held, by an Allied peace conference which would settle conclusively all outstanding issues raised by World War II. The PRC attacked this position. From Beijing's perspective, Taiwan was a part of Chinese territory which had been seized by a predatory imperialist power while China was weak. Taiwan's continuing de facto separation from the "new China" under the auspices of another "imperialist power," namely, the United States, was "a question which invokes the national emotions of one billion Chinese people."⁷ Obviously, the Taiwan question was perceived by the PRC as integral to the principle of China's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

To compromise the different policy positions and perspectives, Washington and Beijing carefully finessed this

issue in the Shanghai Communique of 1972. Beijing stated its own view that "Taiwan is a province of China which has long been returned to the motherland." While Washington said it "acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain... that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States government does not challenge that position." The wording was critical here. The United States "acknowledged," it did not "recognize," that Taiwan was a part of China. "Recognition" would have implied acceptance of China's claim regarding Taiwan and would have, therefore, implied that Beijing would have the final say about Taiwan's relations with other nations. But while Washington "did not challenge" Beijing's claim that Taiwan was a part of China, neither did it agree that this claim would bind U.S. behavior, although it did agree that U.S. actions would not directly challenge the PRC's claims.

In the normalization communique issued in 1978, the United States made a further concession on this issue of principle, but it succeeded in maintaining "unofficial relations" and arms sales with the Nationalist government. There were two official texts of this communique--an English-language and a Chinese-language version. The former stated that the United States "recognizes" Beijing as the sole legal government of China, but "acknowledges" the Chinese position that there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The latter, however, applied the same verb, chengren, in both clauses, a verb which is properly translated as "to

recognize." Because the English-language text of the 1978 communique used two different verbs, Washington was saying that while it accepted the PRC government as China's legitimate government, it still took no position itself on the exact status of Taiwan. By using the verb chengren in both clauses, however, Beijing was saying that the United States not only accepted Beijing as China's government, but accepted that Taiwan ought to be ruled by that government. Each side contended that the version of the communique in its own language was the "official" version.

It is impossible to believe that the diplomats did not know that different terms were being used and did not realize their implications. Since both sides claimed its own language text as "official," it can only be concluded that Washington and Beijing were, in effect, agreeing to continue to disagree about the status of Taiwan.

At normalization, the United States fully accepted the PRC's three conditions regarding Taiwan. In return for Washington's acceptance of these demands, Beijing made two major concessions by agreeing that America could continue selling arms to and maintaining "unofficial relations" with Taipei. In other words, the United States was allowed to continue its security, commercial and cultural ties with Taiwan after normalization, even though the form of this relation was to be quite different from the previous one.

ENDNOTES

1. In 1683, Cheng's grandson surrendered to the Ch'ing Empire and the island was administered as a prefecture of the mainland Fukien Province until 1885. In 1886 Taiwan was made a separate Province of China.

2. The U.S. Department of State issued a policy memorandum on Taiwan revealing the U.S. hands-off policy toward the ROC. The memorandum pointed out that the fall of Taiwan to the Chinese Communist forces was widely expected. The island was exclusively the responsibility of the ROC government and the United States has "assumed no responsibilities or obligations, actual or moral." See Military Situation in the Far East, hearings before the Committee on Armed Service and the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 82d Cong., 1st sess., Part III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), pp. 1667-69.

3. See American Foreign Policy, 1950-1955, Basic Document, Vol.2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), pp. 1667-69.

4. See *ibid.*, p. 2468.

5. American Foreign Policy, Current Documents, 1963 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 761.

6. See excerpts of the article in American Foreign Policy, Current Documents, 1964 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 876-77.

7. Renmin ribao commentary, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Daily Report (China), 31 December 1981, pp. b1-b2.

Chapter 2

CONFRONTATION OVER U.S. ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN

After agreeing in the 1972 Shanghai Communique to progressively reduce military forces on Taiwan "as tension in the area diminishes," the United States cut military personnel in the island from 9,000 in 1972, 4,000 in 1975, 753 in 1978, and to one in September 1979.¹ As the U.S. military presence on Taiwan was progressively reduced, American arms sales to Taiwan became more and more of an issue.

During the normalization negotiations in 1978, Washington expressed its intention to continue supplying Taiwan with arms. At a meeting on 19 September 1978, President Carter indicated to the head of the PRC Liaison Office that after normalization the United States intended to supply the island with selected defense weapons that would allow the people of Taiwan to defend themselves from attack while not upsetting the balance of power in the area.² Although the arms sales issue was not raised directly during the normalization negotiations, in order to prevent ambiguity and possible future conflict, the President instructed the head of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, Leonard Woodcock, to meet with PRC Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping on 14 December to explain clearly U.S. intentions. Deng became angry and

denounced the proposed policy.³ However, Beijing put aside the sharp differences on this issue, in order to allow normalization to move forward. Both Beijing and Washington seemed to agree to disagree on the arms sales dispute. At the very least, both parties agreed not to let the disagreements over this issue obstruct the exchange of ambassadors and the expansion of cooperation. At the time of normalization Secretary of State Cyrus Vance thus stated, "We will continue our previous policy of selling carefully selected defensive weapons to Taiwan. While the PRC said they disapproved of this, they nevertheless moved forward with normalization with full knowledge of our intentions."⁴ At a postnormalization news conference on 16 December, the PRC Premier Hua Guofeng referred to the understanding reached on this issue. "During the negotiations the U.S. side mentioned that after normalization it would continue to sell limited amounts of arms to Taiwan for defense purpose," the Chinese leader stated, "We made it clear that we resolutely would not agree to this... so our two sides had differences on this point. Nevertheless, we reached an agreement on the joint communique."⁵

A further impact on the arms sales issue was the passage of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in March of 1979. During the normalization negotiations, the House of Representatives dispatched a special mission, headed by Lester L. Wolff, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, to study the security situation in Taiwan.

After the delegation returned to the United States, it submitted a report in which it suggested that the U.S. continue to supply Taipei with defensive weapons, "particularly important is support for Taiwan's air and sea defense capability." The delegation asserted that the continuation of needed defense supplies would "maintain Taiwan's confidence in its defense capability, to maintain and improve systems capability, and to advance a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue." To further Taiwan's security and protect American interests in the island, the report also recommended "the earliest possible" implementation of the legislation in order to provide a legal framework for continuing economic, social, and cultural ties with Taiwan.⁶

Although Washington expressed its intention of continuing to supply arms to Taiwan, the Carter administration maintained that there was no need to provide any security guarantee, whether in the form of a presidential declaration or a congressional resolution. At the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's hearing on the Taiwan Enabling Act held on 5 February 1979, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown testified that "any PRC military attack against Taiwan is extremely unlikely for the foreseeable future," for the following reasons: the PRC has limited amphibious capabilities; Taiwan is heavily fortified and would be costly to take; the action could make the PRC more vulnerable to a Soviet attack; the PRC will be faced with a hostile Vietnam and needed to

maintain substantial military forces along the Sino-Vietnamese border; and an attack on Taiwan would reverse the political gains made in the West by Beijing and jeopardize continued U.S. help for its modernization.⁷

Most of the committee members, however, were not as optimistic as the Administration on the island's future security. They pointed out there were several possible "nonpeaceful" alternatives opened to Beijing with regard to its "unification program," these included an economic boycott, a military blockade, seizure of an offshore island, and nuclear blackmail, all of which could seriously strangle the island's economy and security.⁸ Those Congress members considered that some form of security guarantee for the island was necessary. They believed that such a guarantee should be in the form of assurances to Taiwan that the United States remained seriously concerned for Taiwan's future. At the same time, any guarantee should avoid offending Beijing. After extensive discussions in Congress and between the congressional leaders and the Carter administration, the Taiwan legislation was finally passed and signed into law on 26 March 1979 under the title Taiwan Relations Act.

The significance of the TRA was its attempt to link U.S. national security interests with peace in the Taiwan straits and its authorization of American interventions should Taiwan's security or its social and economic system be threatened. The Act asserted that any effort to determine the island's future "by other than peaceful means, including

by boycotts or embargoes" would be considered "a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States." It declared formally that Washington would make available to Taiwan "arms of a defensive character," stating that the President and Congress would determine "the character and quantity" that Taiwan "needs." And it asserted that the United States itself should "maintain the capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion" threatening to Taiwan's security or its "social or economic system."⁹

To further the policy of arms sales to Taiwan, the Act called for the United States to make available to the island "such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability," It also stated that the President and Congress should determine "the nature and quantity of such defense articles and services based solely upon their judgment of the needs of Taiwan."¹⁰

The Taiwan Relations Act was widely acclaimed in the United States, but there is no doubt that it distressed the PRC. From Beijing's perspective, the TRA seriously contravened the principle of the normalization communique. First, the Act declared that the United States had to maintain its capacity to resist any threat to Taiwan's security or to its social and economic system. In the event of any danger to Taiwan and American interests, Washington would take appropriate retaliatory action. Furthermore, the

Act requested the United States to continue to provide Taipei with weapons in order to help the island "maintain a sufficient self-defensive capability." These positions violated the principle bilaterally accepted in the 1978 Communique that the Taiwan question was to be settled by the Chinese themselves and constituted "unacceptable interference in" China's domestic affairs. In addition, the TRA attempted to treat Taiwan as a "country," the Taiwan authorities as a "government," upgrading the unofficial relations between Washington and Taipei into official relations, again a violation of the principle of the normalization communique that there would be only unofficial, nongovernmental, people-to-people relations between the United States and Taiwan.¹¹

Despite the strong PRC protests over the TRA, Beijing also realized that if it had upset the normalization agreement, China's interests would be hurt. Beijing hoped that as U.S.-PRC relations were increasingly strengthened Washington would place less emphasis on American relations with Taiwan. On the other hand, President Carter tried to assuage Beijing's discontent. At the time of signing the TRA, Carter stressed that as president he had discretion regarding how to implement the Act. He pledged to "exercise that discretion in a manner consistent with our interest... and with the understanding we reached on the normalization of relations."¹²

During the first year of the Taiwan Relations Act,

however relations between the United States and Taiwan, actually improved in some respects. Trade between the island and America increased by 23 percent in 1979, totaled \$9,180 million compared with \$7,516 million in 1978. U.S. investment on Taiwan expanded by about 15 percent, reached a record of \$329 million compared with \$213 million the year before. Taiwan therefore moved up to be the seventh leading trading partner of the United States.

Arms sales to Taiwan also resumed in January 1980 after the one-year moratorium of 1979. Washington agreed to sell six of eighteen military items requested by Taiwan, and indicated that it would keep under consideration the other twelve items. However, Taiwan's three priority items-- an advanced fighter (the FX), the Harpoon ship-to-ship missile, and the Standard air defense missile-- were not approved.¹⁴ The Joint Chiefs and the Defense Security Assistance Agency acknowledged that Taiwan's defense needs justified the sale of these weapons but the Department of State was reluctant to recommend approval, apparently for fear of upsetting relations with the PRC.¹⁵

Beijing was particularly displeased with the Administration's implementation of the Act. Despite the one-year arms moratorium for Taiwan, actual arms deliveries continued at a substantial level. The PRC obviously expected a drop in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan following the normalization. On the contrary, American Foreign Military Sales to the island exceeded nearly \$200 million for fiscal

1979.¹⁶ Furthermore, in mid-1980 President Carter authorized U.S. aircraft firms to discuss possible sale of the FX to foreign countries, including Taiwan.¹⁷ Beijing strongly criticized this as "a breach of the principles stipulated in the agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States which...jeopardized China's cause for the return of Taiwan."¹⁸ The arms sales issue seemed to gradually escalate and became a serious matter between the United States and the PRC. However, during Carter's final year in office, his administration took a series of steps to strengthen political and economic ties between Washington and Beijing. While the PRC was clearly disturbed by the trend in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan as well as by the TRA, it generally emphasized the positive side of U.S.-China relations, and did not press hard on Taiwan-related questions.

Matters changed once more after Ronald Reagan entered the White House in 1981. Early in the presidential campaign, Reagan said he would consider restoring an official relationship between Taipei and Washington, including the sale of advanced fighter aircraft.¹⁹ The PRC responded with a warning; "If the United States reestablished official relations with Taiwan according to the policy announced by Reagan, it would imply that the very principle which constitutes the foundation of the Sino-American relationship would retrogress against the will of the two people."²⁰ The Taiwan question, which had been relatively dormant during

1979 and 1980, again became a highly sensitive and controversial issue between America and China. Beijing's concern, clearly, was the result of increasing evidence that the issue of arms sales to Taiwan was rising on Washington's policy agenda. During Secretary of State Alexander Haig's visit to Beijing in June 1981, the arms sales issue was discussed, but no agreements were reached. However, Washington agreed to consult further with China before any U.S. decision was made. The United States also agreed not to do anything that would "precipitously exacerbate the issue," while refraining from giving any assurances regarding future sales to Taiwan.²¹ When President Reagan and PRC Premier Zhao Ziyang met at the North-South Summit at Cancun, Mexico in October 1981, they discussed the Taiwan issue. Zhao was "very candid" about Chinese opposition to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and about the possible adverse consequences of continued sales.²²

The first concrete decision of the Reagan administration on arms to Taiwan came on 28 December 1981, when the State Department announced that \$97 million in military spare parts would be sold to Taipei. The PRC strongly protested this decision. A commentary in Beijing's People's Daily urged U.S. government "must adhere to" the international law and the principle of normalization communique by "truly respecting China's sovereignty and refraining from interfering in China's internal affairs by selling arms to Taiwan." The commentary added a warning: "If

the United States desires to preserve and develop its relations with China, it must seek ...a solution to the issue of selling arms to Taiwan. There is no other way."²²

In response to Beijing's protest, President Reagan sent John Holdridge, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, to Beijing on 11 January to discuss with Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin. This was the beginning of the negotiations that were to culminate in the August 17 communique.

The relations between the United States and the PRC became very strained at this time. In the period from signing of Shanghai Communique in 1972 to the end of the Carter administration in 1981, there had been a calm and stable relationship between Beijing and Washington. But in late 1981 and early 1982, Beijing warned that it might downgrade diplomatic ties with the United States if Washington were to continue selling arms to Taiwan.²⁴ The PRC had apparently been led to believe during the normalization negotiations that American arms deliveries to Taiwan would be gradually reduced and finally eliminated in the long run. The PRC's leaders had indicated that they would be patient on the Taiwan issue if they felt that the United States was moving towards disengaging from Taiwan. But when it appeared that President Reagan was seeking to reverse that trend, Beijing apparently decided to press for a resolution on the arms sales issue.

In order to prevent the U.S.-PRC relations from

deteriorating further because of the arms sales controversy, the Reagan administration began to show flexibility and adjust its policy. In May 1982 Vice President George Bush made a five-day visit to the PRC. While in Beijing, Bush presented Reagan's three letters to three Chinese leaders-- Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping, Premier Zhao Ziyang, and Chairman Hu Yaobang. In the letter to Deng, Reagan admitted that the Taiwan issue "have been a most difficult problem" between the two countries, and the U.S. "fully understand and respect" the PRC position with regard to the arms sales issue. Reagan also reassured the PRC that the U.S. "has an abiding interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question." He indicated that America wished to continue efforts to resolve differences between the two countries and to create a "cooperative and enduring" bilateral and strategic relationship.²⁵ Among the points Reagan's letter suggested to Zhao was that "a decrease" in the need for arms by Taiwan would "naturally be considered," in the context of progress toward a "peaceful solution" of the Taiwan question.²⁶ In the letter to Hu, the President reiterated that the United States would "adhere firmly" to the positions agreed upon in the 1978 normalization communique, continue to follow the principle that there is but one China, and Washington "will not permit the unofficial relations" between America and Taiwan to weaken this principle.²⁷

After Bush's return from China there were intensive negotiations between Washington and Beijing on settling the arms

sale controversy. On 17 August 1982, the United States and the PRC issued a joint communique, which has been referred to as the August 17 communique. The communique incorporated wording from Reagan's three letters to the Chinese leaders and from Beijing's statements concerning its policy toward Taiwan. By relating these previously separate statements, making each dependent on the other, they acquired more binding force. The communique was spelled out in nine points. The most important points are: first, the Chinese reiterated their fundamental policy of striving for a peaceful reunification of Taiwan; second, the United States disavowed any intention of infringing on Chinese sovereignty, territorial integrity, or interfering in China's internal affairs, or pursuing a policy of "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan." The U.S. government "understands and appreciates" the Chinese policy of peaceful reunification of Taiwan; third, Washington indicated it did not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to the island would not exceed, "either in qualitative or quantitative terms," the level of those supplied in recent years since the normalization of relations, and that it intended gradually to reduce its sale, "leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution;" fourth, the two governments pledged every effort to create conditions conducive to a thorough settlement of the arms sales issue.²⁸

The United States made several concessions from its previously held position. By agreeing to limit arms sales to

Taiwan both in quality and quantity, and gradually to reduce such sales with an eye toward the final resolution of the Taiwan question, Washington implicitly accepted Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan. Further, by stating its "understanding" and "appreciation" for the PRC's "peace policy of striving for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question," Washington again implicitly accepted the ultimate objective of Taiwan-PRC unification. After the August 1982 communique it was clearer than before that what was at issue between Washington and Beijing was not the ultimate outcome of the Taiwan question (that is, the ultimate incorporation of Taiwan into the PRC or the emergence of an independent Taiwan), but the means through which unification was to be achieved.

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10. Ibid., p. 55.
11. "U.S. 'Taiwan Relations Act,'" Beijing Review, 12 January 1981, pp. 9-11.
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13. Implementation of the Taiwan Relations Act: The First Year, p. 47.

14. The term FX refers to two export versions of U.S. fighter aircraft. One is the F-16/79, manufactured by General Dynamics, which is a modified version of the F-16 with a less powerful engine than that in the standard version. The other is the F-5-G, manufactured by Northrop, which is an improved version of its F-5 series.
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22. Chanda and Delfs, "China Ups the Ante," pp. 8-9.
23. "China Oppose Sales of Foreign Arms to Taiwan," Beijing Review 12 January 1982, pp. 9-10.
24. A strongly worded commentary by Chinese news agency in Beijing made its point: If it [selling arms so that flouting China's sovereignty] prevails, Sino-U.S. relations will be certain to suffer serious setbacks... If the United States insists on a long-term policy of selling arms to Taiwan, Sino-U.S. relations will retrogress." see "Critical Point in Sino-U.S. Relations," Beijing Review, 15 March 1982, pp. 10-11.
25. U.S., Department of State, American Foreign Policy, Current Document, 1982, Department of State Publication 9415, Department and Foreign Service Series 398 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), p.1028.
26. Ibid., p. 1029.

27. Ibid., p. 1030.

28. "China, U.S. Issue Joint Communique," Beijing Review, 23 August 1982, pp. 14-15.

Chapter 3

BEIJING'S MOTIVATIONS AND TACTICS ON THE ARMS SALES ISSUE

Why did the PRC decide in 1981 to make arms sales to Taiwan a critical issue? Why did Beijing press the issue so hard at that time? And what facilitated the PRC's motivations? Several interrelated hypotheses can be suggested here. First, Reagan's campaign statements and his consideration of the sale to Taiwan of an FX fighter, which could enhance Taiwan's military capability, disturbed PRC leaders. They felt that actions contemplated by the Reagan administration would make Taipei less likely to respond to Beijing's "peaceful reunification campaign" and enter into a dialogue. Because of the pro-Taiwan background of the president and of senior figures in his administration, only a very hard line would deter the administration from going ahead.

Beijing's "peaceful reunification campaign" began at the time of PRC-U.S. normalization and accelerated throughout 1981. This campaign was critical because there was a subtle and psychological linkage between it and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The PRC's reactions to the arms sales issue must be seen against the background of this campaign.

On 1 January 1979, the day that diplomatic relations

between the PRC and the United States were formally established, the PRC's Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress issued a "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" calling for steps toward "peaceful reunification" and negotiations.¹ The message announced the end of all bombardment of the offshore islands controlled by Nationalist troops. It also called for increased trade, travel, and contacts, and urged reestablishment of direct postal and transport links. Beijing asserted that, if Taiwan would acknowledge that it belonged to a unified China whose capital was Beijing, it could maintain its present political, economic, and social system, and even its own armed forces.

There were precedents for Beijing's proposal. In the mid-1950s the PRC offered to open direct negotiations with the Nationalist leaders, but Taipei rejected the overtures, labeling them a Communist stratagem to undermine, weaken, and ultimately take control of Taiwan. However, the NPC's statement clearly launched a new strategy that was more conciliatory than any in the past.² Asserting that Beijing would "take present realities into account," it promised that China would "respect the status quo on Taiwan" and "adopt reasonable policies and measures... so as not to cause the people of Taiwan any losses."³

On 30 September 1981, Ye Jianying, chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress, issued another major statement on reunification, which was even more conciliatory and offered additional concessions to

Taiwan, not seen in any previous statement made by Beijing. It not only declared that "Taiwan can enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special administrative region and it can retain its armed forces," it also asserted that "the central Government will not interfere with local affairs on Taiwan," and Taipei's leaders can "take up posts of leadership in national political bodies and participate in running the state."⁴

Despite the conciliatory nature of Beijing's proposal, however, it still left major questions unanswered. One of them was concerning the statement that Taipei could retain its armed forces, but there was no procedure set for purchasing arms from abroad. An official Chinese journal, Beijing Review, indicated that ultimately Beijing would control the supply of arms to Taiwan. "As for the replacement of weapons by the armed forces in Taiwan," the journal said, "arrangements will be made by the central government after reunification according to an overall plan."⁵

Taipei promptly, flatly, and consistently rejected Beijing's proposals. In many respects it was not surprising that Taiwan's leaders lacked an incentive to enter into official negotiations with Beijing. Taiwan had not suffered noticeably from the severance of its diplomatic relations with the United States. It had maintained internal social and political stability and its economy had continued to grow. It might have been possible that eventually some

real and lasting connections between Beijing and Taipei would be established, that would be in Taiwan's interest. But in the short run Taipei showed no interest in talking with Beijing.

Despite the fact that Taipei had its own reasons for rejecting Beijing's overtures, Beijing pinned the blame on the United States for continuing to offer weapons to Taiwan. From the PRC's perspective, Taiwan's "voluntary" return to China was based upon the assumption that Taipei would be no U.S. support. With no foreign power's "interference," Beijing believed that Taiwan's leaders would accept Beijing's unification proposals. However, the fact that the United States continued to supply arms to Taipei demonstrated that Taiwan continued to have great power support. Such sales obviously negated PRC's efforts to persuade Taiwan that its only option was to accept Beijing's terms. From Beijing's perspective, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, therefore, obstructed the peaceful reunification of China. The PRC's strong opposition to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan caused Beijing to press hard on this issue when President Reagan considered the sale of even more advanced aircrafts to Taipei.

A second hypothesis on why Beijing chose to make the arms sales issue so critical was due to PRC leaders' concern with the eventual Taiwanese influence in the island's government. Taiwanese were believed to be less firmly committed to the one-China position than the older mainlanders. Local Taiwanese, raised for at least several

generations on the island, had no personal contact with the China mainland, they tended to be less responsive to pan-Chinese patriotism and less moved by a desire to return to their ancestral home on the mainland. Consequently, Beijing's leaders felt some urgency to begin negotiations with the more receptive present mainlander leaders.⁶

The third hypothesis is that during 1979-81, despite all the progress made in many aspects of PRC-U.S. relations, the Taiwan problem once again became a major issue in domestic Chinese policies. Deng Xiaoping, under pressure from domestic opponents to not yield too much to the United States by agreeing to normalize diplomatic ties, needed to show an U.S. agreement to end arms sales to Taiwan. Because many aspects of his domestic reform program were under attack by his political adversaries, Deng could not afford to appear weak in dealing with the Americans on the Taiwan issue.⁷

Whatever the reasons for Beijing's hardline position-- and there were diverse motivations underlining the PRC's negotiating tactics-- Beijing's leaders chose to describe U.S.-PRC relations as in a state of crisis and certain to deteriorate if the Taiwan arms sales problem is not resolved. During the 1981-82 arms sales confrontation, Beijing used a number of different tactics in an attempt to achieve two objectives. First, they wanted to establish the principle that arms sales "constitute an encroachment on China's sovereignty and an interference in its internal affair." Second, they wanted to make clear that it was necessary to

end such sales because they "obstruct the return of Taiwan to the Motherland and peaceful reunification of the country."⁸ In other words, by making a test of the arms sales issue, Beijing wanted to obtain what it had not gotten from normalization. These were U.S. recognition that Taiwan was a part of China and that the United States should end arms sales to Taiwan. Beijing's tactics were successful in achieving these objectives. As was discussed earlier, in the August 17 communique, Beijing succeeded in forcing the United States to accept implicitly PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan. In this regard the PRC forced Washington to clarify its ultimate objectives regarding the island, and it established the principle that "the whole question of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan is a major issue affecting China's sovereignty which must be settled through discussions between the U.S. and the Chinese government."⁹ Moreover, President Reagan was forced to give up what Carter had retained for the United States--the expressed determination to continue indefinitely supplying Taipei with select defensive weapons. Thus Beijing was successful in forcing Washington to reject the spirit of the Taiwan Relations Act, which provided U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, limited only by the island's defensive needs with no reduction or ultimate termination of sales. Besides, the qualitative and quantitative restrictions agreed to in the August 17 communique was the understanding that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan would decrease with every year.

In obtaining these objectives Beijing resolved to

several different tactics. One was to launch an extensive propaganda campaign in order to shape public opinion in the United States. The PRC media closely followed the debate in the United States during 1980-82 and responded point by point, article by article, to U.S. advocates of continued arms sales. This propaganda was frequently popularized by the American news media. Thus Beijing became, in effect, a major participant in the intra-U.S. debate over China policy. For instance, to refute the idea commonly heard at the time that China would not estrange itself from the United States over the Taiwan issue because Beijing needed American economic and security assistance, Beijing Review argued, "China has not received much from the United States since diplomatic relations were established. For a long time the United States was even reluctant to sell China computers to be used for China's census."¹⁰ In suggesting that Beijing's fear of Soviet attack was not as great as supposed, Beijing replied that "China is a big country with one billion people. It has the honorable tradition of using backward weapons to defeat enemies with advanced weapons and equipment."¹¹ China had modernized its military by building missiles and H-bombs by its own efforts, so that even if "foreign countries refuse to help us with advanced technology, China can still realize its modernization of national defense."¹²

The PRC also tried to influence Washington by warning of the negative consequences of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Beijing argued, for instance, that "the relaxed situation

across the Taiwan Straits might become tense again"¹³ Reports were circulated that companies which traded with Taiwan might not be allowed to trade with and invest in the PRC.¹⁴ PRC-U.S. diplomatic relations might be downgraded "to what [it was] at the time when Richard Nixon visited China. This is to say, the Liaison Office may go, not to mention the embassy."¹⁵ Other comments warned that relations would be downgraded to the charge d'affaires or liaison office level, and that any diplomatic downgrading would have an impact on economic and cultural relations.

Beijing also offered a threat that it might cease strategic cooperation with the United States and turn toward rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Thus, a Chinese newspaper commentary warned that, "the Soviet Union has recently been displaying good intentions toward China, as if they wanted to play 'the China card' against the United States. China does not want to play either the U.S. or the Soviet card... but wishes Sino-U.S. relations neither to come to a halt nor to retrogress."¹⁶ The implication was that if Washington forced PRC-U.S. relations to retrogress by selling arms to Taiwan, China might be forced to play the "Soviet card."

China's media also stressed that there were no idle threat. When Washington seemed to disregard China's warnings on arms sales to Taiwan, the Beijing Review recalled the failure of the United States to heed China's warnings on the Korean situation in late 1950 and the consequences that

resulted from such action.¹⁷ Just as China had been willing to confront the United States in the 1950s when the United States was much more powerful than China, so too was it ready to do so in the 1980s when the balance was much more favorable to China.¹⁸

By using these tactics in unnerving and testing Washington, Beijing successfully obtained in the August 17 communique what it had not gotten in the 1978 normalization agreement. Washington, on the other hand, harassed by Beijing's negotiating tactics, had surrendered more concessions once again from its previously held position.

ENDNOTES

1. "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan," Beijing Review, 5 January 1979, pp. 16-17.
2. By the 1960s Beijing had no strategy for reunification that had any prospects for success. In fact, before 1968 Taiwan appeared to drop off Beijing's priority policy agenda, since the PRC was heavily preoccupied at that time with other problems-- in foreign policy with the Sino-Soviet conflict and the Vietnamese war, and at home with the Cultural Revolution. It was not until late 1968 that Beijing began to signal its desire for renewed talks with the United States regarding Taiwan issue.
3. "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan," p. 17.
4. "Chairman Ye Jianying's Elaborations on Policy Concerning Return of Taiwan to Motherland and Peaceful Reunification," Beijing Review, 5 October 1981, pp. 10-11.
5. "Sales of Weapons to Taiwan," Beijing Review, 2 November 1981, p. 3.
6. "The inside Story of the 9-Point Proposal," in FBIS, Daily Report (China), 16 November 1981, pp. w1-w13.
7. "A Decade of Sino-American Relations," Foreign Affairs 61 (1982 Fall): 175-95.
8. "Sino-U.S. Relations," Beijing Review, 4 January 1982, p. 3.
9. "China Protests US Decision on Arms Sales to Taiwan," Beijing Review, 18 January 1982, p. 8.
10. "Critical Point in Sino-U.S. Relations," Beijing Review, 15 March 1982, pp. 10-11.
11. Beijing radio, 2 December 1981, in FBIS, Daily Report (China), 3 December 1981, pp. b1-b2.
12. Ibid.
13. Chai Zemin to the Washington Press Club, 18 December 1981, in FBIS, Daily Report (China), 21 December 1981, p. b1.

14. Rong Yiren, chairman of the board of directors of the China International Trust and Investment Corporation to reporters, in *ibid.*, 31 December 1981, pp. w3-w4.

15. See the Renmin ribao article "Whim and Fantasy," *ibid.*, 13 November 1981, pp. b1-b2.

16. *Ibid.*, 31 December 1981, pp. w3-w4.

17. "The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai," Beijing Review, 2 March 1982, p. 26.

18. Xinhua commentary in FBIS, Daily Report (China), 11 January 1982, pp. b4-b5.

CONCLUSION

The confrontation over the issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in 1981-82 was significant because it was the first major conflict between the United States and the PRC since their normalization of relations in 1979. In a broad sense, the confrontation coincided with and reflected one major trend in America's China policy since 1970. That is-- the United States has moved in the direction of meeting Beijing's demands and conditions, while gradually cutting back and accommodating American ties with Taiwan for the sake of better relations with the PRC. While there have been some twists and turns in this trend, it is unquestionable that it will continue to forward American China policy for some time to come.

The driving force behind this trend has been the search for strategic advantage. Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan, have sought to use better relations with the PRC as a means to position America favorably in the U.S.-Soviet-Chinese triangular relationship. Whatever the ideological preferences of the American president and his advisers, this basic perception has never been changed. Even if a particular American president were to damage PRC-U.S. relations for ideological or other reasons, the realities of strategic consideration would lead to a renewal of the strategic relationship between Washington and Beijing to

counter growing Soviet power.

President Reagan, for instance, who had charged President Carter during the 1980 presidential campaign with having made unnecessary concessions to Beijing in the normalization agreement, two years later strongly reaffirmed the terms of that accord and went further toward resolving the issue of arms sales to Taiwan by making more concessions. Strategic considerations and national interest had compelled that pro-Taiwan, anti-Communist president to put aside his ideological predilections and reach a compromise with Beijing.

By yielding to more concessions, the United States defused and shelved the Taiwan arms sales issue. The August 17 communique prevented U.S.-PRC relations from deteriorating and satisfied the U.S. anti-Soviet position in the U.S.-Soviet-China strategic triangle. However, the limitation of arms sales to Taiwan may at some future point reduce Taiwan's defense capabilities. When that happens, the PRC may harden its position toward Taiwan, thus making Beijing's peaceful reunification program even less likely for Taipei to accept. By linking the progress of PRC peace efforts toward Taiwan to the gradual reduction of selling arms to Taiwan, the United States in fact runs the risk of discouraging Taipei from negotiating with Beijing in the future. This incentive, while based upon America's own interest in a broad strategic context, will give far-reaching negative effects on the future development of a Mainland-Taiwan relationship.

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U.S. ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN: A CRITICAL ISSUE
IN SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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Since 1950 the "Taiwan Question" has been the most sensitive issue in Sino-American relations. From 1950 to 1979 the United States continued to recognize the Nationalist government in Taiwan (Republic of China or ROC) as the legitimate government of China and to pursue a policy of nonrecognition toward the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the early 1970's, after two decades of intense hostility, relations between the United States and the PRC started to thaw as both sides moved toward normalizing their relations. On 15 December 1978, President Jimmy Carter announced to the world in a dramatic move that the United States and the PRC had agreed to establish full diplomatic relations on 1 January 1979. Under this agreement Washington recognized that the PRC as the sole legal government of China and accepted Beijing's three conditions, namely, the severance of U.S. diplomatic ties with Taipei, withdrawal of American military forces from Taiwan, and abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Nationalist government. At the same time, However, Washington asserted that it would maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan.

During the negotiations leading to normalization Washington also made it clear to Beijing that it intended to continue to sell defensive arms to Taiwan. Although Beijing regarded this as illegitimate and highly objectionable, it decided, nevertheless, to proceed with full normalization of relations. Arms sales to Taiwan was the crucial issue in the

negotiations. Indeed, it gradually became the major problem between Washington and Beijing during the postnormalization period.

The confrontation over the issue of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in 1981-82 was important because it was the first major conflict between the United States and the PRC since their normalization of relations in 1979. More significantly, it reflected one general trend in American China policy since 1970's, that is, the United States has moved in the direction of meeting Beijing's demands and conditions, while gradually cutting back and accommodating U.S. ties with Taiwan for the sake of better relations with the PRC.

The driving force behind this trend has been the search for strategic advantage. From President Nixon to Reagan, each American administration has sought to use better relations with the PRC as a means to position America favorably in the U.S.-Soviet-Chinese triangular relationship. Whatever the ideological preferences of the American president and his advisers, this basic perception has never been changed. Even if a particular American president were to damage PRC-U.S. relations for ideological or other reasons, the realities of strategic consideration would lead to an renewal of the strategic relationship to counter Soviet power. President Reagan, as this study ~~also~~ showed, who had charged President Carter during the 1980 president campaign with having made unnecessary concessions to Beijing in the

normalization agreement, two years later strongly reaffirmed the terms of that accord and went further toward resolving the issue of arms sales to Taiwan by yielding more concessions. Strategic considerations and national interest had compelled the pro-Taiwan, strong anti-Communist president to put aside his ideological predilections and reach a compromise with Beijing.