

Enemy or Ally: America's Support of Taiwan and the PLA's Perspective and Policy Regarding the United States Military

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I. Thesis Objectives

Over the course of researching my proposed thesis subject, I plan to explore and answer the following questions:

Note: In order to provide ample background information and a holistic assessment of my thesis topic, all of the following questions will be addressed. However, question 1b, regarding the DoD's involvement with Taiwan, will provide the bulk of contextual research and support for my proposed topic and hypothesis.

1. What perception do members of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China and other high-ranking leaders of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) military structure have of the United States Department of Defense (DoD) and its senior leadership?
 - a. How do historical factors, such as US support of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) during the Chinese Civil War, continue to shape the PLA's perception of the DoD?
 - b. How have DoD policies, particularly its aiding of the Republic of China's (Taiwan) Armed Forces (RoCAF), shaped the PLA's perception of the US military?

- i. Does the PLA perceive the US as a legitimate and rightful protector of Taiwan?
 - ii. Is the PLA willing and prepared to engage in a confrontation with the US military in order to regain Taiwan?
 - iii. What steps is the PLA taking, and what steps will it take, to ensure the military power necessary to regain Taiwan by force?
 - iv. Is the PLA convinced the DoD will honor their commitment to defend Taiwan in the event of an armed confrontation?
 - c. How do Sino-American military-to-military relations impact the PLA's perception of the DoD?
2. What are the PLA's official and unofficial long-term goals and policies regarding the United States military?
 - a. Does the PLA view the DoD as an eventually ally, or does the PLA believe in the inevitability of a Sino-US conflict?
 - b. How do non-military factors, particularly Sino-US economic ties and political relations, influence the policies of the PLA towards the US?
 - c. How do PLA predictions of long-term DoD goals regarding China impact the policies of the PLA towards the US.
3. How can the DoD improve its efforts to secure the PLA as a long-term cooperative partner rather than as an eventual enemy?
 - a. What DoD efforts to secure a sustainable and cooperative relationship with the PLA have been successful in the past?
 - b. What does the PLA fear and hope for as a result of its relationship with the DoD?

- c. How can the DoD gain the cooperation and partnership of the PLA, particularly in regards to resolving the Taiwan issue, without sacrificing its strategic advantages?

Note: My success in answering these questions remains contingent upon my ability to obtain critical information regarding the PLA and China's military leadership.

II. Hypothesis

Based on the research I have already completed, I hypothesize that the PLA's perception of the US is defined by a mixture of admiration, opportunism, and rivalry. Furthermore, I hypothesize that, although the PLA is wary of confrontation with the US and wishes the DoD to remain a cooperative partner, America's military support of Taiwan compels the PLA to consider the DoD as a long-term rival. In addition to this, I hypothesize that US support of Taiwan compels the PLA to feel compromised in its perceived right to regain the Republic of China for the PRC and thereby causes the PLA to regard the DoD as somewhat of a disrespectful opponent. The PLA, in acknowledgement of the fact that the US military is the most technologically advanced, versatile, and powerful military force on the face of the planet, is grateful for the opportunity to cooperate with the DoD; a cooperation that has enabled the PLA to closely observe the DoD's strategies and tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan and to learn from DoD leaders during Sino-US joint military exercises and exchanges. Furthermore, the PLA remains grateful to consider the DoD as a current partner rather than as an immediate threat.

However, in light of stark political contention between the US and China, the PLA recognizes the potentiality of the deterioration of Sino-US relations and is therefore mindful of a possible conflict with the US. The PLA is steadfast in its policy towards Taiwan; a policy, as defined by the PRC, intent on the eventual return of the island to main-land control. This policy

remains in direct opposition to the DoD's involvement with the RoCAF. For decades, the DoD has supported the RoCAF with weaponry, military advice, and an assurance of direct military assistance in the event of war with the PRC. This policy on behalf of the US is both threatening to China and at the same time challenges the PLA to find less-confrontational approaches to re-absorbing Taiwan. Undoubtedly, these factors and many more, including the PLA's certain discomfort with being "second-place" in comparison to the US armed forces, puts considerable strain on Sino-US military relations and causes the PLA to consider the DoD as a potential enemy.

As China continues to grow as an economic and geo-political force, its military will strive to secure China's status as a potential super-power. Clearly, the PLA is not currently capable of fighting the US with any chance of victory. However, as the PLA continues to update its arsenal, improve its tactical and logistical techniques, and develop its force projection capabilities, it will, in all likelihood, become increasingly aggressive towards the US military; especially in regards to its goal of "liberating" Taiwan. This will continue to strain Sino-US military relations as the PLA may grow eager to challenge America's military hegemony. In order to prevent a deterioration of cooperative military relations, the DoD must strive to address China's specific goals, such as its goals regarding Taiwan, while at the same time nurturing a fruitful Sino-US relationship that ensures the goals of the PLA will not be in opposition to the goals of the DoD.

Note: The above hypothesis is based only on preliminary research. Undoubtedly, this hypothesis will undergo several extensive revisions before my thesis is completed.

III. Relevance of Proposed Topic

“The relationship between American and China will shape the 21st Century.”

-President Barack Obama

The DoD and the PLA; the world’s most powerful military force and second most powerful military force respectively, represent the potential to be international military allies or fiercely opposed enemies. Among the many factors that will influence the future of these two military powers, the issues regarding the Republic of China will undoubtedly play a significant part in determining these forces as allies or enemies. As the PLA remains committed to seeing Taiwan returned to PRC control, and as the DoD continues to support the Taiwanese military, a time will come when this issue must be resolved either by peaceful means or by military confrontation. Undeniably, a military conflict between American and Chinese military forces would result in an immense loss of life for both sides. In order to avert such a catastrophic scenario, the innate perspectives and values that guide PLA policy must be examined. By understanding how the PLA perceives the US military’s actions and intentions regarding Taiwan, and by understanding how the PLA seeks to resolve this issue, the US can more clearly determine a suitable and beneficial course of action.

IV. Methodology

Using America’s support of Taiwan as my dependent variable, and the PLA’s perception of the US, policy towards the US, and plans regarding Taiwan as my independent variables, my research will focus on answering the aforementioned questions using largely small-n, qualitative research. I will pursue a combination of the following research methods:

1. Literature: Below is a bibliography of books that I have already read or plan to read.
However, this list of literature is incomplete and will grow considerably as I continue to research and develop my thesis topic.
2. Review of Journals and Other Periodicals: I am currently exploring, and will continue to explore, articles regarding PLA perception of the US military. I have already located several articles, including articles in *Foreign Affairs* and other publications, which provide relevant information for my thesis. Other publications, such as the *Annual Report on the PLA*, prepared by the United States Senate, will aid me in gauging specific DoD policies towards the PLA.
3. Chinese Language Research: My Chinese language ability enables me to read articles relevant to my thesis in *The People's Daily* and other Chinese language publications. Additionally, during the coming fall (fall, 2010) that I will spend studying abroad in Shanghai, I will have access to Chinese publications not available in the US.
4. Personal Contact: My personal contact with current and former members of US military delegations to Beijing will enable me to gain a clearer insight into the world of Sino-US military-to-military relations. Additionally, while studying abroad in Shanghai next fall, I will travel to Nanjing. Nanjing, an hour away from Shanghai, is the Headquarters of the Nanjing Military Region of the PLA; the Military Region that lays directly adjacent to the Taiwan Straits. Although it is unlikely a trip to the Nanjing Military Region Headquarters in Nanjing will allow me to obtain in-depth, critical information on PLA perception of the US, it will provide me with insight into PLA infrastructure and could possibly help me to obtain an official, state-authorized PLA policy statement regarding the Republic of China.

5. PLA Publications: While the PLA does not have an official periodical or journal, it does occasionally publish white papers regarding certain PLA operations and objectives. I will continue to obtain and research these publications.

V. Bibliography

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