

The Military Worth Of Quemoy

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PERHAPS AT NO TIME in our history have professional military men been more unhappy and more doubtful about the idea of war than in the current crisis over two little groups of islands off the coast of mainland China. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are agreed that the Quemoy and Matsu groups, the first within the harbor of Amoy and the second off the mouth of the Min River, on which is the port of Foochow, are of negligible or of no importance, in a strictly military sense, to the defense of Formosa.

Formosa (Taiwan), more than one hundred miles distant from the mainland, is easily and fully defensible until such time—perhaps a decade hence—when the Communist Chinese have acquired a stock of nuclear weapons and a substantial naval force to cope with the U.S. Navy. Since the Red Chinese have no such naval force now, the military planners are unable to follow the President's reasoning, as expressed in his report to the American people on September 11: "It is as certain as can be that the shooting which the Communists started on August 23 had as its purpose not just taking the island of Quemoy. It is part of what is indeed an ambitious plan of armed conquest. This plan would liquidate all of the free world positions in the Western Pacific area and bring them under captive governments which would be hostile to the United States and the free world. Thus the Chinese and Russian Communists would come to dominate at least the western half of the now friendly Pacific Ocean."

Without a Navy

How can this attack be launched if the mainland Chinese have no fleet with which to reach Formosa, Japan, or the Philippines? As military men see the situation, mainland China is utterly powerless as an offensive

naval power and cannot threaten any island nations of the western Pacific with invasion. Furthermore, as far as is known, it has no atomic weapons for either blackmail or destructive purposes—though this situation is expected to change soon and may have changed already.

BUT AS a land power the mainland Chinese have the second largest army in the world and the third largest air force, composed entirely of interceptor, tactical support, and light bomber aircraft. The consequences of war with China would not be the loss of Formosa, Japan, and the Philippines, but more likely, as the military planners see it, renewed attacks on the U.S. allies of South Korea and South Vietnam and assaults on Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and possibly Burma. By carrying on the war against our allies on the Asian mainland, the Chinese with their huge army would have the United States at a great disadvantage, considering the comparatively small size of our army and the great distances over which it must be transported. Indeed, the United States is as unequal to the Chinese on land in Asia as China is unequal to the United States on the ocean—assuming, of course, that a war between the two powers would be fought with conventional weapons.

If the United States should use nuclear weapons to protect the offshore islands from invasion, the Soviet Union would be forced to give its foremost ally atomic weapons with which to fight back. The Soviet Union now equals the United States in the production of fissionable material. Its stock of weapons, however, is probably not more than a third of ours—large enough, of course, to supply the Chinese with enough atomic bombs to destroy everything of military consequence on Formosa and to chase the Sev-

enth Fleet out of range of the Soviet Il-28 jet bombers with which the Chinese Air Force is equipped. U.S. air power in the western Pacific is not sufficient to prevent such a sequence of events. But the Strategic Air Command can, in return, destroy the ports, communications, and industry of much of China.

This is the real concern of our military planners in the event of war with China, not the destruction of our allies in the western Pacific. They do not like what they see. They would support a necessary war, regardless of the outlook, but they have little stomach for a war over an issue of little consequence fought, as they believe, to get our diplomats out of a trap of their own devising.

What Can the Reason Be?

To the military, the whole position we are in is so incredible that they are groping for some hidden reason that might give it some sense. They wonder if this is not just some more of the Secretary of State's brinkmanship, and hope that neither he nor the President means what they seem to say. They fear the worst: that the Nationalist régime in Formosa is threatened by subversion, and that Mr. Dulles's great show in response to the threatened attack on Quemoy is for the purpose of bolstering the Nationalist government.

It is generally believed that war may be avoided, but it is feared that all three of the big powers involved—the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China—may be taking such rigid positions that they may be unable to draw back and that a war might follow that no one wanted, a war that easily could involve the Soviet Union actively and would be certain to involve it in material support of China, a war in which the United States will be without allies, except such of them as are attacked by Communist China.

IN A NUMBER of ways the Formosa situation has become more rather than less confused since Congress voted the Formosa Resolution in January, 1955.

The legal status of Formosa is completely different from that of

the offshore islands. Formosa was Japanese territory from 1895 until the surrender of 1945. The offshore islands are territorially a part of mainland China and are a subject of dispute between the successful revolutionary Chinese Communist government and the defeated government of Chiang Kai-shek. The offshore islands are Chinese territory where the Chinese civil war is still raging. Under international law, Formosa is not Chinese territory, and its ultimate disposition remains subject to decision by the major powers that fought the war.

It is legal for Chiang Kai-shek to establish a blockade and enforce it if he is able. It is also legal and legitimate for Communist China to resist the blockade by force, or in turn to blockade any territory held by the other side. The United States, by associating the defense of the offshore islands with the defense of Formosa, and by assisting in the defense of the offshore islands and in breaking the Communist blockade, is intervening in the Chinese civil war.

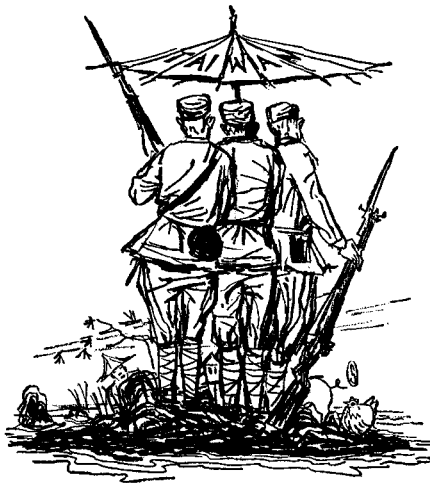
In that unrelenting war, the Nationalists have been maintaining a blockade of the harbors of Amoy and Foochow and the Fukien coast for years. These are the only two ports with real connections to the interior in the thousand miles between Hangchow-Shanghai and Canton. The effect of the Nationalist blockade on the Chinese mainland is much as if on our Pacific Coast the entrances to the Columbia River and Portland harbor and San Francisco harbor were blockaded by a hostile power allied to the Soviet Union, leaving only Puget Sound to the north and Los Angeles and San Diego to the south open to shipping.

The Hoax of Quemoy

The mutual-security treaty with the Nationalist government was signed in December, 1954. This was effected by a hoax perpetrated by the Nationalists in regard to the Communist bombardment of Quemoy on September 3, 1954. After the start of the Communist propaganda drive for the "liberation" of the offshore islands, two landing ships were set up as a dock on Quemoy by the Nationalists. The dock formed a "T" where supply ships could un-

load. It was carefully placed within sight and easy range of Amoy—under the Communists' noses. Naturally they bombarded it. The Nationalists presented this action, which had been provoked by themselves, as evidence of impending invasion. Nationalist air force and artillery went into action—the air force strafing harmless fishing craft, the artillery fire never exceeding thirty rounds a day. Mr. Dulles, who was at the SEATO Conference in Manila at the time, hastened to Formosa and agreed to the mutual-security treaty the Nationalists had long been angling for. Now, once again, Chiang Kai-shek is threatening to loose his air force.

BEFORE the Tachen Islands were evacuated in February, 1955, as a consequence of the Communist assault and capture of one of the group, it was feared that the Matsu group would be next on the list. The President asked and obtained



from Congress authorization to use the armed forces of the United States to defend Formosa and the Pescadores and "such related positions and territories . . . and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores." Thus the congressional resolution, which had been largely prompted by the alleged risk to which Quemoy had been exposed, did not directly include the protection of Quemoy. The offshore islands were to be defended only if in the President's judgment they were considered vital to the defense of Formosa. However, in his message

to Congress transmitting the resolution the President declared: "If any unforeseen emergency arises requiring any change, I will communicate with the Congress."

But within a little more than two months the President forgot about military reasons connected with defending the offshore islands as incidental to the defense of Formosa (there never were any such reasons anyway). At his press conference of March 30, 1955, he talked about the islands as important to Nationalist morale. "You have to have forces there [Formosa] who are of high morale . . . And we must be careful not to destroy their morale. And that is the factor that you must always calculate when you talk about surrendering this place or that place or doing anything else."

ONCE AGAIN the President has changed his line. At his press conference on August 27, 1958, replying in response to a question about their importance, he said: "Well, they have this importance: what we call the Chinese, the Nationalist Chinese, have now deployed about a third of their forces to certain of these islands west of the Pescadores, and that makes a closer interlocking between defense systems with Formosa than was the case before. Before that, I think, they were largely thought of as outposts, strongly held but outpost positions, but nevertheless, outposts. Now, apparently the thing, the philosophy is that to hold the whole thing it is part of the territory from which they hope to make their living, so there is a closer relationship than there was before."

By this statement the President's train of thought seemed to be that the Nationalists had placed a third of their forces on these outposts, and if the outposts were lost the defense of Formosa would be more difficult because so many troops would be lost and, consequently, it had become more important to defend them. This is the apparent evolution of how the President gradually came to accept the defense of the offshore islands. Formosa remains, as it has been all along, in no danger—unless a nuclear war, undertaken for the defense of Quemoy, should lead to its devastation.

Chiang's Shadow Over Warsaw

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IT TAKES TWO to start a fight. And two are usually enough to make peace; but in the conflict over the Chinese offshore islands, it takes three. Both President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles have qualified their willingness to negotiate with the Chinese Communists by a stipulation that has governed the ambassadorial discussions ever since they began in 1955: the United States will not be a party to any arrangements that "would prejudice the rights of our ally, the Republic of China." The United States and Communist Chinese ambassadors may meet in Warsaw, but the important participants in the negotiations include not only the shadows of Chou En-lai and John Foster Dulles but also that of Chiang Kai-shek.

The administration has said that

the ambassadorial negotiations offer an alternative to war. In his press conference on September 9 Mr. Dulles stated: "We hope that out of the talks will come as a minimum a *modus vivendi* which will assure that the issues will not be resolved by recourse to force."

WHAT CAN the *modus vivendi* be? The basic question all along has been whether the United States will concede the "right" of the Chinese Communists to "liberate" the offshore islands and Formosa and the Pescadores, by force if need be; or whether Peking will promise not to employ force to disturb the status quo, including our military relationship with the Nationalist régime. Even the most optimistic study of recent official statements from Peking and Washington discloses no essential change in the basic position of either party.

In sum and substance, the U. S. government wants a renunciation of the use of force in the area of For-

mosa and the China coast. In this light, there may be one matter that could be negotiated at Warsaw to the benefit of both Communist China and the United States: World opinion would doubtless applaud an American proposal that the Nationalist garrisons on Quemoy and other offshore islands be permitted to withdraw under safe-conduct. There are many who feel that the offshore islands belong rightfully to the Chinese mainland and that they are unnecessary for the defense of either the United States or Formosa anyway.

The successful evacuation of the Nationalist garrison from the Tachen Islands in 1955, under similar circumstances, confirms the feasibility of the proposed action. Not one Nationalist soldier need be lost in the operation, and an adjustment of the American position in that sector might enable us to enlist substantial international support for a different disposition of Formosa and the Pescadores, where the legal foundation is more favorable to our stand.

Radio Peking and Mr. Dulles in the U.N. both stand pat. Yet it would obviously be to the advantage of both Communist China and the United States if a compromise could be reached in Warsaw. The matter should be a proper subject for negotiation. But what about Chiang Kai-shek? Would he give his consent, or would he apply the veto we have given him to a fair proposition promising general benefits—ultimately for Formosa itself?

Yeh's 'No'

It is obvious that Chiang is primarily concerned with his personal ambition to return to power on the mainland. He has said time and time again that he will not make peace.

The Nationalist position was affirmed as recently as September 12 by Dr. George Yeh, the new Nationalist ambassador, as he arrived in Washington. A reporter asked him whether, if the Communists accepted Dulles's proposal for a renunciation of force, the Nationalists would do the same. Dr. Yeh: "No, repeat, no." Was there the possibility of a negotiated settlement for the "neutralization" of the offshore

