

## **ASIAN SECURITY: U.S.—CHINA DIPLOMACY OVER TAIWAN ISSUE**

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*Raza Hussain Ghaloo*

### **INTRODUCTION**

**T**he Chinese People's Liberation Army had launched an unarmed M-9 missile test in the waters of Taiwan on 8th March 1996, China ran two sets of missile tests in the Taiwan straits in 1995, shortly after Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui's visit to the U.S.A. in June 1995. But this year's barrage was the closest ever to the island. The missile launchings were expected till March 15, 1996. The reasons behind this were two: first to let the world know that she is very serious about its long standing claim to Taiwan, by force if necessary. Second China also wanted to point out Taiwanese to be careful before voting for 73 years old Lee for first-ever presidential elections on March 23, 1996. Tang Shubei, deputy director of Beijing-Taiwan Office said on the very first day of the missile drills, "we have to tell the Taiwan people that split cannot be permitted".<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese missile test, thus, sent a wave of mixed and confused signals all-over the regional capitals portended for future regional disputes. The U.S. government which was following a policy of "strategic ambiguity" since Sino-Taiwan tension mounted from August of 1995, suddenly got less ambiguous and sent two air-craft carriers in the strait of Taiwan. The U.S. Aircraft Carrier Independence based in Okinawa, Japan, was also ordered to station near Taiwan, which has been interpreted as fairly routine, monitoring missile tests is the business of the navies. In addition, President Bill Clinton ordered another carrier Nimitz from Persian Gulf to Taiwan waters which proved was not a routine practice.

The carrier task force was designed to temper Taiwan and to caution Beijing. Taiwan's Defence Minister Chiang Chug-Ling told that his country would retaliate if Chinese attacked our 12-nautical mile territorial waters, but 12 miles doesn't represent our bottom line.<sup>2</sup>

Keeping the growing tense situation in mind, the Taiwanese government ordered to clean bomb-proof shelters, the people were asked to hoard rice, banks reported short-lived run on U.S. dollars and the stock markets also fell. At least China's muscle flexing has certainly grabbed the world's attention, if nothing more is achieved.

In Beijing the party Leaders the government and the military took a tough stance. The demonstrations were claimed as routine military exercises and show of its capability and determination, much more to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. According to them no foreign country has right to give irresponsible statements and to interfere in China's military exercises.

Many experts have described the missile tests and naval maneuvers as dress-rehearsal for blockade. First a quasi-blocked gradually expanding into a full-blockade.

Atleast five things provoked the Chinese leadership for missile tests in mid 1995 and in March 1996 near Taiwan borders. First, Mr. Lee's visit to U.S., second the democratic presidential election, third, Mr. Lee's irresponsible statements, the fourth one is the problems of annexation of Hong Kong with mainland in mid 1997 and Macua in 1999. The fifth one is Washington's soft attitude towards China as most Favoured Nation regardless of his alleged violation of missile and nuclear non-proliferation rules and failes to comply with trade agreement on copy-right. The above factors provided a reason for the revival of Chinese claim of Taiwan as an integral part of the mainland.

### ELECTIONS

During the presidential election campaign of March 1996, Mr. Lee Teng-hui said "we are going to be the masters of our own country...since the beginning of Chinese history, this is the greatest year".<sup>3</sup>

Taiwan's 14 million voters casted their ballots on March 23, but the mainland China was upper most in their minds. Nearly 150,000 communist troops were deployed on the Chinese coast facing Taiwan, ready for maneuvers, including missile test, began on

march 8. The international attention was focussed on the troubled strait. This was the first election of its kind in which the Chinese ethnic society elected its head of state by secret universal franchise.

In his voice Mr. Peng Ming-Min one of the independent Presidential candidates said,

"The poll will puncture the myth, he explained that authoritarian politics, rather than democracy, are more suited to Asian, particularly chinese society."<sup>4</sup>

He further commented, "This election shows that no one can stop or reverse the wave of democracy".<sup>5</sup>

President Lee Teng-hui while addressing the press conference said, "We can not compromise over democracy, otherwise, there is no guarantee for our future peace and stability".<sup>6</sup>

Taiwan's de-facto ally, the United States also supported the stability through election. Despite United States Beijing's business oriented policy and its claim on Taiwan as its part, support island's democratic process. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Taiwan is world class economic power, and March 23 Presidential election will cap Taiwan's transition to democracy.

In his statement Winston Lord said, "Americans feel strongly about the ability of the people of Taiwan to determine their future peacefully".<sup>7</sup>

In a warning to Beijing to act responsibly, he added, "This sentiment must not be under estimated".<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. Defence Secretary william Perry cautioned Beijing against "menacing actions", in the Taiwan strait. This message was conveyed more directly through secret channels to both Beijing and Taipei.

These stories were purposely planted by Beijing in U.S. and Hong Kong media that the conflict was imminent. Most of the



foreign analysts were of the opinion that such political and military consequences would be horrendous for China in the long run. On the other hand, some analysts agree that this psychological warfare was to influence March polls in Taiwan.

Despite this note of popular defiance and because of China's pressure tactics, the candidates themselves have toned down their campaign rhetoric. But none of them has altered their policy stance on cross-strait ties, the most urgent issue facing the country. President Lee sees reunification with China as a long term goal, to be reached when China itself becomes democratic. Addressing a rally he called for "Courage and Unity", and said that we are not afraid of military exercises, we have guts but we love peace.

Mr. Lin Yank-Kang was widely regarded as the most conservative presidential candidate at that time. Most of the research observers claim that Lin was preferred choice of Beijing to influence Taiwan's politics. Lin claimed that he is the "only true unificationist" among the candidates. If elected, he would immediately open direct links with China to ease the tension. Lin also claimed, he would like to sign a peace treaty with Beijing. So, with its intimidation tactics China wants to reduce the margin of support for Lee as much as possible.

The time has come that Lee or his successor negotiate more formal relationship with mainland as the March 23rd elections, so, he can accumulate as many trump cards as he could. In recent years Lee has accelerated Taiwan's democratization and people in West. Lee also intensified his campaign for a seat in the United Nations, which not only raises Taipei's profile abroad but also boasts his standing at home. And apparently he won the favour that Washington should be at his side in face-off with Beijing. He is still taunting mainland leadership. In his speech he said Beijing war games showed that the communist were "scared to death" of Taiwan's democracy. At the height of the crisis, he sent his Vice-President twice in quick succession through the U.S to central America, asking for and receiving American transit visa in the process.

"only true unificationist" Every day Lee's Political strategy was mounting and the daily news papers headlines frightened about Chinese troops advance for

attack. That strained the nerves of the Taiwanese people, and had jolted the investors confidence. President Lee's wrong political approach had deeply split his Kuomintang (KMT) faction and weakened its grip on power. In addition he had made uncomfortable everyone in Asia. The Southeast Asian countries which have out rightly recognized Taiwan's regional economic order and its membership in Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) had become increasingly dismayed by tension, as a result of Lee's open confrontational approach to China.

### CHINA DIPLOMACY.

Three hours before Premier Li Peng's annual address to 3000 delegates of National People's Congress on March 5, 1996, China announced it would conduct missile test off Taiwan's coast.

The Xinhua Official news agency announced two provocative "missile Lanchin trainings from March 8 to 15 in the East and South China seas. One series of ground-to-ground missiles, probably these were the same M-9 variety of missiles fired north of Taiwan in July 1995.

Premier Li didn't mention anything about missile test on Taiwan border's in his 43 pages of prepared text. He even didn't reiterate to invade Taiwan if reunification becomes impossible like previous years. Significantly, he directed his threat not against his Taiwanese compatriots, but against the schemes of foreign forces to interfere with China's reunification. Taiwan responded angrily to the missile test plans. Premier Lien Chan demanded that the Chinese Communist stop this provocative behaviour immediately.<sup>8</sup>

In his address premier Li warned U.S. to stay out of China's "internal" dispute with Taiwan, Li said that deteriorating relations with Washington are "entirely due to the unwise China policy of the United States",<sup>9</sup> Some Western countries are committed to exclude China from the World Trade Organization. He conceded however, that both China and U.S. have made efforts to improve relations.

But Mr. Lee's tune of taunting China didn't changed, may be a political game to win more votes. One day before missile test

he taunted the Chinese, while saying "the missiles are hallow", he further said, "we need to let the 1.2 billion people in China see our step-by-step progression toward becoming the masters of our destiny".<sup>10</sup>

Independent presidential candidate Chen Li-an called for calm and blamed Lee for creating the tensions and then using them for his own political ends. For deployment of Aircraft Carrier he said, "he must understand that what ever the decisions U.S. take are always in his benefit, don't forget they left Vietnam in a hurry".<sup>11</sup>

Looking beyond the polls, the question is whether Lee will back off or continue on his confrontational course. There are same hints that Taipei was looking for ways to soothe the troubled waters. But suspicions run deep in Beijing that Lee is a committed "close separatist", and they aren't likely to change soon. It may be a long time before calm returns to Taiwan strait.

Independent candidate Chen Li-an said that Mr. Lee was continuously provoking the communists. At present he is absolute powerful, and there is no check and balances in our system, which is very dangerous.

In reply to a question that what will he do to defuse the tension with China, Mr. Chen said that "I am in favour of one China". It is a cultural spiritual China not a "Peoples Republic" or "Republic of China". We will use the "European Community Concept" and do it gradually step-by- step. We should start by talking. We already have close economic links. We can talk about transport and communications.<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese Leaders have repeated endlessly that they want peaceful reunification. They made it clear first time that the reintegration of Hong Kong and Macau in 1997 and in 1999 respectively would serve as a models for the Island. Beijing want to show that two territories can retain their freedom and prosperity under its jurisdiction. It is best time to decide before China would turn its attention seriously to Taiwan. The Beijing missile test wasn't to frighten the Taiwanese voters and a cause Lee to loose election, but to restrain Lee from getting international favour. Taiwan already



lacks United Nation seat and maintains diplomatic relations with only 29 countries. So, its international status is greatly affected by the situation on the Chinese mainland, which at present gives very little room for diplomatic maneuver. Japan had already cancelled its official relation with Taiwan 16 years back. "And few days back the South African Government of Mandila also suspended its diplomatic relations with Taiwan as a good will to PR China".<sup>13</sup>

### UNITED STATES DIPLOMACY

Since the beginning of 1996 the Clinton Administration has toughened its language towards both China and Taiwan in order to head off trouble. According to Paul Godwin of National War College, Washington "The credibility of the U.S. military presence in Asia is at stake, America would be forced by virtue of its forward deployment to intervene in the event of an un-provoked armed attack by China on Taiwan".<sup>14</sup>

Recently Washington took two initiatives against the 16 years old Sino-American Policy. First, the administration allowed formidable Taiwan Lobby and its allies in Congress to overturn U.S. Policy while allowing Taiwan President Mr. Lee to visit U.S. Such a turn of policy not only enraged China but also jeopardized Asia's stability. It also gave Beijing a cause to be creative with its own pledges to the U.S. on arms proliferation, trade and human rights angering the Americans.

The second initiative was that Washington positioned publicly as Taipei's potential defender. The U.S. officials said they would view any Chinese attack on Taiwan with "grave concern", a diplomatic language for use of force. It is clear that Washington cannot directly come into a potential confrontation with China, neither China wants to be the bully boy of region.

Though Taiwan's 376,000 men of ground force were kept on high alert. But many of the experts disagree the likelihood of an invasion. According to U.S. Defence Secretary William Perry, a "Chinese are not planning a military conflict with Taiwan, if we were preparing for conflict, we would put in a much larger force".<sup>15</sup> The another source commented that Regional China watchers saw

no fundamental change in Beijing's military posture across the strait. They are only in exercise mode, not in invasion mode.

Washington took this matter very seriously in public but very lightly in private. Secretary of State Warren Christopher called China's exercise in intimidation "reckless" and "risky". But on the other side, senior American officials were talking with important Chinese leaders about relaxed settings of a Virginia county estate. The Vice-Foreign Minister Lin-Huaqin met with Warren Christopher, William Perry and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake for broad range of security concerns.

Lin also met the members of Congress, who were usually inclined to take tougher stance against China. Republican Senator Frank Murkowski, believed that China doesn't need to be given "benefit of doubt". And many other Congressmen were of the opinion to review China's most favoured nations (MFN) status.

While feeling the delicacy of the situation, the Clinton Administration decided to avoid inflaming the situation on two key areas of potential confrontation. China's alleged violation of missile and nuclear non-proliferation rules and failures to comply with a trade agreement on copy rights.

Christopher and Lake have been nominated point men on Chinese relations. They have been suggested to be soft for time being on the issues with China.

The U.S. State Department invited the Chinese Defence Minister General Chi Haotian and simultaneously the visit of Anthony Lake was arranged in April, -May 1996. The purpose of timing were scheduled with the intention that the visit of these two officials after the Taiwan's Presidential election and Presidential Inaugural Ceremony might ease the tension, and expected Lee's success to show some gesture of conciliation.

### STRATEGIC CONDITION

Despite Peoples Republic of China's massive military superiority over Taiwan, its forces outnumber the latter 10 to one.



In a Western analyst's opinion Beijing does not have the ability to project far from the mainland. Though China has enough capability of landing craft to put nearly 6000 troops on Taiwan at single throw.

A full-scale invasion of Taiwan by China is the only and most extreme of many possible strategies. Looking towards Taiwan's strategic conditions, China has more than hundred ways to intimidate Taiwan, but she is afraid of international condemnation. China can use its force against Taiwan in theory but practically and strategically she will prove failure in view of the Western analysts. China with few military options in hand is conducting a psychological warfare. The naval blockade will bring China in conflict with U.S. which will consider it a threat to international sea lane.

According to Jonathan Pollack of the Round Cop., a think-tank in Santa Monica, California, "in theory China's missile capability exceeds that of its airforce, but then the question of target would arise".<sup>10</sup> If missile attack on Taiwan injure or kill an American or Japanese, China would suffer heavy international condemnation.

The American analysts were watching closely the possibility of military conflict on the two small islets of Taiwan known as Kimmen (Quemoy) and Matsa. These islets are little more than a mile or two from mainland China. Seizing them would probably entail a sizable loss of life from both sides, but political loss would be incalculable because Quemoy and Matsa are symbols of Taiwan's ties to the mainland. The more dangerous was the possibility of conflict occurring purely by accident. The Taiwanese forces had been placed on high alert through March 1996.

### ASIAN SECURITY.

If the Asian century of 20th at its end begins with explosion then what will happen to the peace and prosperity of Asia in 21st Century. The sudden escalation of tension in Taiwan strait and worries over North-Korean, though North-Korea had committed with U.S. not to manufacture the bomb making capabilities is that Asia's security is more fragile than many people can think. The main issue of region's anxieties are the emergence of China as a super-power. China is big and great regional power, and no one knows its intentions.

The Chinese military budget estimates to dollar 7.5 billion (Chinese Government) to dollar 50 billion (U.S Arms Control and Disarmament Agency). The Chinese had more than 4 million troops in 1987. Today the force level is 2.9 million, and planned cuts will trim it to 2.5 million. The Beijing had purchased more modern weapons from Russia, including 26 SU-27 fighter bombers, T-72 main battle tanks and two-kilo-class attack submarines, with more order and intend to buy new Mig-315 also.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to above discussed two uncertainties territorial claims is another problem Asia is facing at the moment. Most of the Chinese latest and newest weapons are deployed in Fujian province opposite Taiwan and in southern Guangdong to assert Beijing's interest and claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea. The Chinese have built a huge runway on woody island seized from Vietnam in 1975.

The ownership dispute with the Philippines on Mischief Reef, though China had give assurances, but they are not taken seriously by Philippines until China remains on Mischief Reef.

In a meeting of the Regional forum of ASEAN hold in Brunie in 1995, China showed its willingness to settle the disputes within the norms of International Law of the Sea. Overlapping claims of Islets in South China Sea also fuel tensions among Southeast Asian countries themselves.

Moreover, Beijing, Taipei and Tokyo claims the small islands near Taiwan. The Japanese call them the Senkakus and Chinese Diaoyutai. Japan and South Korea recently exchanged hard words towards their claims on the Takeshima or Tokdo islet. China and Russia are still tangled over territory along the amur ussuri rivers, that was ceded to Moscow by an "unequal treaty" hundred years back. The matter was very tense in 1969, but now thaw in ties raised hopes of a resolution.

Potential arms race has become matter of grave concern to same regional strategists. The Southeast Asian nations are economically very sound, so with the rise of their GNP they afford to upgrade their armed forces with the expansion of exclusive

economic zones to 370 km offshore, ASEAN countries have lucrative oil, gas and fisheries resources to protect.

By the year 2010, ASEAN countries, including Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia may increase the number of submarines with fast petrol boats. China is not only a matter of concern in region but the inter-regional problems that dates back to 1960s and onwards, Indonesia and Malaysia as neighbours are still the biggest factor (in arms procurement), Thailand looks Malaysia and Singapore's worry, as being a small Chinese State in Malay Sea.

There is a lack of any real structure for conflict resolution towards Asia's insecurities. After the end of the cold war U.S. got linked with defense treaties to five "Spokes", i.e Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Australia and New-Zealand. Only two years back a step towards collective security was taken with the formation of the Regional Forum (ARF) of the ASEAN which brings together for annual deliberations the seven ASEAN members and dialogue partners such as the U.S., China and Russia.

According to Zakaria Ahmed of the National University of Malaysia, "much has been made of the forum's goal of 'confidence building'. But ARF is still in its infancy, and it remains to be seen if ASEAN-style conflict containment can work beyond the local context".<sup>18</sup>

In the opinion of Mr. Ross. H. Munro of the Philadelphia-based foreign policy Research Institute, ARF is 'talk shop' that historians will see as marking a transition while post-cold war Asia sorts itself out. He predicts one of two scenarios: the emergence of balance of two power politics or Chinese dominance.

Presently, the Southeast Asia is forwarding towards collective security. In the region's northeast the U.S. presence can guarantee the stability, as the unpredictability of North Korea and its vast number of troops deployed. The Korean Peninsula is still widely considered the biggest potential flash point in East Asia. They are more well armed (1.7 Million) than Americans or Russians (about



1.5 million each) Even more threatening than Korea, is the prospect of new confrontation between India and Pakistan. The reason such a conflict might involve nuclear weapons.

Most Asian leaders see the U.S. to stay in region. Though the people of Japan and Korea have become restless to host U.S. forces. Following the controversial rape case in Okinawa, where the bulk of American troops are based. 58% Japanese voted for abolishing the security pact with Washington. The U.S will try to ease Okinawan concerns by consolidating some of its bases, though it will not cut force levels below 100,000. As Washington sees it, anything below this round number may be interpreted in Asia as the star of a steady retreat from the region.

### CONCLUSION

It all depends upon Mr. Lee's policy to act as a good actor-cum-politician for big drama for restoration of peace. After winning presidential election of March 23, 1996, he should repair the tattered ties with the mainland. During Lee's Presidential campaign the relations were quite discouraging. Now he could take big step towards restoring harmony by taking up chinese President Jiang Zemin's offer of a meeting, or Lee could open direct transport and communication links with the mainland, which business men on both sides will welcome.

For its part, Beijing would need to take into account Taiwan's legitimate needs for greater international participation. The two sides now should resume work on formulas that allow the island to join such bodies as the world trade organisation. If China is reassured that Taiwan will never break away its pledge, then the main land will soften its attitude. The U.S. should play its wisest course to encourage both sides to keep on resuming constructive dialogue and contracts and keep herself away for direct involvement.

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