

Taiwan Strait Crisis: for the right to peace and security in East Asia

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“We must break the vicious cycle of provocations and stop the nuclear arms race in the East Asian region by tenacious anti-war resistance to the remilitarization.”

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Shortly after arrival of US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, China began military drills surrounding the main island of Taiwan. Chinese naval vessels and military aircrafts crossed what had been an unofficial buffer zone between China and Taiwan for decades. And China continued the military drills. On August 4, ballistic missiles were fired. One of which flew directly over the main island of Taiwan and five of which had landed in the exclusive economic zone waters of Japan. Four missiles flew over Taipei.

It was the first time Chinese missiles have flown over the island. On August 5, 24 Chinese aircrafts and six vessels were detected by the Taiwan Defense Ministry near its territory. Compared to the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995 and 1996, the military abilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been greatly enhanced over the past 25 years. On August 5, China said that it would withdraw cooperation with the US including military relations and climate change while imposing sanctions against US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi in retaliation for her Taiwan visit. On August 16, the US military said it conducted a test of a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that had been delayed during China's show of force near Taiwan earlier this month. [1] The US delegation's visit to Taiwan has created a mounting crisis and it developed fears of conflict in the area.

Conventional US-Taiwan-China relations and the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis

This is not the first time the military tensions between Taiwan and China across the Taiwan Strait have occurred. Three Taiwan Strait Crises have occurred in the past; the first (1954-55), the second (1958), and the third (1995-96). The first and second crises began when the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC) shelled the island of Kinmen (Quemoy) which was held by the Nationalist Republic of China (ROC).

The third crisis began when PRC fired two sets of missiles to intimidate the Taiwanese electorate in the first presidential election of under President Lee Teng-hui with the foreign policy away from the One-China policy. The war-threatening crises may have triggered full-scale conflict between PRC and ROC. They moved a step towards resolution with the intervention of the US. It will also have set

a precedent for application of extended deterrence by the US. Since the crises, a zero-sum game relationship had been created in the Taiwan Strait. This was also a non-zero-sum game in which both parties may have potentially self-destructed. China and Taiwan did not want to use force to resolve their bilateral disputes, and there had been no political-level talks between them. For peace negotiations between the two countries, China had to first halt its military activities. But military force would be the last card taken under compelling circumstances for China. If China discarded the card, there would be a possibility of Taiwan's independence and intrusions of foreign military forces into Taiwan's territorial waters.

The US had benefited the most from the zero-sum game. The Taiwan Strait Crisis had given the US a pretext for mass military deployment in East Asia. And it allowed the US to have far-reaching influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Also, arms exports to Taiwan brought huge revenues to US arms.

Dramatic shift in US-China military balance

The situation of the fourth crisis this year is different from that of the past three crises. In the third crisis, the US had sent two aircraft carrier battle groups, which forced the Chinese leadership to admit its inability to prevent US forces from coming to the region. However, China's naval combat capabilities have improved, and the strategic environment in the region has changed significantly. The zero-sum game relationship is gradually changing due to the dramatic shift in the military balance between the United States and China. And the vicious spiral of militarization and nuclear escalation had been fueled in the region.

Under such circumstances, Russia's political stance should be noted as China and Russia stand together against the common enemy in the North Pacific. In reality, Putin has threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons was posed intentionally to raise the situation to the nuclear level at once, make the Western countries hesitate to intervene, and make the Ukraine lose the fighting spirit.

China will keep an eye on threats to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine situation as its own. In the relationship between China and Taiwan, the risk of escalation involving nuclear weapons is fiercely realistic. Recent claims by Russia and China have lowered the nuclear threshold. This is becoming a risk not only for the countries concerned, but also for the entire East Asian region. [2]

A new global element has been added

In the current fourth Taiwan Strait crisis, new global elements have also been added to the conventional conflict structure. Unlike the third Taiwan Strait crisis era of 1995-96 when the Internet was not widely available, China seeks new ways to fight the crises according to the Chinese military official concept: public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. [3] More than six months before Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, there was already a change in the conflict between China and Taiwan. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine conducted at the end of February, Taiwanese media headlines were changed from "Today's Hong Kong, tomorrow's Taiwan" to "Today's Ukraine, tomorrow's Taiwan". [4] It means that a new element has been added to the conventional confrontational relationship between China and Taiwan.

The difference between Ukraine and Taiwan is that the Taiwan Strait exists between China and Taiwan. However, Russia's Putin administration and China's Xi Jinping administration have a lot in

common such as skeptical towards democracy, control of media to support dictatorship, desire for revival of great power, and unverifiable logic “historical relationship” to justify military aggression. Those similarities that Russia and China have will link with each relationship of Ukraine and Taiwan in some way. In particular, their logic to justify a military aggression deserves special mention. A few years before, the subjective notion that Ukraine is not a country, but a historical part of Russia, appeared to be deeply ingrained in the minds of Russian leadership. [5] This is essentially the same as China’s claim “Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People’s Republic of China. It is the sacred duty of all the Chinese people, including our fellow Chinese in Taiwan, to achieve the great reunification of the motherland”. [6] In the notions of Russia and China, there is no right of self-determination for the Ukrainian or Taiwanese people.

For politics which prioritizes the right to peace and safety

At present, the conflict over the Taiwan Strait may provide the venue that triggers another war among the great powers. The US had held the Taiwan card to maintain its dominance over China making the most of the zero-sum game relationships between Taiwan and China. But the situation of the current crisis is different from that of the past crises. PLA’s military exercises and training activities surrounding the main island of Taiwan mainly targeted Taiwan, and not the US directly. [7] But China will continue its current course of action seeking new ways to fight the crises according and may escalate the situation step by step depending on the situation. Meanwhile, the United States which has benefited from the conventional zero-sum game relationship in the Taiwan Strait is promoting arms exports to Taiwan. On June 17, US House Armed Services Committee Member Jim Banks announced the Taiwan Weapons Export Act for legislation to fast-track delivery of critical weapons to Taiwan. [8] The bill is companion legislation to Senator Josh Hawley’s bill in the Senate which was proposed on April 7. Currently, war profiteers are making unreasonable profits while forcing working-class populations to constant wars and social disasters not only in East Asia but also in the world. The “warmongering logic of the military-industrial complex” which is built on the precondition that armaments must be produced and therefore used should be conclusively refuted. [9] The risk of nuclear escalation is fiercely realistic with lowered the nuclear threshold. We must break the vicious cycle of provocations and stop the nuclear arms race in the East Asian region by tenacious anti-war resistance to the remilitarization.

For politics which prioritize the right to peace and security of working-class populations of East Asia instead of military alliances and economic interests!

Demilitarization in the region will provide a potential to prevent a global war.

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Footnotes

[1] The US military canceled the test of Minuteman III in April to alleviate nuclear tensions with Russia during the continuing war in Ukraine.

[2] This year, the geostrategic situation in the region became more complicated after the denuclearization and de-escalation policies concerning the entire Korean peninsula moved away.

At the time of writing (on August 17), North Korea has fired two cruise missiles again from its west coast into waters in the first weapons test since early last month. See Karen Yamanaka, ESSF article 62269 "[Candle Light to Be Rekindled in South Korea with the Oppressed People's Power](#)".

[3] Peter Mattis, *War on the Rocks*, 30 January 2018, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective": <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>].

[4] 覃勤 (Ton Chinfen), Yazhou Zhoukan, 3 March 2022, "今天乌克兰，明天台湾？"(Today's Ukraine, tomorrow's Taiwan?)" as an example.

[5] Katherine Arnold, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1 July 2020, "There is no Ukraine": Fact-Checking the Kremlin's Version of Ukrainian History": <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseih/2020/07/01/there-is-no-ukraine-fact-checking-the-kremlins-version-of-ukrainian-history/>].

[6] Constitution of the People's Republic of China English: https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/lawsregulations/201911/20/content_WS5ed8856ec6d0b3f0e9499913.html].

[7] In August, PLA did not launch medium-range ballistic missiles with a range of 4,000 km, which can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads.

[8] The bill was published on the Jim Banks's website: https://banks.house.gov/uploadedfiles/taiwan_weapons_exports_act.pdf].

[9] Quotes from Pierre Rousset, 1st May 2917, ESSF (article 41025), "[A state of crisis in North-East Asia – The North Korea issue](#)".