

CHINA'S MISSILE POLICY

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**Why would China target the United States
with 13 strategic, questionably accurate, nuclear
missiles when the United States could respond, not
with a baker's dozen, but with thousands
of nuclear warheads of proven accuracy?**

A recent CIA report said that 13 of China's 18 long-range missiles are targeted at U.S. cities. Assuming the report to be accurate, it seems quite clear that the People's Republic of China considers the United States to be its long-term enemy, not unlike the view held by Japan in the two decades preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor. Given the above, it is a certainty that the United States has already, or can within minutes, target hundreds of mainland China cities, military installations, major industrial activities and key transport hubs. It would seem the last thing leaders of the People's Republic of China would want is an exchange of missiles. So, what is the logic behind the PRC's decision to commit most of its long-range missile force against the United States? What clash of U.S.-China interests would be important enough to risk igniting a war between the two countries? Some possible issues include:

- (a) A showdown over human rights abuses in China and/or China's oppression and brutal treatment of the Tibetan people. Conclusion: Much rhetoric, but conflict between the United States and China over the issue is highly unlikely.
- (b) Overt Chinese military aggression against other East Asian countries. Given firm U.S. commitments insuring the security of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines, overt aggression in northern East Asia by China's leaders is considered unlikely. Nor does China have a navy capable of mounting a sustained threat to nations farther to the south. e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. Moreover, the United States has a mutual security treaty with Australia and a small naval presence in Singapore, while Thailand's security benefits from a number of defense arrangements with the United States. Local skirmishes over the Spratley and Parcel Islands are quite possible but would not directly involve the United States.
- (c) Border conflicts with PRC neighbors--Russia, India and Vietnam. Two of the three are nuclear powers while Vietnam has demonstrated it has the ability to not only defend its border but inflict significant losses on the People's Liberation Army should it attempt an invasion (Vietnam has the 2d largest ground force in East Asia). In the north, economic gains from a PRC-Russia rapprochement are sufficiently great to minimize the likelihood of local border incidents escalating into a major conflict.

And while India is indirectly supportive of Tibetan autonomy, it otherwise has no designs on PRC territory, but like Vietnam, has demonstrated a capability to protect its northern borders. Other nations on China's borders--Nepal, Bhutan, and Laos maintain a benign relation with Beijing, with no history of major border incidents. For all intent and purpose, Myanmar (Burma) is a PRC ally. Direct American intervention should even a major border conflict breakout in any of the above regions is highly unlikely.

(d) A change in the U.S. "One China" policy, that is, diplomatically recognize Taiwan should the island opt for independence. This is extremely unlikely given that America's "One China" policy has been endorsed by both Republican and Democrat administrations. Recognition, should it occur, would only follow after, not before, a conflict with China. The United States has also made it quite clear that should the Republic of China on Taiwan declare its independence, there would be no military intervention on its behalf..

(e) The People's Republic of China decides to use military force to reunite Taiwan with the mainland using any or no pretext for its action and is fully aware of the U.S. commitment to assist Taiwan as spelled out in the Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 968, 96th Congress) Section 2b (4,5,6) of the Act is quite clear in this respect.

(4) to consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States;

(5) to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character; and

(6) to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.

It is argued here that only the use of military force by the PRC against Taiwan could trigger a U.S. response that could lead to conflict. (The PRC has a number of options should it seek reunification with Taiwan by military means -- a sea blockade, an air-sea blockade, invasion or by any combination of the above.)

The next question is -- what would be the dimensions of the conflict should it come? There is an axiom as old as military doctrine itself that says the opponent that can choose the location and terms (parameters) of the conflict will be the likely winner. General Robert E. Lee ignored the axiom, and with the failure of Pickett's charge, doomed hopes for Southern independence.

With this axiom in mind, what is the most likely strategy of the People's Republic of China should conflict with the United States come about? First, limit the weapons of engagement, i.e., avoid a nuclear exchange of strategic missiles. How could this be accomplished? By deploying a sufficient number of strategic, so-called "Long March" missiles against a sufficient number of U.S. targets. The operative word is "sufficient." In other words, how many PRC missiles would have to be U.S.-targeted for the United States to accede to a defacto agreement that neither the United States or China would launch missiles against one another's territory, that is, against mainland China or the United States and its territories? Thirteen? Twenty? The point is that China does not have to even come close in matching the United States missile for missile.

The second PRC task or goal would be to minimize the effect of U.S. air power based in Japan and the strike capability of the U.S. 7th fleet. In the first case, Japan could be threatened with nuclear armed missiles (DF21/M9) if it allowed U.S. based aircraft to support Taiwan militarily. Here lies the American dilemma. To threaten China with a nuclear counter strike and risk a strategic missile attack on the U.S. or to "go it alone" using U.S. Pacific island (e.g. Guam) based aircraft and 7th fleet carrier based planes. And what of the 7th fleet? China's strategy here would be to minimize its effectiveness and the best way to accomplish that is to force it as far back in the Western Pacific as possible. This would require state of the art land and sea based cruise missiles, in sufficient numbers capable of attacking and sinking surface combatants, including aircraft carriers.

Thus outlined is China's two missile policy. The first leg is a strategic missile capability with pinpoint accuracy a secondary consideration. What is really the difference if ground zero is Sacramento or San Francisco or Tokyo or Yokohama? The second is having a large inventory of accurate land and sea based cruise missiles. Of the two, the latter is far the more important.

American Options

To counter the threat of a PRC invasion of Taiwan, that is, make such a decision one of high risk and high cost, the United States could:

(1) Accelerate U.S. missile defense. Till now concentration has been on acquiring technology while avoiding hardware deployment. However, even deployment of a less than accurate, less than complete defense would still give China's military leadership pause. Second and more important, budget whatever is necessary for cruise missile defense to insure that the 7th fleet can accomplish its stated purpose--power projection in the Western Pacific which translates into being near enough to Taiwan to make a difference.

(2) Give serious consideration to providing Japan with a stockpile of nuclear weapons with delivery systems capable of reaching all geographic areas of China and without a U.S. veto on their use. One positive aspect of this option would be that Japan would have a counter to a threatened PRC nuclear attack. The decision to use nuclear weapons would not be America's to make, a fact that should weigh heavily on any PRC decision to threaten Japan. Even discussion of such an option in the Congress could influence a decision by the PRC to attack Taiwan. .

(3) Make it clear to the PRC that as soon as a military threat against Taiwan is confirmed, the United States will deploy air, ground and naval forces on Taiwan. Time would be of the essence for this option with detailed plans to carry out such a deployment well rehearsed and in place.

(4) Make it clear that a PRC attack on Taiwan would invoke a worldwide naval war, that is, an attack on Chinese merchant shipping coupled with an air-sea blockade of mainland China.

The above options are well within the capability of the United States. Nonetheless with respect as to how a conflict with the PRC would be fought remains the same. To the greatest extent possible, the United States must deny China's military leadership the exclusive choice of location, tactics and weapons.

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