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**Recent Changes in Taiwan's Defense Policy
and Taiwan-US Relations**

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In a recent article, international relations realist theorist John Mearsheimer wrote that Taiwan had three options for the future: 1) develop its own nuclear deterrence; 2) try to keep some kind of conventional deterrence; and 3) a Hong Kong strategy. But he added that since the People's Republic of China (PRC) is becoming a great power, the only long-term option for Taiwan is the third one: the first one would be fiercely opposed not only by China but also the United States and the second one is a "high risk strategy" that increasingly deepens upon the US's resolve to fight a war over Taiwan.¹

Some may argue that the Taiwanese military concur with this assessment. In its 2013 *National Defense Report*, an official document that probably inspired Mearsheimer, Taiwan Ministry of National Defense stated that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would have "the comprehensive military capability to deter any foreign aid that comes to Taiwan's defense by 2020".²

Yet, in spite of this dire prediction as well as the unprecedented rapprochement across the Strait that the Ma Ying-jeou administration has initiated since 2008, Taiwan still believes that Mearsheimer's second option is the only viable one in the long haul and is serious about it. In other words, the island's political elite, both blue and green, thinks that rather than having to negotiate like Hong Kong a level of autonomy acceptable to Beijing, Taipei can remain de facto independent as long as it can keep a credible conventional deterrence and a strong security relationship with Washington, enshrined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).

The recent changes in Taiwan's defense policy as well as in Taiwan-US relations tend to confirm that Mearsheimer's second option is far from having been abandoned and cannot be abandoned if the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROCOT) wants to survive. However, the island is facing growing security challenges that won't be easy to fix. And overcoming these challenges will depend much more upon the Taiwanese's resolve than the US' intention to remain committed to the island's security.³

¹ "Say Goodbye to Taiwan", *The National Interest*, February 25, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/say-goodbye-taiwan-9931>.

² Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China, *National Defense Report 2013*, Taipei, 2013, p. 66, <http://report.mnd.gov.tw/en/pdf/all.pdf>.

³ On these broader issues, cf. Gudrun Wacker, "Better and Worse: Taiwan's Changing Security Environment" and Cheng-Yi Lin, "Taiwan's National Defense Transformation, Taiwan's Security and US-Taiwan Relations", in Jean-Pierre Cabestan & Jacques DeLisle eds., *Political Changes in Taiwan under Ma Ying-jeou. Partisan conflicts, policy choices, external constraints and security challenges*, Abingdon, Oxon & New York, Routledge, 2014, pp. 175-194 and 195-213.

Taiwan's Defense Strategy: Conventional Deterrence and Asymmetrical Capability

There have not been many new developments in Taiwan's Defense Policy. Taiwan's 2013 *National Defense Report* (or White Papers) and *Quadrennial Defense Review 2013 (QDR)* have confirmed a defense strategy that has been in place at least since Ma Ying-jeou's election in 2008 and even, to a large extent, the deterioration of the military balance in the Strait in the mid-2000s. This strategy can be summed up into two concepts: *conventional deterrence* and *asymmetrical weapon capability*.⁴ Taiwan's objective is not to win a war against the PLA but to deter China from embarking into a military adventure over the Strait in making sure that the cost of such an attack remains prohibitive for the PLA and China, or much higher than the expected benefits of this operation. Even if Taiwan military only ambitions to keep the capacity to hold on for 21 to 30 days⁵, in other words enough time before the US can militarily intervenes, it hopes that this resistance capacity will force Beijing to think twice before contemplating any "non-peaceful" option to "solving the Taiwan issue."

Which Equilibrium between "Resolute Defense" and "Credible Deterrence"

According to Taiwan's second and most recent *QDR*, released in 2013, Taiwan's national defense strategy rests on five pillars: war prevention, homeland defense, contingency response, conflict avoidance, and regional stability. Summed up by the well-known formula "resolute defense, credible deterrence" reasserted in Taiwan's 2013 *National Defense Report* and well as *QDR*, this strategy equally emphasizes, as Michael Mazza puts it, "measures aimed at ensuring the Taiwanese military's ability to fight and those designed to ensure a fight will not be necessary".⁶ The same report claims that Taiwan will "develop defense technologies, continue to procure defensive weapons, establish 'innovative and asymmetric' capabilities, and strengthen force preservation and infrastructure protection capabilities."⁷

However, the Taiwanese military and political leadership seem to be hesitating between giving priority, on the one hand, to asymmetrical but offensive capabilities or, on the other hand, defensive, protective, and more reactive if not

⁴ Ministry of Defense of the Republic of China, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2013*, Taipei, 2013, <http://qdr.mnd.gov.tw/file/2013QDR-en.pdf>.

⁵ According to rather optimistic Taiwanese computer war games, see Michael Cole, "Is Taiwan Military Becoming too Small to Fight?", *The Diplomat*, March 19, 2014.

⁶ Michael Mazza, "Taiwanese Hard Power between a ROC and a Hard Place", *National Security Outlook*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, April 2014, p. 4.

⁷ *National Defense Report 2013*, op. cit., p. 68.

passive measures. Inspired by Murray's "porcupine" strategy⁸, the latter set of priorities was initially privileged by the Ma administration, triggering criticism among some Americans. For example, American Enterprise's Mazza thinks that this would seriously limit Taiwan's options. He states that in adopting the porcupine strategy, Taiwan's "armed forces would focus on repelling an invasion and on homeland defense, to the exclusion of other missions such as counter-blockade. Therefore, Taiwan would achieve deterrence through demonstrating to China that Taiwan would be a bitter pill to swallow, rather than through doing so in addition to holding at risk anything of value on the Chinese mainland."⁹

Mazza also thinks that the concept of "resolute defense" is not precise enough. The 2013 *National Defense Report* defines it as "a defense force that is only used when attacked by the enemy, and is the minimal force required only for defense. The defense force is also limited to protecting territorial integrity, and thus adopts a passive defense strategy."¹⁰ Mazza acknowledges that the 2013 *QDR*'s description is somewhat more specific, including a requirement "to be able to conduct fortified defense, reinforce and support, and recapture operations,"¹¹ but for him "the emphasis remains defensive in nature".¹²

Ma's initial inclination to give priority to a purely defensive strategy is closely linked to his rapprochement policy. It is also part of a defense strategy that also emphasizes collaborative approaches to security such as promoting enhanced security dialogues and exchanges, working with others to establish regional "security mechanisms," and establishing programs to "jointly safeguard regional maritime and air security".¹³

Nevertheless, Taiwan military has continued to also emphasize "credible deterrence", and even more so since Ma's reelection in 2012. This concept is defined as follow in the 2013 *QDR*:

The ROC Armed Forces should continue force training and combat preparation, effectively integrate the interoperability of weapon systems, enhance joint operational performance, and exert overall war-fighting capabilities, forcing the enemy to consider the costs and risks of war, thereby deterring any hostile intention to launch an invasion.¹⁴

Nor does the QDR exclude counter-blockade operations in order to "open air and sea transportation routes, maintain communication with the outside world, and

⁸ William Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (Summer 2008), www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/ae650b06-a5e4-4b64-b4fd-2bcc8665c399/Revisiting-Taiwan-s-Defense-Strategy---William-S---.aspx.

⁹ Mazza, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁰ *National Defense Report 2013*, op. cit., p. 274.

¹¹ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2013*, op. cit., p. 38.

¹² Mazza, op. cit., p. 4.

¹³ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2013*, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁴ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2013*, op. cit., p. 39.

ensure the continuity of (joint operations) capabilities”.¹⁵ In any event, the concept of “all-out defense” implies the use of offensive capabilities or “innovative and asymmetric capabilities targeting the enemy’s COG (center of gravity) and critical vulnerabilities to leverage the advantages in time and space in defense operations to block or paralyze enemy attacks”.¹⁶

New Weapons to Serve this Strategy

In order to enhance its offensive or counter-attack capability, Taiwan under Ma has continued to modernize its armed forces, particularly its Navy and Air Force and to rely on the development of new missile technologies.

As far as the Navy is concerned, it has retired all its large ships, apart from the four Keelung class destroyers bought in the 2000s, and recapitalized its fleet of small missile boats, particularly the 31 stealth Kwang-Hua VI-class vessels. In March 2014, the Taiwanese Navy also received the first of 12 new fast-attach stealth missile boats, dubbed “carrier killers”. Armed with 8 anti-ship cruise missiles, and called Tuo River, it has the size of a corvette.¹⁷

Among the other naval “offensive” weapons Taiwan still hopes to get are the diesel-electric submarines (SSK) once offered by George W. Bush in developing them by itself. Reactivated by Taiwan’s Deputy Defense Minister, Andrew Hsia, in April 2014, this project is likely to remain “an empty wish” owing to the multiple technological, financial and diplomatic difficulties that need to be overcome to realize it.¹⁸ However in late 2013, the Taiwanese navy received from the US32 submarine-launched anti-ship cruise missiles Harpoon UGM-84L. The “L” designates the capability to attack littoral targets, including port infrastructure, power grids, and military staging grounds. Aimed at upgrading munitions on its two deployable Dutch submarines, these missiles can obviously strike Chinese coastal targets.¹⁹

The Navy has also upgraded its maritime air capabilities. 4 of the 12 P-3C Orion purchased from the US were delivered in 2013, another 5 are to be acquired in 2014 and the rest in 2015.

The Air Force has simultaneously continued its modernization drive with the integration in November 2013 of the first batch of 30 HA65E Apache Guardian

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁷ Zachary Keck, “Taiwan Receives First ‘Carrier Killer’ Ship,” *The Diplomat*, March 14, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/taiwan-receives-first-carrier-killer-ship/>.

¹⁸ Wu Shang-su, “*Taiwan’s Indigenous Submarine: A Viable Project?*”, RSIS Commentary 071/2014, April 16, 2014.

¹⁹ Wendell Minnick, “Taiwan’s Sub-Launched Harpoons Pose New Challenge to China’s Invasion Plans,” *Defense News*, January 6, 2014, www.defensenews.com/article/20140106/DEFREG03/301060013/Taiwan-s-Sub-launched-Harpoons-Pose-New-Challenge-China-s-Invasion-Plans.

Attack helicopters, Taiwan becoming the first foreign country to receive these updated choppers. It will help the island counter an invasion and prevent an enemy from establishing a beachhead. The first delivery of the 60 UH60M Black Hawk utility helicopters took place in 2013 as well, enhancing Taiwan's Army mobility.

Because of US budget cuts, there were fears in Taiwan that the F-16 upgrade program would be postponed or compromised but in April 2014, a solution was found that should allow all 146 Taiwanese F-16 to be equipped with a much more powerful radar system.²⁰

Taiwan also plans to add another three PAC-3 batteries (ground-based missile defense systems) in the South of the island to the one deployed outside of Taipei.²¹ In addition, it has decided to invest some US\$2.5 billion in the next nine years (2015-2024) into the deployment of a more modern and locally-made Tien Kung 3 (*Tiangong*, Sky Bow 3) anti-missile system. Developed by Taiwan's Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (CSIST), this surface-to-air missile is designed to counter tactical ballistic missiles for air defense missions and missile interception.²²

This latest program suggest that, under Ma as before, to improve its offensive capability, the Taiwanese military has continued to give priority to the conception and development of more powerful and reliable missiles. As Mazza indicates: "cruise missiles are a relatively low-cost capability against which it is costly and technologically difficult to defend. They are attractive to Taiwan's military for a number of reasons including the fact that in the event of a conflict, cruise missiles might be more likely than manned fighters to reach targets on the mainland. Strikes on critical Chinese command-and-control nodes could significantly impede PLA operations."²³

For a long time, the CSIST has developed different kinds of offensive weapons as anti-ship missiles and stealth missile crafts but also longer range ballistic, cruise and supersonic missiles. For instance, the Hsiung Feng IIE (HF-2E) land-attack cruise missile (LACM) has already entered serial production. With an estimated range of 650 km, it can attack targets in China. It is deployed on road-mobile launchers, a development that reduces its vulnerability.

²⁰ J. Michael Cole, "Turbulence Ahead for Taiwan's F-16 Upgrade Program?", *The Diplomat*, February 6, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/turbulence-ahead-for-taiwans-f-16-upgrade-program/> Aaron Mehta, "USAF: Taiwan Will Still Receive F-16 Radar Upgrades", *Defense News*, March 19, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140319/DEFREG/303190036/USAF-Taiwan-Will-Still-Receive-F-16-Radar-Upgrades>.

²¹ "Taiwan to Deploy 3 More PAC-3 Antimissile Batteries," *Want China Times*, April 26, 2013, www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20130426000077&cid=1101.

²² *China Post*, August 31, 2014.

²³ Mazza, op. cit., p. 7.

Another well-known missile program is the Hsiung Feng III (HF-3). This anti-ship cruise missile can be fired from land-based or seaborne platforms. In 2013, a prototype of a road-mobile launcher carrier for the HF-3 was unveiled.²⁴

Besides, in January 2014, Taiwan unveiled a new air-ground long-range cruise missile (200 km) that can reach targets on the mainland from a fighter that would remain outside of the envelope of existing air-defense systems deployed along the southeastern coast of China, using a GPS-inertial navigation system to home in on its target (at least until China gets from Russia the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system²⁵). Called Wan Chien (*wanjian*), or “Ten Thousands Swords,” and developed by the CSIST, this cruise missiles predominantly a delivery device for cluster bombs, with Chinese airstrips as the primary target, although other sites, such as radar installations and missile bases, are likely candidates. Serial production of Wan Chien missiles is not expected to begin until 2015, but this missile is believed to have entered service on Aerospace Industrial Development Corp’s (AIDC) F-CK-1 Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF) following a mid-life upgrade program. 71 IDF have already been upgraded and by 2017 all 127 IDFs will be Wan Chien capable.²⁶

Under Ma, Taiwan has probably also developed a land-based supersonic anti-ship missile called Cloud Peak (*Yun Feng*) with a longer range than the Hsiung Feng 3.²⁷ There are conflicting reports about this program: earlier reports indicated that the Cloud Peak was a land-based cruise missile (range: 1,200 to 2,000 km) able to reach Shanghai, and perhaps naval bases at Qingdao and Hainan island.²⁸ The Ministry of National Defense has denied in 2014 any mass-production of this new missile. However, presented as a response to China’s modernization effort of its short range ballistic missiles targeting Taiwan (DF-11,15), this new program underscores the priority given by Taiwan’s armed forces to developing missile-based counter attack or offensive capabilities.

²⁴ Wendell Minnick, “Taiwan Displays New Missile Launch Vehicle,” *Defense News*, August 14, 2013, www.defensenews.com/article/20130814/DEFREG03/308140013/Taiwan-Displays-New-Missile-Launch-Vehicle.

²⁵ With a range of 2,400 km the S-400 Triumph anti-aircraft missile system can engage up to 72 targets simultaneously with as many as 72 missiles at altitude of 5 meters to 30 km. It is capable of countering all air attack weapons, including tactical and strategic aircrafts, ballistic missiles and hypersonic targets as the US F-35 fighter jet, *South China Morning Post*, 29 August 2014.

²⁶ J. Michael Cole, “Taiwan Unveils Wan-Chien Air to Ground Cruise Missile”, *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/taiwan-unveils-wan-chien-air-to-ground-cruise-missile/>.

²⁷ Wendell Minnick, “Japan, Taiwan Upgrade Strike Capability”, *Defense News*, May 7, 2013, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130507/DEFREG03/305060016/Japan-Taiwan-Upgrade-Strike-Capability>.

²⁸ Wendell Minnick, “Taiwan Working on New ‘Cloud Peak’ Missile”, *Defense News*, January 18, 2013, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130118/DEFREG03/301180021/Taiwan-Working-New-8216-Cloud-Peak-8217-Missile>.

Owing to Taiwan's growing vulnerabilities, the US appears to have toned down its opposition to Taiwan's acquisition of offensive technology, even some of them contravene with the MTCR (Missile Technology Control Regime) of which Taiwan is not a party. In any case, these weapons systems remain defensive in nature because Taiwan is unlikely to initiate hostilities.²⁹

In other words, under Ma the Taiwanese military has kept trying to develop new and more credible asymmetric warfare capabilities.

However, this stronger emphasis given by Taiwan on asymmetric warfare capabilities has not (yet) translated into a greater financial and human resources investment in its armed forces. Actually, the opposite has happened: defensive and offensive missiles as well as other sophisticated weapon programs clearly appear as substitutes for a stagnating defense budget and a difficult and costly transition towards an all-volunteer force.

Taiwan's Armed Forces' Financial and Human Resources Hurdles

Taiwan's Defense Budget

Taiwan's armed forces financial difficulties and lack of investment in defense are nothing new. Since the late 1990s, the ROCOT defense budget has stagnated at around US\$10 billion, representing only 2.0% of the GDP in 2014 against 3.2 % in 1999.³⁰ A far cry from Ma Ying-jeou's 2008 electoral promise to build a "hard ROC" (rock) military with a defense budget reaching 3% of Taiwan's GDP. Amounting US\$10.4 billion in 2014, Taiwan's defense budget now represents only 16.2% of government's total expenditures (against 21.6% in 1999). And in spite of an expensive transition towards an all-volunteer force, a reform that should be completed at the end of 2017 (against 2014 before), there is no indication that this budget will substantially increase.³¹ In 2011, Ma claimed that the defense budget could not keep up with Taiwan's rapid GDP growth, a highly debatable argument. More plausibly, as his predecessor Chen Shui-bian, in order to increase his chances to be reelected, Ma Ying-jeou has been keener to invest in social programs. In any event, the 3% target has been dropped from the March 2013 QDR. Although Taiwan's defense budget increased by 8% in 2012 to finance both the transition to a professional army and the F-16 upgrade program, since

²⁹ Ibid. Cf. also Wendell Minnick, "Q&A with Nien-Dzu Yang," *Defense News*, November 14, 2012, [www.defensenews.com /article /20121114/DEFREG03/311140011/Q-Nien-Dzu-Yang](http://www.defensenews.com/article/20121114/DEFREG03/311140011/Q-Nien-Dzu-Yang).

³⁰ Shirley Kan, *Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990*, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, June 13, 2014, pp. 34-40, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL30957.pdf>.

³¹ J. Michael Cole, "Is Taiwan's Military Becoming Too Small to Fight?", *The Diplomat*, March 19, 2014.

then, in spite of US pressures, it has again stagnated, shrinking its comparative size to Singapore's (US\$10 billion) and widening the gap with South Korea's (US\$32.7 billion) and of course with China (officially US\$132 billion).

Towards an All-Volunteer's Force

The transition towards an all-volunteer's force has been harder and slower than anticipated. Conscription that accounted for around one-third of the total active force was due to cease by 2014. However, because of a low recruitment rate of professional officers, NCOs and soldiers, the end of conscription has been postponed until 2017. In the first 11 months of 2013, the armed forces recruited only 8,600 people, for an annual target of 28,000 (less than 30%).³² In infantry and armored units, the recruitment rates are even lower, 4% and 16% respectively.³³

In order to correct this situation, in late 2013, it was announced that volunteer soldiers' wages and benefits would be increased (up to NT\$33,625 against NT\$29,625 for a basic non-combatant duty); a volunteer private service in the Nansha (Spratly) island would receive an additional NT\$20,000 (NT\$53,625). By comparison, the starting salary for a Taiwanese with a postgraduate degree was around NT\$31,000 in 2013.³⁴

However, recent incidents in the armed forces and a declining birth rate will continue to impede the success of this transition. For example, although the death of corporal Hung Chung-chiu, a conscript as a result of an abuse in July 2013 triggered large demonstrations and later the dismissal of the then Defense Minister Kao Hua-chu and the short-lived promotion of Andrew Yang Nien-tzu to this position, the lenient sentences given in March 2014 to most of the defendants may dissuade many young unemployed Taiwanese from joining the military.

The 2013 *National Defense Report* announced a planned reduction of armed forces personnel from 275,000 to 215,000 at the end of 2014, a ratio of 0.9% of the population (23 millions). But in early 2014, the Defense Ministry went further in its reduction plan, indicating that from 2015 to 2019, its military personnel will go down to 190,000 and even 170,000 (at most 0.8 % of the population), a size that, in President Ma's view, should be sufficient to ensure national defense.³⁵

Will these reductions allow armed forces' personnel expenditure share (today 49% of the defense budget) to decrease and other expenses, as maintenance, training and investments to increase? It is probably too early to tell. Nevertheless, having difficulties in recruiting and keeping good professional soldiers, NCOs and

³² Cole, "Is Taiwan's Military...", op. cit.

³³ Wu Shang-su, "Taiwan's All-Volunteer Military", *The Diplomat*, December 25, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/taiwans-all-volunteer-military/>.

³⁴ Cole, "Is Taiwan's Military...", op. cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

officers, the ROCOT armed forces are facing the danger of becoming less and less reliable as well as even more isolated from the society.

Moreover, the current one-year military service already appears too short to allow former conscripts to turn into a meaningful reserve force. What about the future? Taiwan's 2013 *QDR* lists "all-out defense" as an important piece of the defense strategy's homeland defense mission. "All-out defense" includes tasks as promoting all-out defense education, cultivating the public's patriotism and support for national defense, coordinating interagency efforts to establish a robust all-out defense system and maintaining capabilities of reserve force through mobilization and training to ensure rapid mobilization during peacetime and wartime.³⁶

After 2017, young men will still undergo four months of military training. Once they have completed this basic training, they will be added to the reserve mobilization system. According to *The Military Balance* 2013, Taiwan counts about 1.6 million reservists. They are supposed to take part every two years into military drills.³⁷ Some reports have mentioned a 5 to 7 day training twice yearly.³⁸ However, that will not make much difference since the proportion of reservists who will have received a proper basic training is due to substantially shrink. In other words, as Mazza put it, maintaining an effective reserve force is to be a "greater challenge".

The consequences of these trends are hard to assess, but most PLA experts have already publicly concluded that without a US intervention, the Taiwanese would not fight but prefer to accept the conditions imposed by Beijing whatever they may be. Or to be more accurate, and in order to backup this strategy, China's military propaganda has been developing a very strong narrative aimed at weakening the morale of the Taiwanese and their will to fight, exaggerating the PLA's capabilities, including vis-à-vis the US military, and underestimating the ROCOT armed forces resolve.³⁹

Changes in the US Debate about Taiwan

In the past year, as China's PLA has kept modernizing and expanding at rapid pace, the US debate about Taiwan security and American arms sales to the island has become more intense. I have already mentioned Mearsheimer's influential article. But voices in favor of gradually abandoning Taiwan have become louder,

³⁶ 2013 *QDR*, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁷ Cole, "Is Taiwan's Military...", op. cit.

³⁸ Mazza, op. cit., pp. 8, 11.

³⁹ Andrew Chubb, "Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA's 'Hawkish Faction'", *China Brief*, Vol. 13, No. 15, July 25, 2013, p. 6-11 & Vol. 13, No. 16, August 9, 2013, p. 12-16.

alarming a growing number of pro-Taiwan US experts.⁴⁰ Even if the PLA does not secure the “comprehensive military capability to deter any foreign aid that comes to Taiwan’s defense by 2020” (see supra), the cost of any US involvement in the defense of Taiwan is getting higher and higher, if not prohibitive. The PLA’s advanced anti-ship ballistic missiles (particularly the Dong Feng – 21), quieter submarines as well as more sophisticated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets have the “ability to blunt US power projection in the Western Pacific”.⁴¹

An “accommodating” trend, claiming to better understand China’s long-term interests and red lines, has been taking shape in Washington, hoping that a new *modus vivendi* among the two great powers can be worked out. As a result, some analysts have made more specific suggestions, proposing for example to “calibrate” US arms deliveries so that in any given calendar year the value does not exceed US\$941 million. The same study suggested that, in exchange so to speak, China should reduce its short range ballistic missiles now pointed at Taiwan by one fifth. Presenting US arms sales to Taiwan “fundamentally as a political issue”, it asks for a return to the 1982 US-China communiqué on the reduction of arm sales to Taiwan.⁴²

These proposals have triggered much discussion. For instance, former American Institute in Taiwan Chairman Richard Bush objected that the danger of setting a cap on arms sales was that it could become a “hard ceiling” rather than a “floating average”. It can be added that, as this paper also shows, Taiwan’s arm purchases are far from being totally political: they continue to serve the island’s deterrence defense strategy and help develop an asymmetrical weapon capability. As Bush indicated: “US weaponry is not trivial in military sense”... “From a US perspective, arms sales, whatever their political value to Taiwan, should also contribute to Taiwan’s ability to deter mainland attack or threat of attack”. If the US decided to come to Taiwan’s defense in case of such an attack, it would need Taipei to hold on “for several weeks while we did all that was needed to mount our defense”. And “if Taiwan has the capability to hold on, Beijing is less likely to consider an attack in the first place”.⁴³

Randy Schriver, US deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia from 2003 to 2005 and now president and chief executive officer of the Project 2049 Institute, shares Bush’s concern. In August 2013, he declared that it would be a “huge mistake” and “naive” for Washington to reduce arms sales to Taiwan. He was

⁴⁰ Elbridge Colby, “Can We Save Taiwan?”, *The National Interest*, October 18, 2013.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Proposals for US and Chinese Action on Arms Sales to Taiwan*, EastWest Institute, September 10, 2013, http://www.ewi.info/sites/default/files/TAS%20Final%20%2528%20ISSUU%20VERSION%209_17_2013%2529.pdf.

⁴³ *Taipei Times*, January 16, 2014.

reacting to reports in the Chinese press based on remarks attributed to Chinese Read Admiral Guan Youfei, director of the Foreign Affairs Office of China's Ministry of National Defense, that the US may form a task force with China to discuss weapons sales to Taiwan along with other issues. These remarks followed Pentagon Talks between Chinese Minister of National Defense Chang Wanquan and US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.⁴⁴

On the Republican and conservative side, a similar criticism of the Obama administration is perceptible: for instance, American Enterprise Institute's Mazza argued that it has become harder for the US to sell arms to Taiwan.⁴⁵

However, it is hard to deny that, as shown in the first part of this paper, US arms sales to Taiwan and other features of US-Taiwan military cooperation have continued to develop at a rapid pace. As Daniel R. Russel, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, underlined in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs on April 3, 2014:

For its part, the Obama administration has notified to Congress over \$12 billion of sales of defensive equipment and materials to Taiwan. This is a tangible sign of our determination to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense.

Our security relations with Taiwan are about much more than arms sales. The United States engages in a wide range of consultations and exchanges with Taiwan in order to assist Taiwan armed forces as they seek to maintain, train and equip a capable, effective self-defense capability.⁴⁶

This does not mean that US concerns about the Taiwanese military capability, its ability to keep under check Chinese espionage, and its will to fight are not increasing. And within the US, beyond the group of Asia, China and Taiwan experts, a growing number of strategists are asking the Obama administration to concentrate on the Western Pacific rather than on the Middle East and get better prepared for an Air-Sea battle style campaign against China, if Taiwan needs to be "saved".⁴⁷

Nevertheless, no one in the US, or even in Taiwan is ready to contemplate Mearsheimer's third option. And Hong Kong's recent developments are not conducive to convincing the Taiwanese people that the "one country, two systems" formula can solve the differences between the PRC and the ROCOT, which to date remains the only genuine democracy that has managed to bloom in a culturally Chinese (and Confucian) society.

⁴⁴ *Taipei Times*, August 24, 2013.

⁴⁵ Mazza, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁶ Evaluating U.S. Policy on Taiwan on the 35th Anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/04/224350.htm>.

⁴⁷ Colby, op. cit.

As far as the Obama administration is concerned, Taiwan's security and cross-strait relations cannot be disconnected from the more general strategic situation in the Western Pacific. Growing tensions in the East and the South China seas, the August 2014 interception of a US surveillance plane P-8 Poseidon by PLA fighter in the international air space 130 miles south of Hainan Island and other past and future incidents will compel Washington to give more substance to its "rebalancing" strategy.

Taiwan under Ma cannot be totally oblivious of this wider regional and global environment either. While it is modernizing its infrastructure on Itu Aba (Taiping Island) in the Spratly, it does not cooperate with Beijing against other claimants. Ma has gone further, launching in August 2012 a "peace initiative" to solve or at least manage the territorial disputes in the South and the East China seas, an initiative that has been supported by the Obama administration. Similarly, after the creation by the PRC of a new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) near Japan and including the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands, Ma called in January 2014 concerned countries with overlapping ADIZs to engage in negotiations in order to prevent risk of future confrontation. This directly concerns Taiwan that in response to the PRC's new ADIZ demarcation, has reiterated that Taiwan Air Force and Navy military drills in the overlapping ADIZ in the East China Sea have not been affected by Beijing's unilateral move.⁴⁸

Up to a point though. In late August 2014, two PLA military transport aircrafts (Yun-8) were intercepted in Taiwan's ADIZ where they made four separate intrusions, lasting 10 minutes each time. Beijing did not admit that it intruded in Taiwan's ADIZ, arguing that its aircraft were "carrying routine flight in the relevant airspace".⁴⁹ This incident raises fresh questions about the PRC's recognition and respect of Taiwan's own ADIZ.

Conclusion

To conclude, one need to acknowledge that there is a growing pessimism among Taiwanese military that contrasts with Ma's rapprochement policy with the PRC and the apparent good state of cross-strait relations. In the latest annual report on China's military forces presented to the legislature, Taiwan' Ministry of National Defense indicated that Beijing's purpose in holding combined air-naval-ground exercises involving the PLA's Second Artillery Force in recent years "was to ensure that it would be able to launch a large-scale attack on Taiwan by next year" adding that the PRC's "desire to become a dominant power in Asia has

⁴⁸ *The China Post*, January 15, 2014, CNA, February 26, 2014.

⁴⁹ *Taipei Times*, August 27 & 28, 2014.

endangered regional stability, with sporadic tensions with the US, Japan, South Korea and some Southeast Asian countries”.⁵⁰

After his reelection in 2012, the Ma administration had already hardened its mainland policy, giving priority to the amelioration of Taiwan-US relations.⁵¹ However, in the last year, and even before the outbreak of the Sunflower movement or the Chang Hsien-yao espionage scandal⁵², it had clearly decided to both speeding up the modernization of Taiwan’s armed forces weapon systems and strengthening its cooperation with the Pentagon.

As we have seen, Taiwan military will continue to face financial and human resources challenges; its relationship with the society will also need to be improved. In other words, Taiwan may not be able, as Mazza fears, to be equipped with a “highly skilled, innovative, high-tech force”, like say Israel.⁵³ But there is no sign that it is giving up either. On the contrary, under Ma, Taiwan is clearly committed to keeping a robust and credible defense, based on conventional deterrence and asymmetrical weapon systems. Aimed at the survival of the ROCOT as a de facto independent state, this commitment should also allow Taipei to negotiate with Beijing if not in a position of strength, at least not defenseless.

For these reasons, Mearsheimer’s third option remains beyond any contemplation both in Taiwan and Washington. For how long? As long as China does not overtakes the US as the Western Pacific’s major military power? Or as long as China does not democratize and adopt the same political values as on the other side of the Taiwan Strait?

⁵⁰ *Taipei Times*, August 31, 2014.

⁵¹ See Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Ma Ying-jeou’s Mainland Policy since 2012 : Has it Hardened and Why”, paper presented at The 10th Symposium on China-EU Relations and the Taiwan Question, Shanghai, 28-31 July, 2013, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt_papiere/Taiwan2ndTrack_Cabestan_2013.pdf.

⁵² In August 2014, Chang Hsien-yao, principal Deputy Chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), was suddenly dismissed because he was suspected of having leaked classified documents to a Taiwanese business person living on the mainland who later passed them to the PRC authorities; leaks may have started two years ago, *The China Post*, August 31, 2014.

⁵³ Mazza, op. cit., p. 5.