

War: China Is Showing Its Commitment to Invading Taiwan By Sea



The Chinese have been heavily investing in amphibious capabilities.

Here's What You Need to Remember: The best way to prevent such a violent and shameful disgrace is to press Taipei into negotiations on forming a confederation with Beijing now. It was actually not so long ago that Taipei and Beijing leaders were chatting amiably at the first-ever Taiwan-China summit. "One country, two systems" may indeed be a kind of "ugly duckling" at this point, at least in the Western press, but that only remains true until the cataclysmic alternative is thoroughly understood.

A number of events and trends are coming together now to drive Taiwan and with it the whole Asia-Pacific region, to the edge of disaster. These include the recent election for Taiwan's leadership, the unrest in Hong Kong, China's increasing military might, and the downward spiral of contemporary U.S.-China relations.

For sure, Taiwan has been at or near the center of U.S-China relations for the last seventy years, so at one level, there is nothing particularly new here.

Yet, before U.S. leaders dismiss this warning into a heap of other global calamities, they should briefly peruse the words below from an unsigned Chinese editorial in the December 25, 2019 edition of Global Times: “The United States as a whole must understand that although Taiwan is the easiest place to provoke Mainland China, it is also the place where the U.S. is most at risk. It is precisely that China has the most real cards against the U.S. provocation in the Taiwan Strait region, and China has the strongest will and capability to defend the core interests of the country [美方作为整体必须了解，台湾虽是最容易挑衅、刺激中国大陆的地方，但也是对美方来说风险最大的地方。中国在台海地区反制美方挑衅的实牌恰恰也是最多的，而且中国在这里捍卫国家核心利益的意志和能力都是最强的].” The editorial continues, “This is not a joke. Mainland China has so far exercised restraint in the Taiwan Strait region and has not meddled in some of America’s vulnerabilities across the world [这可不是开玩笑的，中国大陆迄今在台海地区很克制，在国际上也没有在美国的一些脆弱点找麻烦].” It concludes, “We hope the U.S. Congress is not acting as a prelude to a future U.S.-China crisis. To be honest, we don’t think that the U.S. is ready for a Sino-U.S. crisis related to Taiwan, and we don’t think the DPP authorities are ready for it [希望美国国会不是在弹中美一场未来危机的前奏。实话说，我们不认为美方对迎接一场与台湾相关的中美危机做好了准备].” Merry Christmas? Not so much. Fighting words or a brash bluff?

As one who reads Mainland Chinese defense publications on a daily basis, my impression is that “T-Day” is not very far off. Over the last few years, I have demonstrated that China’s missile forces are wholly adequate to give the PLA both air and naval superiority for the requisite period of weeks. I will not rehearse here the many reasons why Western analyses tend to be overly optimistic concerning the military balance in the western Pacific more generally. But rather than discussing capabilities again, let’s briefly put a focus on the crucial matter of strategy. That is generally a taboo subject in Chinese defense discourse, but hints occasionally bubble to the surface. One such discussion appeared in the September 2019 edition of Military Digest [军事文摘] that provides a careful analysis in Mandarin of the vital precursors to the Normandy victory in WWII: both the disaster at Dieppe, as well as the lessons learned from amphibious operations during the arduous Italian Campaign.

For readers unfamiliar with Dieppe battle, this short, bloody engagement featured an amphibious “probe” by British and Canadian forces of German coastal defenses along the French coast of the English Channel during mid-August 1942. This Chinese analysis rightly characterizes the raid as a “complete defeat,” but extracts numerous lessons, as indeed the Allied commanders did too. First, it is assessed that “the forces were inadequate to risk such a decision [实力不足冒险决策].” The Allies in this engagement suffered from a paucity of warships, transports, tanks, artillery, and even infantry numbers were less than their German adversaries. Trying to fight their way ashore straight into the teeth of Germany’s “massive air force shield” was bound to prove disastrous for Allied troops, according to this Chinese analysis, as Dieppe proved to be both “the wrong time and the wrong place” for an attack. A second lesson articulated in the Chinese article is, indeed, that “intelligence was poor causing operational blindness [情报不力盲目行动].” The account reports the Allied forces were surprised by unexpected defenses, such as a two-meter sea wall, minefields, and also German forces that were not anticipated to be in the area. Even the weather forecasts are reported in this Chinese rendering to have been inadequately detailed.

Lacking both air and sea control in these circumstances, the Allies making the raid on Dieppe were relying heavily on the element of surprise. Apparently, there was neither an extensive pounding by bombers from the air, nor even any kind of preparatory barrage from warships offshore. This Chinese account relates how “the element of surprise was lost immediately ... [and] the Allied amphibious forces came under the full firepower of the German military.” Thus, a third lesson the Chinese take from Dieppe is that “inadequate fire preparation will entail major personnel casualties [火力不备人员伤亡].” Finally, the Chinese analysis examines the command arrangements for the Dieppe battle and finds them wanting. It is reported that there was no overall commander and each of the services went in their own direction. An airborne parachute drop was scrubbed due to weather at the last minute and the participating ships were very poorly coordinated, such that the amphibious forces were, more or less, left to simply try to save themselves with the resultant terrible losses. Thus, the fourth lesson for Chinese strategists from Dieppe was “the need to harmonize so that each service is not fighting on its own [协同不周各自为战].”

Fortunately, as related in this Chinese analysis, the Allies got some substantial

additional practice before Normandy. In the invasion of Sicily, for example, it is related that the Americans and British corrected almost all the mistakes from Dieppe. British intelligence, according to this Chinese rendering, succeeded in making fake plans and spreading rumors that the Allies intended to attack Greece instead of Sicily. Mobility was used to achieve surprise, air and naval superiority proved decisive, and due diligence on logistics also paid dividends for the Allies. Still, this Chinese analysis criticizes Allied operations in the Italian campaign for being excessively timid [步步为营] and also in failing to make better use of airborne and amphibious capabilities.

Understanding this history in some detail enables a keener appreciation of the grand achievements of D-day, for sure. This Chinese historical analysis closes with a summary of those elements of success for Operation Overlord. These included, of course, “absolute superiority [绝对优势]” in the air that knocked down 600 German aircraft in the months prior to the invasion at Normandy. With a comment that might have special resonance for the Taiwan scenario, this Chinese rendering claims that during the three days after D-day, not a single German submarine entered the English Channel to challenge the invasion force. The famous intelligence ruse or a skillful “mingling of truth and false [真真假假]” made by General Dwight Eisenhower is also related in decent detail – down to the fact that Allied bombers and intelligence flights made a 2:1 ratio in favor of sorties to targets that were distant from Normandy in order to keep the Germans confused. Finally, the Chinese analysis relates that the Normandy invasion represented the triumph of logistics [后勤支撑], including 370,000 dedicated logistics personnel that delivered over five millions tons of equipment and supplies for the invasion.

With respect to Taiwan, one can safely assume both a massive PLA superiority in firepower and very close attention to the complex logistics problem. Thus, the only remaining challenge for Beijing is to create a proper ruse – admittedly somewhat difficult in the age of satellite reconnaissance. Yet, this is also not all too hard to imagine. Would Xi Jinping simply call his friend Vladimir Putin to ask for a decent-sized diversion in the Baltics? It should not be forgotten that Mao Zedong’s victorious military campaign against India in 1962 was accomplished with lightning efficiency under the “cover” of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The actual PLA assault on the “beautiful island” would come from both the sea and the air, of course, developing from multiple vectors simultaneously, allowing for the

exploitation of the most promising fronts, and likely prompting rapid, total collapse.

Probably, the “dirty deed” would be accomplished within just a week or maybe two (for mopping up). As with Putin’s annexation of Crimea back in 2014, the U.S. might well be better off if the whole episode was “fervently condemned,” but then quickly written off as a total loss. To be sure, some new “Taiwan sanctions” could be added to the Hong Kong and Uighur list already approved by Congress. Yes, this would be another grand humiliation for American power, but at least the planet would be spared from a third and final world war.

The best way to prevent such a violent and shameful disgrace is to press Taipei into negotiations on forming a confederation with Beijing now. It was actually not so long ago that Taipei and Beijing leaders were chatting amiably at the first-ever Taiwan-China summit. “One country, two systems” may indeed be a kind of “ugly duckling” at this point, at least in the Western press, but that only remains true until the cataclysmic alternative is thoroughly understood.

In November 2019, a leading Mainland expert regarding Taiwan, Wang Zaixi, gave a keynote speech at Peking University. He decried the new tendencies in Taiwan toward ‘step-by-step de-sinification’ [一步一步推动 ‘去中国化’]” and the Taiwan-related manifestations of the new policy of “hard containment [强硬遏制]” undertaken by the Trump Administration. He warned ominously that “time is running out [时间已经不多了]” and that cross-Strait relations now confront “huge risks [巨大风险].” Are American diplomats, strategists, and scholars wise enough to help avert this altogether preventable tragedy?

Lyle J. Goldstein is Research Professor in the China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) at the United States Naval War College in Newport, RI. In addition to Chinese, he also speaks Russian and he is also an affiliate of the new Russia Maritime Studies Institute (RMSI) at Naval War College. You can reach him at goldstel@usnwc.edu. The opinions in his columns are entirely his own and do not reflect the official assessments of the U.S. Navy or any other agency of the U.S. government.

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