

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 21  
Number 2 February

Article 8

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1968

# The Formosa Resolution, 1954-1955, 1958

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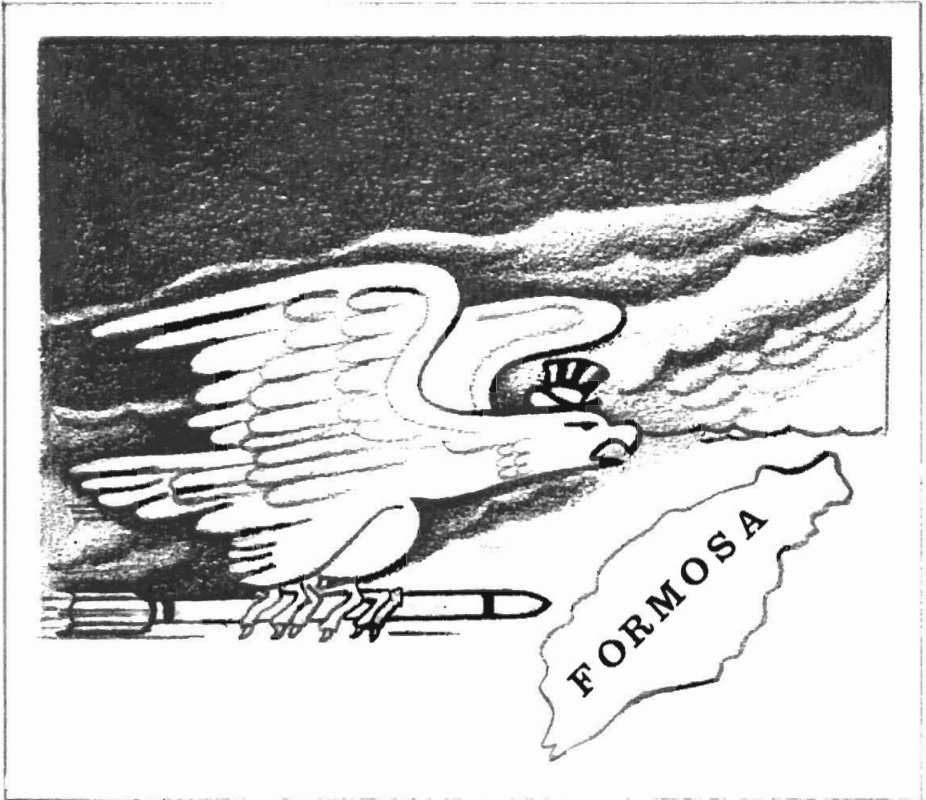
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### Recommended Citation

Ashurst, Albert J. (1968) "The Formosa Resolution, 1954-1955, 1958," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 21 : No. 2 , Article 8.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol21/iss2/8>

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## THE FORMOSA RESOLUTION 1954-1955, 1958

**A Research Paper prepared by  
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(This paper was prepared for the study "Diplomacy Since World War II" which was offered to officers at the Naval War College pursuing The George Washington University education program. Ed.)

Resolved: That the President of the United States be and he hereby is authorized to employ the Armed Forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the securing and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.

*House Joint Resolution 159  
(84th Congress, 1st Session)  
29 January 1955*

With this resolution the Congress of the United States presented the President with *carte blanche* to wage war with another power, to interfere in what had been legally considered to be a civil war, and to define the area of interest, all to be based upon his own evaluation. Thus, another pivot point in the U.S. foreign policy was attained; one that essentially closed the door to any possibility of fruitful negotiation with the Chinese Communists, but also one that securely closed a route of aggression that had been open to them. The question is, then, how did the situation evolve that dictated the assumption of such a foreign policy, and what are its ramifications?

On 3 July 1884 Caleb Cushing signed on behalf of the U.S. Government the Treaty of Wanghai, the first treaty between the United States and China. The preamble of the document affirmed the desire "to establish firm, lasting, and sincere friendship between the two nations" and article 1 stipulated that:

There shall be a perfect, permanent, universal peace and a sincere and cordial amity, between the United States of America on the one part, and the Ta Tsing Empire on the other part, and between their people respectively, without exception of persons or places.

A century later, China and the United States brought to a victorious close their war against Japan. They had fought together as allies, and although the alliance had difficulties at times, it still achieved its objective. China had found a staunch friend in the United States who had been primarily responsible for the defeat of Japan, and the United States regarded friendly China as the mainstay of a newly emerging balance of power in the Far East. In less than 5 years the two powers, the United States and Mainland China, were to be antagonists, not allies. The reasons for the rift are many and complex; the innocuousness of the "open door policy," the imposition of an alien religion by missionaries, the traffic in coolies and opium, the restriction and final exclusion of Chinese labor immigration, the birth and growth of the Chinese Communist Party coupled with the increasing ineffectiveness of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang which finally resulted in the flight of Chiang to Taiwan in 1949 were some of the factors, but certainly not all, that contributed to the break in relations that exists to this day. In fact, even as late as 5 January 1950 the policy of the United States was at least neutral, if not friendly, toward that of Mainland China as exemplified by the following statement by President Truman on that date:

The United States Government has always stood for good faith in international relations . . . . In the joint declaration at Cairo on December 1, 1943 the President of the United States, the British Prime Minister, and the President of China stated that it was their purpose that territories Japan had stolen from China, such as Formosa, should be restored to the Republic of China. The United States was a signatory to the Potsdam declaration of July 26, 1945 which declared that the terms of the Cairo declaration should be carried

out. In keeping with this declaration, Formosa was surrendered to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek . . .

The United States has no predatory designs on Formosa or any other Chinese territory. The United States has no desire to obtain special rights or privileges or any intention of utilizing its armed forces to interfere in the present situation. The United States Government will not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil conflict in China.

Similarly, the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa.

A statement by the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, on the same day, further reinforced and elaborated on that made by the President. The heart of the Secretary's statement was:

We are not going to use our forces in connection with the present situation in Formosa. We are not going to attempt to seize the Island. We are not going to get involved militarily in any way on the Island of Formosa. So far as I know, no responsible person in the Government, no military man has ever believed that we should involve our forces in the Island.

Obviously, when one considers the power differential, the U.S. Government was ready and willing to hand over the Island of Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the offshore islands to the Communist Chinese Government at that time. However, shortly after this date the relationship between the United States and mainland China started to deteriorate. On 14 January 1950 the Chinese Communists seized all U.S. consular property in Peiping. On 14 February 1950 Communist China and the Soviet Union culminated a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance. Secretary Acheson's response to this development was, "We now face the prospect that the Com-

munists may attempt to apply another familiar tactic and use China as a base for probing for other weak spots which they can move into and exploit." And, "they (the Chinese) should understand that, whatever happens within their own country, they can only bring grave trouble on themselves and their friends, both in Asia and beyond, if they are led by their new ruler into aggressive or subversive adventures beyond their borders." Could the warning be any clearer? Nevertheless, on 24 June 1950 the Korean war was initiated by the North Korean Army. This action, in consonance with the vast Communist Chinese buildup at Chekiang and Fukien opposite Formosa, led President Truman to initiate the following policy on 27 June 1950:

In these circumstances [attack upon Korea] the occupation of Formosa by Communist forces would be a *direct* threat to the security of the Pacific area and to the United States forces performing their lawful and necessary functions in that area.

Accordingly I have ordered the Seventh Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa. As a corollary to this action, I am calling upon the Chinese Government on Formosa to cease all air and sea operations against the mainland. The Seventh Fleet will see that this is done.

Thus, in one fell swoop, the defensive perimeter concept as postulated by Acheson and the policy of noninvolvement in the civil strife between Formosa and the Mainland became diplomatic nonentities. The foregoing policy was further strengthened by a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between the United States and the Republic of China on 9 February 1952. The Communists, through the instrument of war, had launched a U.S. foreign policy that was to continue to widen the gulf between Mainland China and the free world. The action of utilizing the Seventh Fleet as the

neutralizing agent in the Formosa Strait by President Truman, although initially taken as a limited military step related to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, soon became the pivot point upon which much of our subsequent China policy was to turn.

Concurrently, with the hardening of U.S. foreign policy which was aimed at containment of the Chinese Communists, the United States also took steps to isolate the Mainland. In the United Nations the United States was set against Communist China's gaining a seat. In June of 1951 Secretary Acheson declared "that a claimant for seating cannot shoot his way into the U.N. and cannot get in by defying the U.N. and fighting its forces." Another example of this isolating pressure was the use of and the recommendation for the embargo of all trade with Red China.

Thus, by the end of the Korean war American policy towards Communist China was one of sharp opposition and hostility. And, conversely, the Island of Taiwan, which in months preceding the Korean war had been regarded as unessential to the vital interests of the United States, was now elevated to the rank of a crucial strongpoint in the entire U.S. security policy in the Western Pacific.

Indeed, during the political campaign of 1952 and throughout 1953 the determination of who was responsible for the defeat of the Nationalists on the Mainland in 1949 and the rise of communism in China was intensely debated. And in his first State of the Union Message on 2 February 1952 President Eisenhower revised the mission of the Seventh Fleet in the Formosa area:

I am therefore, issuing instructions that the Seventh Fleet no longer be employed to shield Communist China. Permit me to make this crystal clear. This order implies no aggressive intent

on our part. But we certainly have no obligation to protect a nation fighting us in Korea.

Some experts interpreted this to mean that Chiang's forces were to be unleashed, but without U.S. assistance Chiang was helpless. And no assistance was forthcoming. It should be noted, however, that the Seventh Fleet mission "to prevent any attack on Formosa" remained intact. Although no military consequences were derived from President Eisenhower's action, the political consequences were to link us even more closely to the Nationalist Chinese Government.

During 1954 continued efforts were made by U.S. policymakers to increase the pressure on Communist China through tighter containment restrictions and isolation. On 20 July the Geneva Convention was signed which divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel. Although the French Government originally was conducive to a split at the 16th, it was primarily through the influence of Secretary Dulles that the 17th was finally adopted. This action deprived the Communists of control of two major Vietnamese cities — Da Nang and Quang Tri. Also, on 8 September the Southeast Asia Defense Treaty was signed in Manila. SEATO was designed, of course, to stabilize the situation in Southeast Asia and prevent further Communist expansion. Thus a line was drawn which, together with those drawn in South Korea and in the Taiwan Strait, would establish three firm positions on China's periphery that could halt the outward spread of Chinese Communist influence.

At 0145 on 3 September 1954 the Chinese Communists began a heavy artillery shelling of Quemoy Island off the Chinese coast. This incident, in the words of President Eisenhower, "marked the commencement of a sequence of events which was to extend

through nine months, threaten a split between the United States and nearly all of its allies, and seemingly carry the country to the edge of war, thus constituting one of the most serious problems of the first eighteen months of my Administration."

In addition to Formosa and the Pescadores which had returned to Chiang Kai-shek's Government at the end of World War II, the Quemoy and Matsu groups, which were much smaller and much nearer to the Mainland, had been under the control of the Mainland until 1949 when Chiang continued his control from Formosa. He was prepared to defend them with his full strength since he considered an attack on either of the offshore island groups as a prelude to an attack on Formosa and the Pescadores. He also had several other reasons for maintaining control of this real estate.

1. He was convinced that if he lost Quemoy and Matsu his main forces would lose their will to fight.
2. The islands were considered to be stepping stones for the reinvasion of the mainland.
3. They provided sanctuary for guerrilla raids.
4. They tied down Communist troops to a specific locale.
5. They were excellent harassment and blockading points for two major mainland seaports — Amoy and Foochow.

Eisenhower, however, considered that in a technically legal sense the intervention by the United States in a contest over these islands would be intervention in a Chinese civil war. This was the situation on the day of the shelling, which was disturbing although not completely unexpected. Throughout the first part of 1954

Chiang and Chou En-lai had been threatening each other with invasion, and President Rhee had been throwing verbal fuel on the fire by calling for a combined effort by the United States, Nationalist China, and the Republic of Korea in war against Red China. The vested interests of these leaders were obvious, but they did little to relieve international tensions. In an effort to do so, President Eisenhower had kept the Seventh Fleet in a tripwire position in the Formosa Strait to preclude any Chinese Communist invasion of Formosa. The problem was further complicated by the fact that Communist China had about 62 American nationals under detention of which approximately 22 were military. Negotiations to obtain the release of these people had been carried out since 1951 with only marginal results. With these factors impinging upon his considerations, President Eisenhower now faced the question, "What policy should the United States adopt?" Consultations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff brought two factors to light:

1. The offshore islands were not militarily essential to America's capacity to defend Formosa.
2. The Chinese Nationalists could not hold them without American assistance.

President Eisenhower recognized that the defense of the offshore islands through the use of U.S. military force would be an extremely dangerous act of brinkmanship; consequently, he decided to accept Secretary Dulles' recommendation "to take the offshore islands question to the United Nations Security Council with the view of getting there an injunction to maintain the status quo and institute a cease-fire in the Formosa Strait. Whether Russia vetoes or accepts such

a plan, the United States will gain." Subsequently, Secretary Dulles, in consultation with Foreign Minister Eden and the New Zealand High Commissioner, endeavored to get the New Zealand Government to submit the offshore island problem to the Security Council. Chiang objected to this plan since he felt it would endanger his U.N. seat, but Dulles was able to convince him that the possibility of Mao ever agreeing to such a course of action was less than negligible. Other outside influences were also exerting pressure on the President. Prime Minister Clement Attlee wanted to neutralize Formosa but declined to explain what that meant. The Communist Chinese were threatening to execute 13 of the American prisoners which caused Eisenhower serious concern. Internal Congressional pressures for action were also mounting as the Chinese Communists continued their shelling and buildup of forces.

Consequently, as a result of, or perhaps in spite of, these various decision criteria, on 2 December 1954 a Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China was executed. Thus, the sixth treaty was added to the pattern of mutual security arrangements with other friendly and free nations of the Western Pacific. In 1952, treaties had been concluded with the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan. In 1953 a treaty with Korea was signed, and in 1954 the Manila Pact (SEATO) was concluded. The Nationalist Chinese treaty then represented the last link in the chain of containment in Asia. The important provisions of the treaty were Article II — Collective Security — and Article V — Action to Meet a Common Danger. These articles were not only applicable to Formosa and the Pescadores but also to "such other territories as may be determined by mutual agree-

ment." It should be noted that Article V was to be in accordance with constitutional processes. The Senate, in its evaluation of the treaty, was careful to point out:

1. The treaty was to be strictly defensive in nature.
2. The addition of any other territories would require Senate approval.

However, prior to ratification by the Senate, events dictated the rapid formulation and implementation of a strong policy. On 10 January 1955, 100 Communist planes attacked the Nationalist-held Tachen Islands, about 200 miles north of Taiwan. The Island of Ichang was overrun and occupied by Communist troops. President Eisenhower felt it was time to take immediate action without waiting for U.N. sanction or even ratification of the security treaty. And according to President Eisenhower:

The next day I approved the wording of a special message to Congress asking for presidential authority to use American armed force to protect Formosa and the Pescadores and related positions, if necessary, in defense of the principal islands. I resolved that . . . no uncertainty about our commitment to defend Formosa should invite a major Chinese Communist attack.

This proposal, although very similar to the wording in the security treaty, had one serious caveat. That is, Senate approval would no longer be required to determine what territories in addition to Formosa and the Pescadores were to be defended. The advantage to such a situation was that now there was no way that the Chinese Communists could hope to know just where the United States would set the line. Some indication of the forthcoming

U.S. policy relative to the line was given, however. Chiang had been advised through unofficial sources that the United States would not assist in the defense of the Tachens consequently, he voluntarily evacuated those islands rather than waste his resources in a hopeless defense. Assistance in this re-deployment was requested from the U.S. Government so the Seventh Fleet and other U.S. forces were ordered to assist in the operation. The net gain to the Chinese Communist forces was now the Island of Ichang and the Tachens. The message was transmitted to Congress on 24 January, and by 29 January it had passed both bodies. The vote was 410-3 in the House and 83-3 in the Senate. Two weeks later the mutual security treaty was signed by the President after Senate approval.

The Formosa problem finally reached the U.N. Security Council on 28 January 1955 after being introduced by the New Zealand representative; however, Communist China refused to join in the discussions, as predicted by Dulles, and on 14 February 1955 it was dropped, unresolved, from the U.N. agenda.

Although both the Resolution and the Security Treaty were now in effect, both the President and the Secretary of State declined to commit themselves as to what was to be included in "related positions and territories." Significant pressure, both internal and external, was applied to preclude the offshore islands from the definitions. Prime Minister Churchill agreed that Formosa and the Pescadores should be defended but considered that the inclusion of Matsu and Quemoy was too provocative towards the Red Chinese, and he recommended the evacuation of those islands along with the Tachens. Indeed, Chou En-lai considered the resolution to be a "war message" and repeated his determination to liberate not only the

offshore islands but the Pescadores and Formosa as well. External Affairs Secretary Lester Pearson made the announcement that Canada would not fight over the offshore islands. Domestic criticism of the Administration's policy was also forthcoming. Adlai Stevenson had grave misgivings about risking a third world war over these little islands, and Lewis W. Douglas considered that the islands were legally a possession of Red China. However, as time passed, the threat to the offshore islands abated, and by April Chou En-lai stated at the Bandung Conference that "the Chinese people are willing to strive for liberation of Formosa by peaceful means as far as this is possible." By May an informal cease-fire was in effect, and shortly thereafter the Communist Chinese Government started releasing the American prisoners. Throughout the entire incident neither Eisenhower nor Dulles would commit themselves as to whether the United States would or would not interpose if the Communists attacked Quemoy or Matsu although, according to Beal, President Eisenhower did send a private letter to Chiang Kai-shek assuring him that the United States was committed to the offshore island defense.

After 3 years of relative calm in the Formosa area, the Chinese Communists suddenly initiated a heavy artillery bombardment of Quemoy and began harassing the regular supply of the civilian and military population of the Quemoy on 23 August 1958. This event occurred about 3 weeks after a visit to Peiping by Chairman Khrushchev. On 4 September 1958 Secretary Dulles issued a statement which:

1. Reaffirmed the sovereignty of the Nationalist Chinese over Quemoy and Matsu.
2. Restated the increasing importance of Quemoy and Matsu to the defense of Taiwan.



3. Restated the basic tenets of the security treaty and the Formosa Resolution.
4. Indicated the positioning of U.S. forces.
5. Warned the Red Chinese that the United States would use such force if necessary.

On 11 September 1958 President Eisenhower reiterated the points made by Dulles and further stated:

I do not believe that the United States can be either lured or frightened into appeasement. I believe that I am taking the only position that is consistent with the vital interests of the United States and indeed, with the peace of the world.

As in 1954 the Chinese Communists backed off from their threatening position, and relative calm has existed in the area since that time. Whether the shelling by the Red Chinese was a function of their desire to occupy the offshore islands or a manifestation of the communistic sinusoidal hard-line, soft-line policy is unknown. The important difference between the 1954-1955 incident and the 1958 incident was that in the latter there was no question as to the status of the offshore islands. They, like Formosa and the Pescadores, had entered the realm of U.S. vital interests.

In evaluating the Formosa problem for the 1954-1958 time frame, there are several major factors that come to light:

1. The decision to include the offshore islands within the framework of the Formosa Resolution was political vice military; indeed, political considerations overrode those of a military nature.

2. The legal and moral issues of ownership of the offshore islands were not really critical. The islands were in the self-interest of Formosa; Formosa was in the vital interest of the United States; therefore, the offshore islands ended up as a U.S. vital interest.
3. The offshore islands are located at Red China's doorstep and represent serious threats both as stepping stones for invasion and to lines of communications to Amoy and Foochow.
4. The U.N., as well as our allies, was totally ineffective in either resolving the problem or dissuading the United States from its selected course of action.
5. The offshore islands situation does provide a very vulnerable military testing ground for the resolution and consistency of U.S. Asian policy. The 1958 incident may have been such a test.

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### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Comdr. Albert J. Ashurst, U.S. Navy, holds a B.S. in Economics from the Illinois Institute of Technology and is a graduate of the School of Naval Command and Staff, Naval War College. He has served aboard the U.S.S. *Lenawes* (APA-195), U.S.S. *Rankin* (AKA-103), U.S.S. *Fletcher* (DDE-445), commanded U.S.S. *Munsee* (ATF-107), and was Executive Officer of U.S.S. *Rupertus* (DD-851). He also served on the Staffs of Commander First Fleet and Commander in Chief, U.S. Southern Command.

Commander Ashurst is presently assigned to the faculty of the School of Naval Command and Staff, Naval War College.

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6. By keeping our policy flexible, especially in 1954-55, the United States avoided the problems developed by the Acheson defense perimeter concept.

In the final analysis, the United States did fulfill its objectives of containment and isolation with a high degree of success. The secondary objec-

tive of developing a viable and strong Formosa was also attained. Although Davids considers that the offshore islands basically represent hostages subject to the easy exploitation by the Chinese Communists, the net payoff to the United States has been a staunch ally in the form of Nationalist China which represents one of the strongest links in the Asian chain of containment.

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We must consult our means rather than our wishes; and not endeavor to better our affairs by attempting things, which, for want of success may make them worse.

*George Washington: To LaFayette, 1780*