



Table Top Exercise 2020: Security in Northeast Asia

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Summary and Purpose of the Tabletop Exercise

The tabletop exercise (TTX) was held using WEBEX on November 20, 2020, and was a follow up to the TTX 2019. The main topic for all the delegations was how each of the countries would deal with an aggressive Chinese move against Taiwan and/or Taiwanese territories. There was also commentary about the risk that an attack by China could spill over to Japan or to Japan's islands in the Ryukyu chain (which is a major chokepoint at the Miyako strait's Bashi channel, also known as the Kerama Gap) and discussion of whether, in the case of an attack by China aimed at Taiwan (including US bases in Japan, Okinawa, and elsewhere), China would persuade North Korea to launch a "diversionary" attack on South Korea in order to tie down the transfer of US assets (air forces, ground troops).

How the Exercise Was Organized

The global meeting included teams from the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, with a Red team playing the part of China. In all, there were 22 participants. The TTX took place over a 2.5-hour period. On the whole, the electronic connections and quality were very good.

Exercise Findings

Many different observations and perspectives were offered. Here are the main points:

1. All agreed that China has grown dramatically stronger militarily and by now is the strongest player along the area of the First Island Chain.
2. Some thought that China's growth in military power would result in China dominating the region at some point unless balanced by a strong US and US-allies posture.
3. Particular attention was given to Chinese alleged carrier-killer missiles, DF-21D, and its impact on the US ability to deploy aircraft carriers strategically to aid Taiwan, Japan, or both.
4. The parties discussed that the United States is essentially a status-quo power or is playing a different role in the region. A status-quo power, as described by Hans J. Morgenthau in his seminal book *Politics Among Nations*, describes three uses of power, which are (a) status quo (b) imperialism and (c) prestige. Following this taxonomy, China seeks to use power to gain prestige and using various forms of imperialism to obtain prestige and strengthen its power. Measures used by China include economic imperialism through the Belt and Road Initiative and the new Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, ostensibly of the ASEAN countries but in reality China dominated; market access and trade deals; and, when there are opportunities, seizing territory, like in the South China Sea. Recently China attacked fishermen at sea in the areas off the coast of Vietnam and the Philippines and is claiming the Paracel Islands, which contain oil deposits. China started oil drilling in the disputed area on May 2, 2020, and the confrontation with fishing boats began at the same time as part of China's effort to seek by conquest the areas where there are counter sovereignty claims.

A status-quo power, by contrast, seeks to maintain and exploit its geopolitical, economic, military, and political advantages. However, at the TTX, there was pushback on the concept that the US was a status-quo power per se. Instead the proposition was advanced that the US posture in the region promotes liberal democracy against Chinese party dictatorship, that it supports human rights, and that US actions are revolutionary rather than exploitative and benefit each country and their people. The TTX generally backed the idea and supported the importance of advancing liberal democracy and human rights as the bedrock of the allied position.
5. Concern about the US was advanced in the shadow of China's growing power and some loss of confidence among the allies. It was generally asserted that the US needs to do more to strengthen confidence.

6. All three delegations from Asia did make clear that all have strong trade relations with China. Korea said that today China is Korea's main trading partner. However, three caveats were tabled regarding China's strong trade relations. (a) China is not energy independent and depends on importing energy from outside. On the other hand, the US is energy independent and is exporting energy. This means that in any extended crisis China would face difficulty in supporting its domestic infrastructure and sustain economic activity. (b) In regard to China threatening trade relations with any of the Asian participants—Taiwan, Korea, or Japan—the participants did not think that China could do so without causing serious harm to itself and trampling on its natural industry and trade supporters in these countries. (c) None of the participants saw growing trade as giving China influence over national security decisions.
7. The US made the point that American policy has consistently offered its commitment to its allies and undertaken the role of creating stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The group all agreed that the primary threat in the region was China.
8. There were strong comments by the Japanese team that the US should lead and strengthen its military cooperation and coordination, especially in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance. The suggestion was made that the best way to improve cooperation and coordination was by the US military leading the effort. It appears that while there is selective cooperation with the individual countries by the US, a major missing piece was the lack of a cooperative enterprise in the US with the others participating. This idea was not filled out in the conversation, but it seems that what is wanted is a full-time coordinated command that would operate on US soil but in the “background” to assure continuous information sharing. By framing this cooperation in the “background,” a command center could rapidly add other functions, including tactical decision-making based on knowledge of emerging threats.

The Japanese delegation's suggestion for US-led coordinated ISR was supported by the US, South Korean, and Taiwan teams.

The key issue is how to cooperate with Taiwan in an acceptable way for all the parties to strengthen the overall capability of all the parties, both to resist aggression and to enhance deterrence.

9. Taiwan explained how it would respond to an actual invasion scenario. Taiwan will upgrade its combat readiness level, its Chien Lung class submarine would immediately leave port and enter waters where it could ambush Chinese combatants, the Navy's surface fleet would move immediately to the designated combat area; the Air Force would launch early-warning aircraft and perform battlefield surveillance and early-warning missions over the eastern waters of Taiwan. Taiwan would move its mobile radars to tactical positions, and Taiwan's Army ground troops in Taiwan and on Taiwan's sensitive islands [Penghu, Kinmen (Quemoy), and Matsu] would fully deploy. Taiwan's naval forces would be able to make use of shore-based missiles and air-launched harpoons against a Chinese naval force. The degree of potential coordination between Taiwan's military and Japan's Self Defense Force and the US Pacific Command is not known.

The Taiwan delegation pointed out that it has an elected government based on a fully democratic system.

Taiwan's delegation said the island is open to foreign basing (e.g., the US, Japan) if a request is made.

After the TTX, there was news that Rear Admiral Michael Studeman, the top US intelligence official in the US Indo-Pacific Command had visited Taiwan. While no details of the visit have been provided, it appears that the purpose of the visit was improved intelligence cooperation. This reinforces the TTX proposal that the US should coordinate intelligence sharing with Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

10. All the parties supported the importance of cooperation where US bases were involved but stressed that requests from the US would have to be approved by their respective political echelons.
11. The parties agreed that Chinese aggression against Taiwan would be harmful to Japanese and South Korean security and most thought that the US would respond to any actual attacks on Taiwan.
12. The parties were not strongly interested in China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea, although there was support for freedom of navigation exercises that were deemed important to all.
13. The South Korean parties pointed out that they have to defend against a nuclear North Korea, a major concern. While the China delegation suggested that China might persuade its North Korean friend to launch diversionary attacks on South Korea in the case of a Taiwan invasion, the probability for such a diversionary attack seemed low for two reasons: (a) China's influence over North Korea is limited; (b) the North Koreans still hope to reach an agreement with the United States and would not want to sacrifice that chance for normalization.
14. One of the outside experts pointed out that China's nuclear doctrine was more and more ambiguous. The same can be said of the US, which has canceled the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Agreement with Russia. INF directly impacts China because the US now has the ability to develop and deploy weapons in this category that can challenge China (and Russia). China, of course, is not a party to any nuclear agreement and has steadfastly refused to participate in such measures. The Commander of the US Strategic Command, Admiral Charles A. Richard, recently said that the US "must massively 'revise' its nuclear weapons-oriented 21st-Century Strategic Deterrence Theory to reinvigorate its arsenal of current and future weapons of mass destruction as a way to stay in front of fast-modernizing rivals."
15. There was some discussion of deploying US forces to Taiwan either during a crisis scenario (e.g., a Chinese land invasion) or to strengthen deterrence and prevent a Chinese attack from materializing. This discussion was not conclusive.
16. At the same time, there was agreement that China will continue to try and push back the United States and try to undermine US resolve to respond to threats launched by the Chinese side. The participants did not forecast any major change in the US posture regarding China with the new US administration.
17. The participants argued that once COVID-19 conditions improved, an actual TTX with more in-depth war games would be very helpful in identifying military and political issues and ways to improve deterrence.

Results of the Exercise 2020

The TTX does not make direct recommendations to governments. The information developed in the TTX will be passed on to individual governments by the delegations in whatever manner they choose, along with whatever recommendations each delegation wishes to convey. All the participants expressed the view that this second TTX was also very successful, even though it was not a real TTX, but that there is great need for and interest in holding a follow-up TTX to continue and deepen this process.

Agreements Between TTX Participants and Hudson Institute

The participants agreed with Hudson Institute not to include the names of TTX members or their remarks in any official Hudson report or summary. They also agreed to allow each team to inspect those publications and attach their own reports.

Appendix: Questions for Players

Subjects & Questions to the US

1. The US continues to conduct FONOPS (Freedom of Navigation operations) in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, but these have no effect on Chinese behavior--unlike in 1986/1987. How will we respond when they see that FONOPS has little or no deterrent effect?
2. Intelligence reveals that China is preparing to attack Taiwan at the north (Miyako Strait) AND south end of the island (Bashi channel). How does Taiwan respond? How do the US, Japan, ROK respond?
3. What actions can we anticipate from China around the world as tensions escalate in the SCS/Taiwan Strait?
4. Anticipating a large increase in Chinese aggressiveness, what can the US/Japan do to deter China and divert it if a war begins? In other words, how can we take the offensive instead of waiting to respond to Chinese aggression?
5. How prepared is Japan, ROK, Taiwan to counter a Chinese threat - by this it means what is the actual state of the defenses, the capability to counter different kinds of Chinese attacks (missiles, aircraft, sea invasion, commandos, etc)
6. Can the US move forward on bases in Taiwan?
7. Can the US Congress (maybe with the under the table support of the administration) pass legislation requiring a defense pact with Taiwan?
8. Are we coming to the end of the Pax Americana in Asia?

Subjects & Questions to Taiwan:

1. Will China set up an alternative Taiwan government on the mainland (sort of government in "exile") and say the alternative is the real (provincial) government of Taiwan.
 - a. What are the implications if Taiwan collapses and installs a pro-Chinese government (without any election)?

2. Will China close down Taiwanese companies operating in China — what is the economic impact, political impact?
3. Intelligence reveals that China is preparing to attack Taiwan at the north (Miyako Strait) AND south end of the island (Bashi channel). How does Taiwan respond? How do the US and Japan respond?
4. What "grey zone" tactics can we reasonably expect from China as regional tensions increase?
5. What actions can we anticipate from China around the world as tensions escalate in the SCS/Taiwan Strait?
6. Can the US move forward on bases in Taiwan?
7. Is the US coming to the end of the Pax Americana in Asia?
8. The replenishing of the NPM treasures into the empty Palace in Beijing is critical for the revolution of the CCP to complete. How Taiwan use the NPM treasures against Beijing?

Subjects & Questions to Japan:

1. Will Japan allow the US to use bases to support Taiwan as the frontline base, including logistics?
2. What connected operations they can take?
3. How about their preparation today for the conflict. Understanding, recognition
4. Will they receive refugees from Taiwan. And will they send airplanes or ships to transport them?
5. If China tries to take the Ryukyu Islands for keeping their command of the air and sea for the conflict or even a long term their strategy. What Japan will do.
6. How prepared is Japan, ROK, Taiwan to counter a Chinese threat - by this it means what is the actual state of the defenses, the capability to counter different kinds of Chinese attacks (missiles, aircraft, sea invasion, commandos, etc)

7. If the Japanese government will be able to make their decision prompt or need some strong pressure from Washington.
 8. How likely is it Japan will try and stay neutral in any conflict?
 9. Intelligence reveals that China is preparing to attack Taiwan at the north (Miyako Strait) AND south end of the island (Bashi channel). How does Taiwan respond? How do the US, Japan, ROK respond?
 10. How to defense and respond to a missile attack from the DPRK?
 11. Is the US coming to the end of the Pax Americana in Asia?
- Subjects & Questions to ROK:**
1. Will allow the US to use bases to support Taiwan as the frontline base, including logistics?
 2. What connected operations they can take?
 3. Will they receive refugees from Taiwan. And will they send airplanes or ships to transport them?
 4. How likely is it ROK will try and stay neutral in any conflict?
 5. Intelligence reveals that China is preparing to attack Taiwan at the north (Miyako Strait) AND south end of the island (Bashi channel). How does Taiwan respond? How do the US, Japan, ROK respond?
 6. How prepared is Japan, ROK, Taiwan to counter a Chinese threat - by this it means what is the actual state of the defenses, the capability to counter different kinds of Chinese attacks (missiles, aircraft, sea invasion, commandos, etc)
 7. Is the US coming to the end of the Pax Americana in Asia?
 8. Will it function properly in the future with the negotiation on OPCON/CFC/USFK today?
 9. What will be the threat of DPRK?



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