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'One-China Principle': Taiwan The Missing Link
A Threat Analysis of a Military Conflict in the
Taiwan Strait

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Introduction

Taiwan has been transformed from a neglected unsettled frontier into a prosperous democratic nation of 23 million people. Prior to the transformation, control over the island has passed through the hands of succession masters, ranging from the Dutch colonizers to the Han Chinese pioneers, the Manchu officials and the Japanese imperialists. It was only in 1945 that the island reverted to Chinese control under the Republic of China government. Subsequent to this reversion, China itself was divided by a Civil War into two parts: the capitalist Republic of China on Taiwan and the Communist regime of the People's Republic of China on Chinese mainland. Ever since, the two sides face each other across the narrow Taiwan Strait in a tense confrontation marked by hostility and distrust. This thesis examines the cross-Strait relations between Taiwan and the Peoples' Republic of China, specifically on the notion of the 'one-China' principle where both Taiwan and Mainland China advocate that they are part of one state. While the notion of the 'one-China' principle has been the subject of different interpretations, in recent times there has been an erosion of this principle on the part of Taiwan creating a sense of uncertainty to international security. The result of which gave rise to the threat of the possibility of a military conflict between China and Taiwan. The paper seeks to analyse such a threat and examine the rationale behind the gradual erosion of the principle. What is the strategic significance of this erosion? There follows a critical examination of the subject of sovereignty and security, the two main issues that formed the substance of the dispute. What is the likelihood of the risk of military confrontation? Lastly, what are the current political developments and the outlook.

The thesis comprises of four chapters. In the first chapter, the paper examines an overall historical view to demonstrate the mainline of the evolution of the Taiwan and China relationship. It examines the significant move by Taiwan away from the 'one-China' principle. The chapter will further examine what prompted this erosion of the principle; why is Taiwan so important to China; what is China's response to this gradual erosion of the 'one-China' principle; how does the US react to the cross-Strait relations, and lastly, how does this affect US-China relations.

In the second chapter, this paper seeks to examine the two main issues that formed the substance of the dispute between Taiwan and China, that of sovereignty and security. The paper will explore in detail the concept of sovereignty and the idea of statehood, and how these two relate to the dispute. Is there a case for Taiwan? This chapter will also look at the controversial legal question as to which legal entity exercise *de jure* sovereignty over Taiwan. Following this, we will look at the security dilemma that both Taiwan and Mainland China are locked into rendering these substantive issues even more difficult to resolve. The sense of fear and mistrust traps both Taiwan and China in international relations. The insecurity dilemma aggravates the proliferation of advanced weaponry systems on both sides.

In the third chapter, the paper looks at the risk of military confrontation and analysis the threat of a possible conflict. This chapter examines both China's and Taiwan's military postures. What are the contingencies of a cross-strait conflict? It follows on to examine both forces' readiness and their strategies.

The paper will also examine the United States military posture in the region and its strategy towards the defense of Taiwan. The chapter will also briefly look at the analysis of the Anti Secession Law recently passed by China and how it affects the cross-Strait relations. Whilst China reserves its rights to use force against Taiwan, the paper seeks to argue that the constraints on China would make any military option impractical, and on the balance of probability, it is very unlikely that China would avail itself of this option and it would be a no-win situation for China.

In the concluding chapter of this paper, it examines a proposal as a confidence building measure in the Taiwan Strait. It will also look at how the Taiwanese should respond to China's controversial Anti Secession Law. These two measures, although not exhaustive, warrant some form of exploration and consideration in the mitigation of the tensions in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan appears to have adopted similar strategic positions. Finally, the chapter will look at some contemporary factors reshaping politics in the Taiwan Strait and how recent developments have deferred the crisis. To this extent, the paper will examine the latest development in cross Strait relations particularly on the corruption scandal, shelving of the National Unification Council and the Guidelines, the significance of both economic and social integration across the Taiwan Strait. The paper seeks to conclude that China's strategy towards Taiwan is mainly political and not military. The continuing reference to military threats is part of China's broader political strategy. Both have a common interest attracted by the benefits of cross-Strait peace and economic co-operation. Any chance of military confrontation seems low.