



The Change and Development of US Taiwan Policy in the 1950s and KMT's Reaction to It

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The talk traced the historical development of US-Taiwan Policy in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War. Dr. Liu explores the origin and evolution of United States “Hands-off Policy” towards the Koumintang (KMT) in Taiwan. He argued that the “Hands-off Policy” was a result of irreconcilable differences between the US Departments of State and Defence, amidst the emergence of post-war American bi-partisan politics.

US policy towards Taiwan can be traced back to the 1950s. Although the importance of Taiwan and its definition changes in different times, “strategic ambiguity” has always been the core in US-Taiwan policy. As Washington distanced itself from Chiang and his government, the KMT regime adjusted its US policy from relying on the formal channels to using more back or personal channels, including the “China Lobby” in Congress and secret relationships with government officials, military officers and politicians. Many of these tactics are still used by Taipei to maintain the relationship with US today.

Using an array of archival sources from the United States and Taiwan, Dr. Liu tried to deconstruct the complexities of US-Taiwan policy in the critical years of 1949 and 1950, laying emphasis on how and why US policy towards China and Taiwan changed so drastically following the outbreak of the Korean War, and what implications this shift had for the status of Taiwan. Dr. Liu stated Korean War as a key component in the reversal of US-Taiwan policy. He explained the rationale behind Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s “hands off” and “let the dust settle approach” towards the Chinese Civil War, aiming to achieve American objectives by exploiting Sino-Soviet antagonism and carefully avoiding any irredentist issues in US relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) over Taiwan.

Dr. Liu mentioned that during 1949-1950, there was a continuous re-assessment of America’s Taiwan Policy, arguing that post-war Taiwan was not seen as an integral part of US foreign

policy. The Truman government, though a favoured Nationalist government over a Communist regime in Taiwan, (but/and) wanted to keep its role limited to diplomatic assistance, and did not want to provide any military assistance to Chiang. Dr. Liu deconstructed these revisions of US-Taiwan policy, by analysing the internal dynamics of the Truman administration, on differing views between Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defence (DOD), and leading policymakers within the administration towards Taiwan during 1949 and 1950.

Dr. Liu started by analysing Harry S. Truman, arguing that his policy on Taiwan has to be looked amidst the political situation in Post-War American politics, which was emerging to be more and more bi-partisan, and looming Soviet-American divide. Truman, Dr. Liu stated, was amidst an election year, and since he had succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt to become the President (after Roosevelt's demise) this was his first test of public support thus very crucial for him. George Kennan's option of "Chinese Titoism" was rejected owing to the election climate. Military had become weak and its influence in foreign policy had declined. Truman's administration was not in favour of Chiang, as they felt that despite assistance, Chiang had lost the Civil War.

Dr. Liu further looks at the Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defence (DOD) to analyse their bifurcating views on United States' China Policy. He argued that while DOD favoured military assistance for Chiang, the DOS with George Marshall and Dean Acheson, who were close to Truman, wanted to maintain status quo on China Policy, especially with elections being in focus. The China Policy was dominated by the DOS, as the military had weakened.

Post American presidential elections, there was pressure on the Truman administration to reverse the "hands-off policy" and adhere to necessary means to prevent the Chinese Communist from crossing the Taiwan Strait. But, Acheson, who was part of the DOS, and a channel to Truman, manoeuvred through the challenges to maintain his non-intervention policy towards China and Taiwan. Sensing the collapse of the KMT, Acheson refused to bow down to the pressure, as he wanted to explore the possibility of accommodation with the PRC and take advantage of fictions between Beijing and Moscow.

On the other side of the globe, the polarization of the war was beginning to form alliances and structure. The situation was deteriorating in China, and George Kennan's "the X-article / "Long Telegram", saw Soviet Russia as the prime threat while there was a widening gap between Soviet Bloc and Communist China. Japan was emerging as the centre to defend East Asia against Soviet expansion. Post-elections, Truman decided to make a public announcement in order to explain US-China Policy to the American public, owing to "good-timing".

Chiang on the other hand, was losing ground in Taiwan, where he was facing the Taiwan Independence Movement, which saw the KMT's rule as an invasion itself. Chiang also feared a Chinese Communist invasion, owing to fragile situation in Taiwan. The nationalist government was desperate for American support, and decided to garner support in American media for Taiwan, through propaganda. Chiang also tried using his connections at the DOD, to influence Truman's administration. Madame Chiang Kai-Shek also visited America as part of the Chiang's plan.

George Marshall, on the other hand, understood that there was no public support for KMT among American public and even in Taiwan. The Truman administration decided that no higher military liaison officers will be sent and economic assistance too shall be limited. DOS had asked Joint Chief of Staffs (JCS) to evaluate Taiwan's strategic importance; the JCS concluded that Taiwan was a wartime American base and a major source of food and supplies for Japan, which was emerging as a strategic point for restricting the Soviet wave in Asia.

The Truman administration had no faith in Chiang or Taiwan Independence Movement, but sought to rely on Provincial Governor Cheng Chen, who interestingly was a close aide of Chiang. The Americans had decided to formulate a flexible policy, owing to the uncertainty of the Chinese situation to: a) support a non-communist Chinese government on Taiwan, b) support Taiwanese Autonomous Movement or c) encourage the Philippines to propose non-strategic trusteeship to UN.

The US did not want the situation in Taiwan to get out of control, but they did not want Chiang in control either. The DOD, though had other views on Taiwan, Pentagon wanted military cooperation with Chiang's Army, to relocate the Qingdao Base US Forces to Taiwan and maintain Taiwan through cooperation with KMT. While the DOS, feared that American troops on Taiwan will stir up nationalism in China and also provide incentives for KMT officials to flee to Taiwan. DOS wanted US to consider taking unilateral military action. Dean Acheson wanted the United States to "avoid military and political support of any non-communist regimes in China" unless they are "willing to actively resist communism" or this kind of support would "mean the overthrow of...the Communists. (NSC 34/2)".

The start of the Korean War, forced the United States to abandon its "hands-off policy", and intervene, changing the dynamics of the US –China-Taiwan policy.

The talk was followed by a discussion session on various issues concerning the US –Taiwan relations during the 1950's and also in contemporary times. The issues from the 228 incident, Taiwan's reason to maintain a large army, and Taiwan's 2016 presidential elections were also discussed.

About the Speaker

Roger Chifeng Liu is an Assistant Professor and the Director of the Centre for Asia-Pacific Security Studies at JSIA. Professor Liu earned his Ph.D. in political science from University of South Carolina. His research interests span political geography, geopolitics/geoeconomics, interstate/intrastate conflicts, geographic/quantitative IR methodology and governments and politics of East Asia countries. Professor Liu's latest research project based on his doctoral research, "The Geography of Conflict: Using GIS to Analyse Israel's External and Internal Conflict Systems (co-authored with Harvey Starr and G. Dale Thomas)," is published as a chapter in *The Israeli Conflict System: Analytic Approaches* by Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group in 2015.

Dr. Liu had worked for major foreign policy think tanks in Taiwan as research fellows before he earned his Ph.D. He had also worked as a political reporter covering foreign affairs and China policy for major Chinese and English newspapers in Taiwan. His research papers and news reports have been referred and used by different government departments and agencies for policy analysis and implementation. Professor Liu is currently also a correspondent

research fellow with the Center for Globalization and Peace Research, Soochow University, Taiwan.

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