

China might not win attack, but Taiwan needs to spend more on defense



Military drills in Taiwan. (By Associated Press)

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) – An eventual military attack by China against Taiwan would not necessarily end with a victory for Beijing, but the island needs to step up its military spending, according to an op-ed piece in the Washington Post.

In the article “Can China really take over Taiwan?,” former Post correspondent in Beijing John Pomfret considers recent theories that China has given up on the peaceful unification option and might be preparing for a military assault, according to some as early as 2020.

The writer notes the recent escalation in Chinese military drills close to the island, with air force jets and navy vessels entering Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone. On Wednesday, President Xi Jinping (習近平) told his military to be “battle ready,” while earlier, a Chinese diplomat based in Washington warned against the U.S. sending Navy ships into Taiwanese harbors, which a new law allows it to do.

The recent tension is “a reminder that the island democracy ... remains a center of gravity in East Asia,” but it also raises the question of whether China is able to take over the island, Pomfret says.

The view that China’s rise will never end and that it is therefore unavoidable that it will “absorb” Taiwan has recently come under some criticism, according to the Washington Post article.

The author notes the shift in public support inside Taiwan for eventual unification with China, with Beijing’s combination of threats and blandishments, including the opening of tourism, failing to work.

Economic action by China against Taiwanese investments would be painful but would backfire and cause resentment, Pomfret quotes Denny Roy of the East-West

Center in Honolulu as saying.

A blockade of the island amounted to an act of war which would damage China's own economy and its international standing, while even an outright military invasion might not work, according to Michael Beckley, political science professor at Tufts University.

Crossing the Taiwan Strait to land on the island would pose the biggest problem, Beckley says, with eight U.S. submarines likely to sink 40 percent of the amphibious invasion force with the possibility of one submarine lost.

Reaching Taiwan would be hard considering the island has "an advanced early warning system, along with coastal artillery, state-of-the-art mines and anti-ship missile batteries. Taiwan also has the capacity to rapidly move its force of 150,000 and only 10 percent of Taiwan's shoreline is suitable for amphibious landings," says Pomfret, mentioning Beckley's views.

However, as China continues to spend on its military modernization, Taiwan's spending also needs to go up, the former Washington Post correspondent concludes.

The Taiwanese government said it wants to hike the defense budget by 3 percent a year, but "the United States wants Taiwan to double its defense expenditures soon," Pomfret says Trump Administration officials told him.

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