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Original draft

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

File

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM No. 249

15 November 1949

SUBJECT: The Communist Threat to Taiwan

as received from FE

1. Summary

The principal military threat to the Nationalist position on Taiwan comes from Communist forces on the mainland. This threat is enhanced by the inherent basic weaknesses of the Nationalist establishment on the island; the same basic weaknesses which contributed so heavily to the Nationalist collapse on the China mainland. The anti-Nationalist feeling among the Taiwanese, while detracting from the ability of the present regime to resist a Communist operation against the island, lacks the leadership, organization, and armed strength necessary to overthrow the Nationalists. Communist infiltration of the island, both among the disaffected native population and Nationalist armed forces, is proceeding, but in itself is probably not strong enough to unseat the Nationalist regime. Although the Communist mainland forces are capable of assaulting Taiwan at any time during the coming winter months, a major Communist effort probably will not occur before March, by which time the Communists are expected to have completed certain preliminary operations such as the capture of the Chushan Islands, the securing, in a military sense, of East China, and the massing of sufficient forces, supplies and transport of the Fukien coast. In the face of such a major Communist assault, compounded by the effects of native disaffection and Communist infiltration, the Nationalist probably could not hold the island.

2. Nationalist Forces on Taiwan

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Nationalist ground forces on Taiwan number well over 100,000 and are supported by an air force of approximately 250 operational aircraft, a navy with about 50 combat ships afloat, and an armored force of over 200 tanks. The navy and air force suffer from shortages of fuel and spare parts, but the ground forces have adequate stocks of weapons and equipment. The weakness of the Nationalists arises from divergence of purpose, lack of will to fight, tendency toward defection, the ineptitude which resulted in their defeats on the mainland, and Communist infiltration.

3. Communist Forces for an Assault on Taiwan

The Communists are committed to taking Taiwan and have already assigned the 400,000-strong force of CHEN Yi to the task. CHEN's forces have had some amphibious experience — but they have not yet faced problems comparable to those involved in an assault upon Taiwan. They have the capability of concentrating and equipping a force of sufficient size to assault the island. The major obstacle to the Communists is the Taiwan Strait, which ranges in width from 75 miles in its northern part to over 200 in the south. The crossing would in all likelihood be made by a junk armada which the Communists are already assembling. These junks, some of which have auxiliary motor power, may be supplemented by elements of the Communist navy, made up of ex-Nationalist ships and men.

4. Weather Conditions

During the coming winter and spring months, weather in the Taiwan Strait, which could be a controlling factor, will not, except for sporadic gales, preclude a crossing. Strong favorable winds continue through the winter.

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With spring the velocity of the winds diminishes, and there are recurring periods of low visibility which would facilitate undetected crossings.

5. The Probable Course of the Campaign for Taiwan

During the period of favorable winds, junks under sail power alone could cross the strait in about 30 hours. Motorpowered junks and vessels of the Communist navy could cross under cover of darkness and disembark advance elements to establish a beachhead in anticipation of the arrival of the main junk-borne force. Nationalist defenses appear to be organized upon three key, or control, points from which they hope to meet any Communist threat with flexible counteraction. However, the launching of the Communist operation against Taiwan will probably precipitate native uprisings, Communist-inspired sabotage, and Nationalist defections. The cumulative effect of a continuing flow of Communist re-enforcements, the disruptive actions of the native Taiwanese, and the weaknesses inherent in the Nationalist military establishment makes it likely that the Communists can control Taiwan 90 days after the first landing.

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Project: IM-249

OFFICE OF REPORTS AND ESTIMATES

Project Initiation Memorandum

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Date: 7 Nov 49

To: D/FE

Publications

From: ~~State Intelligence~~ Division, Projects Planning REL

Subject: Probable developments in Taiwan

Statement of Project

Origin: Interdepartmental Coordinating Staff (Norberg)

Problem: To provide a current estimate on probable developments in Taiwan

Scope: The request stems from plans to place a USIE unit on Taiwan, and seeks information which would relate to the safety and ability of personnel to carry out functions there. Particular interest is centered on the timing of anticipated events, such as communist attack, internal collapse, etc.

A brief estimate is requested.

Graphics (if any):

Form: IM memorandum

Draft due in D/St: 15 Nov 49

Dissemination deadline (if any):

Responsible Branch: D/FE

Internal Coordination: None

Departmental responsibilities: None

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AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 24 Jan 50 REVIEWER: 006514

Classification to be no higher than: Secret

Recommended Dissemination: Requester only, plus DCI, IAC

Note that requester's copy should be forwarded thru OCD, ref. attached CD No. 7767.1.

Back slip attached.

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