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NSC BRIEFING

27 May 1954

CURRENT CHINESE COMMUNIST CAMPAIGN
IN THE TACHENS AREA

I. Background

- A. Northern group of Nationalist-held islands off southeast coast of China is centered on Tachen Islands, 28°-30' North.
- B. Between 1949 and spring 1953 Communist forces occupied a few islands of this northern group evacuated by Nationalist forces, occupied certain undefended islands near Nationalist-held islands of this group, and captured one Nationalist-garrisoned island.
- C. In May and June 1953 Communist forces occupied 13 islands of northern group, later abandoning three of these. Two of islands abandoned at that time, Kinmen and Tienao, are among the four or five islands occupied by Communist forces in the past two weeks.

II. Current Off-shore Island Clashes

- A. Since 15 May Communists have occupied at least four and possibly five islands within 20 miles of Tachens. These are Kinmen, Toumenshan, Tienao, Shihtan, and perhaps Tungchi.

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- B. Naval and air activity by both sides has been on a larger scale than in previous clashes. Late reports indicate that Nationalist forces are becoming less aggressive, presumably as result of losses to stronger Communist forces.
- C. Nationalist reports, probably exaggerated, claim three Communist vessels have been sunk and at least four damaged. Nationalist fighters (F-47's) are said to have shot down one MIG-15, damaged two others.
- D. Nationalists have admitted severe damage to two of their destroyer escorts and two planes. Actual naval and air losses are probably higher than stated.
- E. There are reports of Communist troop concentrations in coastal cities of Chekiang province, opposite Tachens, of the massing of 21 LST's at Shanghai, of concentration of 1,000 Communist junks within 35 miles of Tachens, and of intensified Communist air reconnaissance and patrols in area.

III. Communist Capabilities Against Tachens

- A. Communist strength in East China is more than sufficient to capture Tachens at any time.

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- B. Communists have between 250,000 and 320,000 troops in East China, many of whom have seen action in Korea. Of this strength, approximately 150,000 troops are between Shanghai and Foochow.
- C. Communists have nine air divisions in East China, mostly at Shanghai and Hangchow. These include 125-150 jet fighters, 125 conventional fighters, and 75 conventional light bombers. Other jet fighters and conventional light and medium bombers are based in interior within range of Tachens.
- D. Communists have stationed along East China coast at least five frigates, 50 motor torpedo boats, six gunboats and about 40 LST's and LSM's, as well as hundreds of armed junks.

IV. Nationalist Strength in Tachens

- A. Ground forces include 10,000 regular troops, mostly of 46th Division, one of Taipei's best, and 5,000 guerrilla troops. Other guerrilla troops on nearby islands number 3,000 to 4,000. Combat status excellent, but vulnerable to Communist air attack and seaborne invasion at night.

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- B. Naval forces include two destroyer escorts (replacing two others badly damaged in battle on 15-16 May) and about ten small patrol craft. Naval forces vulnerable to Communist air attack. In first few days of operations, navy showed surprising aggressiveness, but lack of friendly air support has led to decline in aggressiveness.
 - C. Air support is provided by Formosa-based conventional fighters (F-47's), far from a match for Communist jets.
 - D. Nationalist Ministry of Defense on Formosa has promised all-out effort to reinforce land, sea and air forces to protect Tachens if invasion comes. Air forces will have to continue to operate from Formosa, additional ground forces would be shipped from Formosa, and naval reinforcements would come from two destroyers, three destroyer escorts and about 100 patrol craft now at Formosa.
- V. Nationalist Response to Current Campaign
- A. Tachen Island command is preparing to withstand attack and has expressed confidence in its ability to hold Tachens.

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- B. Ministry of National Defense in Taipei has blown hot and cold. Early statements predicted imminent amphibious attack on Tachens with coordinated air attacks on Formosa. Later statements assert that situation is "not critical."
- C. Tachen Command expects invasion of two other islands nearby. One is located to south of Tachens, and invasion could signal Communist plan to cut supply lines from Formosa, thus isolating Tachen garrison.
- D. Taipei requested on 6 April, before the current island campaign began, that U. S. 7th Fleet protection be extended to include all Nationalist-held off-shore islands. General Chase, chief of the American military advisory group on Formosa, recommended at that time that such protection be extended without delay. So far as we know, the request has not been answered; earlier press reports indicating that it had been answered in the negative are believed to have been false.
- E. Nationalists may choose to remove crack 46th Division from Tachens, rather than risk its loss, if U. S. protection not extended.

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VI. Significance of Tachens

- A. Valuable listening post, as intelligence on Communist activity in East China is collected regularly by Tachen-based guerrillas who raid mainland.
- B. Strategically located 230 miles north of Formosa, Tachens could provide advance warning of Communist air and sea attacks on Formosa and other islands to south.
- C. Limited offensive base for Nationalists to conduct sea and air operations against Communist shipping, naval and air activity in coastal area. This capability has not been fully exploited to date due to vulnerability of Tachens to Communist air power and difficulty in providing logistic and tactical support.
- D. Tachens not of strategic importance to Communists, but successful Communist assault would enhance Peiping's prestige and reduce prestige of Nationalists and U. S. Chou En-lai recently stated at Geneva that American "occupation" of Formosa "cannot be tolerated." As Communists are unable to take Formosa, they may be willing to pay price of taking Tachens in order to give some substance to their threat.