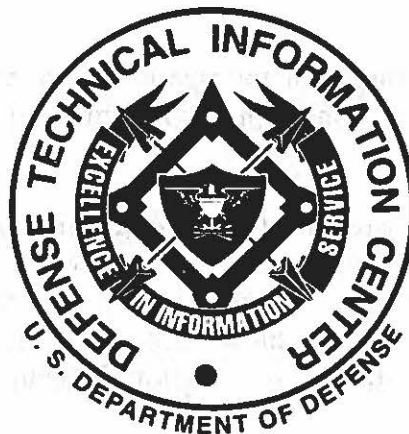


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MEMORANDUM

RM-4803-ISA

JANUARY 1966

**THE 1958 TAIWAN STRAITS CRISIS:
AN ANALYSIS (U)**

M. H. Halperin

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PREFACE

This study, undertaken by RAND for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs), represents an attempt to enlarge our knowledge of crisis management and the control of limited war situations.

The present edition of the study is a condensation that offers an annotated but compressed chronology of events together with an analysis of the Taiwan Straits crisis and of its lessons for those concerned with crisis management. The detailed history of this crisis has been reserved for another publication, now in preparation, which will offer a unique collection of data gleaned from a great variety of sources, official and otherwise.

The study focuses primarily on American decision-making and America's relations with its Chinese Nationalist allies simply because of the relative scarcity of materials on Chinese Communist decision making and on Sino-Soviet relations.

Many of the data for this study, particularly on Communist behavior, come from unclassified sources, including Western and Communist newspapers and Communist radio broadcasts. In addition, the author has examined U.S. government classified files in various agencies in Washington, including the Department of State and Office of the Secretary of Defense. He has also consulted materials at CINCPAC headquarters and the Taiwan Defense Command in Taipei, as well as unclassified material in the Dulles collection at Princeton University. Most of the American decision makers involved in the crisis

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have been personally interviewed. Their request for anonymity has been honored. The interviews were relied upon mainly to recall moods and impressions during the crisis and, where possible, to fill gaps in the story whenever the documents themselves were incomplete. As is generally the case, the memories of those interviewed were sometimes hazy as to the details of what had taken place.

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SUMMARY

Apart from its historical interest, the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1958 is rich in implications for those involved in crisis management. It points up, for example, the troublesome problem of assessing the political costs of giving up territory that has little or no military value. The difficulty of this assessment led the United States in 1958 to "play it safe" by overemphasizing the consequences of losing Quemoy to the Chinese Communists.

For both Peking and Washington, of course, the real issue was not the fate of Quemoy but the future of Taiwan. United States policy on Quemoy and other off-shore islands was not at first clear to the Chinese. The Communists therefore embarked on a probing operation to test the strength of the U.S. commitment to defend Quemoy. In response to Communist pressure, the United States took the line that Taiwan's security depended on the retention of Quemoy. This position encouraged the Nationalist leadership to hope for larger-scale U.S. action in support of their aims.

Although the Chinese Nationalist government failed to draw the United States into a major military confrontation with the Communist mainland, it did succeed to a surprising degree in influencing U.S. policy. This tendency was offset to some extent by the skill with which local U.S. military leaders exercised for political ends the authority delegated to them by the civil administration in Washington.

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Contrary to the opinions of some scholars, the Taiwan crisis does not provide incontestable evidence of a clash between Moscow and Peking. Indeed, it was probably one of the last instances of close Sino-Soviet cooperation in international political maneuvering.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful to those public officials, both retired and still on active duty, who took time from their busy schedules to discuss with him the events of the Quemoy crisis with which they were connected.

Acknowledgment should also be made to officials who made available to the author the files in which much of this research was done. The author is particularly indebted to Mr. Jacob van Staaveren, who had written a previous study of the 1958 crisis for the Air Force Historical Office and generously shared with the author his knowledge of the crisis and sources of documentation. Finally the author wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance received from a large number of people at RAND. Any attempt to mention all of those who have commented in one form or another on various drafts or who have otherwise assisted in the study would produce a very long list. However, special mention should be made of Alexander George, who read the manuscript at an early point in its development and provided the author with a large number of extremely keen insights that have helped substantially to shape the final product.

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The islands which came under attack in August 1958 are referred to by the Chinese Nationalists, as well as by the American military, as the "Kinmen Islands." However, in accordance with the Department of State, OSD, and general public usage, the term "Quemoy" is employed throughout the study. The Quemoy Island chain consists of Big Quemoy, Little Quemoy, Ta-tan, Erh-tan, and several smaller islands. The term "Quemoy" is used to refer both to the single island of Big Quemoy and to the entire island chain. The reader should have no difficulty in determining in context what is meant. The government which controls Taiwan and the Offshore Islands is called the Government of the Republic of China (GRC), the term frequently used, particularly within the Department of State. Its more common public designation, the Chinese Nationalists, is also employed. The government controlling the mainland of China is spoken of simply as the Chinese Communists or, when quoting Communist sources, as the People's Republic of China (PRC). Other abbreviations and designations used are spelled out the first time they appear in the text.

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I. THE CRISIS IN BRIEF

The first sign of a possible crisis in the Taiwan Straits came on June 30, 1958, when the Chinese Communists demanded a resumption of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks. The first military action came in late July in the form of air clashes over the Taiwan Straits and the Chinese mainland. During July the Chinese Nationalists began to anticipate a Communist move against the Offshore Islands. Urging the United States to commit itself publicly to the defense of the Offshore Islands, they also sought modern equipment for their armed forces, including the delivery of American Sidewinder missiles.

While the United States refused to issue a public statement indicating that it would defend Quemoy, it did increase its military assistance to the Government of the Republic of China (GRC) and began intensive contingency planning for a crisis in the Taiwan Straits. The basic policy of the American government was that it would help defend the Offshore Islands only if necessary for the defense of Taiwan. American officials in the field, however, were authorized to assist the GRC in planning for the defense of the Islands, and assumed that nuclear weapons would be used to counter anything but very light probing by the Chinese Communists.

In early August, officials in Washington became concerned with the possibility of a crisis, although they did not expect the Chinese Communists to launch a major military attack. During that same month, a consensus developed that a high-level decision should be made as to

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what the American reaction would be to an air-sea interdiction campaign against the Offshore Islands. There was also strong pressure for a diplomatic warning to the Chinese Communists that the United States would not tolerate the fall of Quemoy.

On August 22 it was decided, just below the presidential level, that the United States would participate in the defense of the Offshore Islands if they came under attack. It was agreed that, as an attempt to deter a Chinese Communist move, a public statement clarifying the American position would be issued in the form of an exchange of letters between Secretary of State Dulles and Representative Thomas Morgan.

THE CRISIS ERUPTS: THE U.S. DECISION TO INTERVENE

On August 23, 1958, at 6:30 p.m. Taiwan time, the Chinese Communists launched a heavy artillery attack against the Quemoy Islands. Although anticipated by a number of planners, the attack provoked a reevaluation of American policy towards the Offshore Islands.

During the weekend of August 23 and 24, officials in the Pentagon and the State Department worked on position papers for a meeting to be held at the White House on the 25th. The basic position paper of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, like most of the subsequent papers, was prepared in the political-military section of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Urging the United States to involve itself in the defense of the Offshore Islands, this paper stated bluntly that, although initial operations might have to be conventional for political reasons,

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atomic strikes against the Chinese mainland would eventually be necessary if the Chinese Communist move was to be stopped effectively and quickly. At this meeting, approval was given to the Navy paper authorizing CINCPAC to reinforce American capability and to prepare to escort supply ships to the Offshore Islands. CINCPAC was also authorized to prepare to assist in the event of a major assault against Quemoy. Aware of the problems that would arise if the Chinese Nationalists were to know the full extent of the American commitment to the Offshore Islands, Washington ordered the Taiwan Defense Commander not to inform the GRC of planned American moves. It was also decided that American interests in the Offshore Islands would be limited to the islands of Big and Little Quemoy and the five larger islands in the Matsu chain.

American officials on Hawaii and Taiwan approved of Washington's decisions, taking exception only to the possibility that initial actions might have to be conventional. CINCPAC responded by ordering his subordinate commanders to prepare a conventional-weapon annex for the existing operations plan. At the same time, in the last week of August, American military actions in the Taiwan Straits and in the Far East in general were substantially stepped up as a means of communicating American determination to the Chinese Communists. The Chinese Nationalists, who were reacting favorably to the steps taken by the United States, continued to press for a public statement that America would regard an attack on Quemoy as an attack on Taiwan. They also asked for an American convoy to Quemoy and stand-by authority for the Taiwan Defense

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Commander to participate in the defense of Quemoy in the event of an all-out Chinese Communist assault. By August 28, American officials in the field were reporting that the critical issue was the supplying of Quemoy, and attention then came to be focused on this problem.

THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PROBE (August 23-31)

The Chinese Communist attack began with the firing of some 40,000 shells against the Quemoy Islands on August 23, 1958. The initial fire was directed at a ceremony welcoming the Chinese Nationalist Defense Minister to Quemoy. Following this, the Chinese Communists, by a combination of artillery fire and PT boat action, succeeded in preventing any landing of supplies until American escorted convoys began to sail on September 7. Artillery fire remained heavy during the first two weeks of the crisis and was directed mainly at incoming convoys. At the same time, a number of air engagements took place in which the Chinese Nationalists very quickly demonstrated their superiority over the Chinese Communists.

During the first two weeks of the crisis, Chinese Communist propaganda tended to play down the events in the Taiwan Straits. The People's Daily simply reported what was in fact taking place. Soviet propaganda followed the same line by denying that a major crisis was occurring. The Chinese Communists, however, did begin to beam a series of radio broadcasts at Quemoy, calling upon the garrison to surrender and warning that it was cut off and isolated.

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THE U.S. DECISION TO ESCORT

Following the decision to prepare for escort and the tacit decision that the United States would defend the Offshore Islands, planning in Washington focused on moves for deterring a Chinese Communist invasion of Quemoy. The government also began to issue a series of public statements strongly suggesting that the United States would be involved in the defense of Quemoy. Concern even came to be expressed at high-level meetings that the Chinese Nationalists might not be doing all they could to deal with the situation and might indeed be trying to pull the United States into a major war with the Chinese Communists.

A second meeting at the White House on August 29 authorized American escorts for GRC convoys to within three miles of Quemoy. This decision was immediately disclosed to the GRC, and plans were made for such convoying.

THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS REASSESS THEIR STRATEGY

Intense Chinese Communist military action against the Offshore Islands began to taper off early in September. The Nationalists, increasingly confident that the United States would undertake escort operations, began to reduce substantially their efforts to resupply the Islands. At the same time, the Chinese Communists brought their artillery action to a virtual ceasefire after September 2. Chinese Communist propaganda continued to play down the crisis but did begin to report some criticism of the American position in the West. On September 4,

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the Chinese Communists announced their claim to a twelve-mile limit, which would put all of the Offshore Islands within their territorial waters. On September 5, Pravda stated in an "Observer" article that the Soviet Union could not "stand idly by" if things happened "on the frontier territory of its great ally," and that an attack on the mainland would cause the Soviet Union to help the Chinese Communists. On September 6, Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai issued a public statement offering to reopen the Sino-American ambassadorial talks. The Chinese Communist People's Daily devoted most of its front page to Chou's statement and thereafter began to publicize the developing crisis. Meanwhile, the Mainland Chinese inaugurated a series of public meetings calling for the liberation of Taiwan.

THE U.S. DECISION TO DEFEND QUEMOY

American officials hoped that increased American military action in the Taiwan Straits, including the escort of GRC supply vessels to within three miles of Quemoy as well as American public statements, would alleviate the crisis by both deterring a Chinese Communist invasion and breaking the blockade. The series of American statements publicly expressing U.S. interest in keeping Quemoy out of Chinese Communist hands reached a climax after Secretary Dulles met with President Eisenhower at Newport, Rhode Island. In a formal statement, the American government announced that the security of Taiwan had become increasingly related to the defense of Quemoy. Following this statement, Dulles held a press briefing

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in which he went very far toward making clear the American determination to defend Quemoy.

While marking time in their efforts to resupply the Islands, the GRC began pressing the United States for permission to bomb the mainland and for greater American involvement in the crisis. American officials on Taiwan, urging restraint on the GRC, went forward with plans for an escorted convoy, scheduled to set sail on September 7.

On September 2, Dulles met with members of the Joint Chiefs and other top officials to formulate the basic American position in the crisis and to define American policy in the event of a Chinese Communist invasion of the Offshore Islands. At this meeting there was considerable debate on the question of to what extent Quemoy could be defended without nuclear weapons and on the more general question of the wisdom of relying on nuclear weapons for deterrence. The consensus reached was that the use of nuclear weapons would ultimately be necessary for the defense of Quemoy, but that the United States should limit itself initially to using conventional forces.

The next meeting on September 3 authorized a formal paper urging the President to agree to an American defense of the Offshore Islands. At the same time, it was recognized that it was important to make unmistakably clear to the Chinese Communists that the United States was prepared to intervene in order to deter a possible Chinese Communist move. Following this, Eisenhower met with Dulles at Newport, and then the President returned to Washington for another White House consultation on the crisis. This meeting considered a paper prepared by the

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Joint Chiefs on proposed American policy in the event of a Communist invasion of Quemoy.

At the White House meeting on September 6, the President authorized the Joint Chiefs to employ American conventional forces in the event of a major assault on the Offshore Islands. Nuclear weapons were to be used only with the President's permission.

THE PROLONGED BLOCKADE: COMMUNIST MOVES (September 7-October 6)

On the morning of September 7, the first U.S. escorted Chinese Nationalist convoy set out for Quemoy. The convoy beached in Lialo Bay without interference and with no Chinese Communist artillery fire. The beaching operation, however, was so inept as to lead the Taiwan Defense Command to propose a halt in convoy operations until techniques could be corrected. The Chinese Nationalists rejected this delay and, on September 8, the second convoy set out with a reduced escort. Two hours after the convoy reached the beach, the Chinese Communists opened fire with a heavy barrage that prevented the landing of any supplies. Through the month of September the Chinese Nationalists sent to Quemoy a series of American-escorted convoys that came under moderate to heavy Communist artillery fire and, until late in the month, succeeded in landing only very small quantities of supplies. Attempts were also made to land supplies by aerial drop, a technique that also improved in late September. Several air battles ensued, in which the Chinese Nationalists, using the American Sidewinder missiles, markedly outclassed the Chinese Communists and destroyed a number of MIGs.

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Chinese Communist propaganda, foreign and domestic, focused on the crisis during September and early October. On September 8, Soviet Premier Khrushchev, in a letter to President Eisenhower, gave strong support to the Chinese Communist position. An attack on China, he warned, would be considered an attack on the Soviet Union and the Soviets would do everything to defend the security of both states. Khrushchev also argued that the Chinese Communist operation against the Offshore Islands was a purely internal affair. During this period the Chinese began to issue a series of warnings against American intrusion into Chinese Communist territory, a series they have continued into the present. In mid-September, Chinese Communist propaganda appeared to be aimed at minimizing the consequences of their failure to take Quemoy and, at the same time, at exacerbating US-GRC relations. On September 19, Khrushchev sent a second letter to Eisenhower warning that a world war was possible and that the Soviet Union would honor its commitments to Communist China. The letter was rejected by the American government.

THE PROLONGED BLOCKADE: REACTION ON TAIWAN AND IN THE FIELD

From September 7 to October 6, the GRC, with U.S. military assistance and convoy support, gradually improved its ability to land supplies on Quemoy. It also continued to press for greater United States involvement in the crisis and for permission to bomb the mainland. While GRC officials still affirmed that they would try to honor

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their commitment to consult the United States before attacking the mainland, they stressed that attacks on the mainland might be necessary. Apparently the GRC was still trying to manipulate events so as to draw the United States into a greater military involvement against the Chinese Communists. U.S. officials in the field, attempting to develop an accurate picture of the resupply situation on Quemoy, sought to aid the GRC resupply effort and to demonstrate to the Chinese Communists that the United States would be involved in the defense of the Offshore Islands. In addition, military officers were engaged in crash planning for possible large-scale conventional operations in the Taiwan Straits. This contingency planning produced a bitter reaction among some officials, who felt that large-scale conventional operations were unrealistic.

THE PROLONGED BLOCKADE: PUBLIC DEBATE AND DECISION MAKING

During September, public opposition to American involvement in defense of the Offshore Islands continued to mount in the United States and abroad. American officials were aware of this opposition and felt constrained by it. The United States sought to answer its critics in a series of public statements and to warn Peking that the United States would be involved in the defense of Quemoy. In a major address on September 11, President Eisenhower indicated that Quemoy would not be permitted to fall.

There was considerable uncertainty in Washington during September as to whether or not the Communist blockade could be broken by American-escorted convoys.

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During this period some attention was given to the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Proposals to demilitarize the Offshore Islands, originating in the highest office of the State Department, met with considerable skepticism from lower State Department officials and from the Navy. But American officials were generally agreed both on the need to defend the Offshore Islands in the event of assault and also on the need to explain publicly the American position. At the same time, a consensus was developing that the Chinese Nationalists were seeking to drag the United States into a major military clash and that these efforts had to be resisted.

The question of whether or not the blockade could be broken became of considerable importance in Washington decision making. By September 25, American officials had concluded that the blockade could be broken and that there was no need to pursue a diplomatic course toward a political settlement.

Following Chou En-lai's public statement on September 6 urging reopening of the Sino-American talks, the United States publicly reaffirmed its willingness, privately conveyed to the Chinese Communists prior to August 23, to resume the talks at an ambassadorial level. After some further negotiations with the Chinese Communists as well as the Chinese Nationalists, U.S. Ambassador Jacob Beam held the first of the renewed Warsaw talks with Chinese Communist Ambassador Wang on September 15. During this and subsequent meetings, the United States pressed for a ceasefire in the Taiwan Straits while the Chinese Communists demanded that the United States withdraw from the Taiwan area.

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THE CHINESE COMMUNIST CEASEFIRE (October 6)

On October 6, 1958, in a radio broadcast from Peking, the Chinese Communist Defense Minister announced that there would be a one-week ceasefire if the United States ceased to escort GRC convoys. Chinese Communist military fire did in fact come to a halt. Following the ceasefire, Chinese Communist propaganda began to stress disputes between the United States and the Chinese Nationalists. On October 13, the Chinese Communists announced that they were continuing the ceasefire for another two weeks. However, on October 20, the Chinese Communists announced that they were resuming their fire because an American ship had intruded into Chinese Communist territorial waters. On October 25, they said that they were again suspending their fire. This time they declared that they would not fire on even-numbered days against airfields, beaches, and wharves if there were no American escort. This odd-even day fire pattern has continued to the present. Following this latest ceasefire, Chinese Communist propaganda took the line that they had never been interested in capturing only the Offshore Islands but were determined instead to capture both Taiwan and the Offshore Islands at the same time.

THE CEASEFIRE PERIOD IN WASHINGTON AND TAIPEI

The Chinese proclamation that its ceasefire would continue only so long as the United States did not escort convoys touched off debates between the United States and the GRC. The GRC urged the United States to escort

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convoys during the initial ceasefire period going in on the odd days, but the United States refused on the grounds that there was no military necessity for convoys. Dulles then began to press for a reduction in the Chinese Nationalist garrison on Quemoy in order to give the impression that the United States had gone about as far as it could in pursuing a policy opposed by its allies and by the American public. On October 21, Dulles arrived on Taiwan. In a series of meetings with Chiang Kai-shek, he pressed Chiang for a public statement renouncing the use of force in any attempt to return to the mainland and succeeded in getting GRC acceptance to a communiqué stating this point. It was also agreed that there would be a limited reduction of the garrison on Quemoy in return for increased U.S. military fire power on the Islands.

II. THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS

By the end of 1958, events in the Taiwan Straits had returned to the pre-July level. The Chinese Communists continued to issue "serious warnings" and to shell Quemoy on odd days, but they made no attempt to blockade the Offshore Islands. Following the Dulles visit to Taiwan and the events which flowed from it, including the renunciation of force by the GRC and the decrease in the number of their troops on the Offshore Islands, there were no major changes in American policy. Nevertheless the crisis did affect, to some extent, the policies of all countries involved with the Islands. This chapter explores this impact, and a concluding chapter considers the implications that are of consequence in the management of crises.

CHINESE COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE CRISIS

The dominant lesson for the Chinese Communists was America's determination to defend its interests by not allowing Quemoy to fall. The hope with which Peking began the crisis proved in the end to be illusory. However, it is necessary to go beyond this and to estimate for the Chinese the costs and gains of their action.

Their major failure was that the United States did not either force a withdrawal from Quemoy or allow its GRC garrison to fall, and so undermine the Chiang Kai-shek regime on Taiwan. The crisis thus made it clear to the Chinese Communists that they could not hope to capture Quemoy and that Taiwan was not likely to be theirs for some time to come. Whatever gains they were to make

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elsewhere internally or externally, they would have to accept the fact that there would continue to be a rival regime on Taiwan supported by the United States.

In addition, the Chinese Communists suffered in their own eyes and perhaps in the eyes of others from having started something they could not finish. As noted above, they anticipated this outcome at the beginning of the crisis and began to suggest fairly early that they were not interested in capturing the Offshore Islands. They first gave voice to this line in early September and stressed it during the ceasefire period. For example, Anna Louis Strong, in an article written in Peking and published in a Soviet journal, argued that Peking preferred to have the Offshore Islands remain in Nationalist hands.* More officially, the Chinese Communist Foreign Minister suggested to diplomats in Peking that the Chinese were not interested in capturing Quemoy. During the early stages of the crisis the Chinese Communists kept their propaganda, except that directed exclusively against the Offshore Islands, in a reasonably low key so as to mitigate their loss of prestige should the operation fail.

The Chinese Communists' claim that the United States was a "paper tiger" proved to be false. Whatever the Sino-Soviet understanding about the crisis may have been, it is clear that it tended to disprove the Chinese Communist position that the United States was weak and would back down under pressure. It should be kept in mind, however, that the Russians were shortly to make their own test of American resolve over Berlin.

* Anna Louis Strong, "Chinese Strategy in the Taiwan Strait," New Times, Moscow, November 1958.

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The Chinese Communists suffered a rather significant loss in the build-up of GRC materiel and equipment from the United States, in particular the Sidewinder air-to-air missiles and the 8-inch howitzers and other artillery for deployment on Quemoy. During the crisis and after it, the United States permitted a very major increase in the military defenses of Quemoy, including, for the first time, mining of the waters around Quemoy as well as stepping up military assistance in general to the Nationalist regime. The crisis also strengthened the American commitment to defend the Offshore Islands, which at least in one sense was a loss to Peking. The United States also became more aware of Chinese Communist weakness and caution.

To some extent, these losses were offset by a number of gains for the Chinese Communists. Most important perhaps was the exacerbation of U.S.-GRC relations in the dispute over the way the Chinese Communists had brought the crisis to a halt. In addition, American officials on Taiwan and in Washington believed all the more firmly that the GRC wanted to drag the United States into a major war with the Chinese Communists, and the GRC was confirmed in its belief that the United States did not completely trust it. The United States had also demonstrated that it could not be provoked into allowing the GRC to attack the mainland.

Soon after the crisis, there was negotiated, in a manner suggesting two hostile partners, a reduction in the size of the Quemoy garrison, and Chiang, in a communique issued after the Dulles visit, publicly renounced the use of force to return to the mainland. The possibility that the Chinese Nationalists with or without American support

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would attempt to return to the mainland was significantly reduced. The American intention to keep the GRC "leashed" was made clear.

Added to its impact on U.S.-GRC relations, Chinese Communist action in the Taiwan Straits had the effect of eliciting a strong statement of Soviet support. The Khrushchev letters to Eisenhower gave the Chinese Communists added assurance that the Soviets would come to their aid in the event of a nuclear attack by the United States upon the Chinese mainland.

The Chinese Communist action, beyond demonstrating China's ability to exacerbate international tension, also served to check the two-China trend by tying the United States more closely to the defense of Quemoy and by separating the United States further from its allies and neutral nations. Some countries had been prepared to defend or recognize Taiwan as an independent regime, but they were not about to accept a government on Taiwan that claimed to be the Government of all of China. Finally, the Offshore Islands, which had always been mainland Chinese territory, remained in Nationalist hands not only as a check against the two-China trend but available for pressure moves by the Chinese Communists at any time they might think such pressure to be in their interest.

Thus it would be wrong to conclude that the Chinese Communists would never again move against the Offshore Islands if they thought that they could succeed either because the United States might force the Nationalists to withdraw from the Islands or, by standing aside, allow the GRC to be defeated. The Chinese Communists learned

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from the crisis that the United States would not over-react or allow the GRC to over-react by bombing the mainland, and they discovered, too, that there were considerable gains even from an unsuccessful move against the Offshore Islands. And whatever the costs of such a move, they were neither very serious nor permanent. The Chinese Communists, then, if they have reason to believe that their major foreign policy objective of securing the elimination of the Chiang Kai-shek regime might be obtained by renewed pressures against the Offshore Islands, may well be willing to try again.

SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

Much has been written about Sino-Soviet relations in the Quemoy crisis. Many analysts have pointed to the crisis as one of the first concrete instances of Sino-Soviet disagreement. Others, including most government officials at the time and some scholars, have concluded that there was no Sino-Soviet disagreement during the Quemoy crisis. In determining the truth of this matter, it should perhaps be emphasized at the outset that there is virtually no hard evidence. It is largely a matter of interpreting what meager data there are.

There is not, so far as the author knows, any classified information that sheds light directly on the nature of Sino-Soviet relations during the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis. Any analysis of the question depends then on inferences drawn from overt Soviet behavior during the crisis and conjectures about what the Chinese Communists might have wanted the Soviets to do. It is perhaps

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interesting to note that all government analyses made at the time and seen by the author conclude that there was close Sino-Soviet cooperation on all phases of the probe in the Taiwan Straits. Whether or not analysts were reluctant to see here the beginning of a major Sino-Soviet disagreement, they tended to look at the crisis with the expectation that there was cooperation, and to find considerable evidence for it. Today, the situation is different. Most analysts start from the supposition that there is considerable Sino-Soviet disagreement, a proposition that is now impossible to doubt. Given this orientation, they tend to look for and to find disagreement in the 1958 crisis.

Perhaps the best way to proceed is to present the argument that there was substantial Sino-Soviet disagreement over the Quemoy crisis and then suggest why this does not seem to be the correct interpretation.*

Two separate questions need to be asked about Sino-Soviet relations. First, were the Soviets enthusiastic about the crisis and, second, if not, were they willing to go along? Some analysts at the time even suggested that the Soviets might have encouraged the Chinese to

*The argument that there was substantial Sino-Soviet disagreement during the Quemoy crisis is drawn essentially from John R. Thomas, "Soviet Behaviour in the Quemoy Crisis of 1958," Orbis, Vol. VI, Spring, 1962, pp. 38-64; Donald Zagoria, The Sino-Soviet Conflict 1955-1961, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1961, pp. 200-201; Alice Langley Hsieh, Communist China's Strategy in the Nuclear Age, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962, pp. 119-130.

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begin the move in the Taiwan Straits. There is no evidence that this was the case. The Soviets had much less to gain from a Chinese Communist probe in the Taiwan Straits than did the Chinese. Furthermore, when one considers that the Soviets did not share the convictions of the Chinese Communists that the strategic balance between East and West permitted more aggressive Sino-Soviet moves, it seems highly unlikely that Khrushchev was the instigator of the Chinese probe.

Khrushchev and Mao almost certainly discussed the impending Chinese Communist move at their meeting prior to the crisis. If so, Mao undoubtedly outlined his strategy and discussed what role the Chinese would like the Soviets to play. Analysts who have argued that there was intense Sino-Soviet disagreement over the Quemoy crisis have based their case almost entirely on the failure of the Soviets to give a strong statement of support to the Chinese Communists at an earlier stage in the crisis. They point to the facts that there was even no mention of Taiwan in the communiqué of the Khrushchev-Mao meeting, little discussion of the probe in the Soviet press, and that the first Khrushchev statement did not come until after the Chinese Communists had offered to reopen the Warsaw talks with the United States. This analysis assumes that the Chinese Communists would have wanted a strong Soviet statement in the early stages of the crisis, and it is on this that the argument for a Sino-Soviet disagreement depends.

The assumption that the likelihood of Chinese Communist success would increase if the crisis began with a

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strong statement of support by Soviet Premier Khrushchev is open to serious challenge. On the contrary the likelihood of the United States either forcing the Chinese Nationalists to abandon the Offshore Islands or simply standing by and allowing the Islands to be captured by the Chinese Communists would have substantially increased if the war had been made to appear simply a part of the Chinese civil war and not a major East-West clash involving the prestige of the United States and the Soviet Union. In other words, it would seem to have been in fact in the interest of the Chinese Communists to keep the Soviet Union from raising the stakes by challenging the United States.

Lower-level statements of support might have been useful and were to some extent forthcoming but, as indicated below, even such statements would have not been in conformity with the basic Chinese strategy.

There remains only the question of whether Mao and the Chinese Communists would have made this analysis of the situation. Did, in fact, the Chinese Communists understand that it was not in their interest to get a Russian statement early? On this point one can be much less dogmatic. It does appear, however, that the Chinese Communists recognized that it was in their interest to treat the crisis in the early days as a low-level affair involving simply a continuation of the civil war.

Thus, at the Khrushchev-Mao meeting, Mao might well not have asked the Soviet leader for a public statement of support. What he might well have asked for and received was an agreement to cover the Chinese Communist retreat

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to convey to the Chinese Communists its involvement in the defense of Quemoy. In seeking to implement this policy by action, the Administration in Washington relied in large measure on the initiative of its commanders in the field. The major decisions--to dispatch a TAC unit from the United States, to add an aircraft carrier group from the 6th Fleet, to escort to within three miles of Quemoy--were made in Washington, but a host of other decisions, decisions probably critical in making clear American involvement, were made on Taiwan and in CINCPAC headquarters in Hawaii. Questions such as how many ships would be involved in the escort, what maneuvers to carry out in the Straits, and so on were decided there. American military officers in the field were well aware of the task which had been given to them and responded with sensitivity to the problems involved. They recognized that the objective was to convey American involvement without being provocative and without bringing on a major clash between the United States and China. They recognized their responsibility and fulfilled it more easily than would have been the case had Washington officials attempted to direct every move from the Pentagon.

If Washington was prepared to transfer authority for military maneuvering in the Taiwan Straits to officers in the field, it was determined to keep decisions on how to react to invasion of Quemoy centered in Washington. The main issues concerned the necessary degree of delegation of authority to the Joint Chiefs and the extent to which the President had to make up his mind in advance. There was general agreement that a decision in principle

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new strategy. It is interesting to note that at this point Soviet propaganda also shifted to the new policy of highlighting U.S. actions that had produced a major crisis. In this second stage, once they felt that they could not take Quemoy, the Chinese Communists were primarily concerned both to disguise their withdrawal and to prevent an over-reaction by the United States that might lead to an attack on the mainland. In the latter connection, they cautiously avoided any military attacks on American vessels or airplanes. They also began a propaganda campaign designed to reduce the likelihood that the United States would react violently. Of major importance in this campaign was the dramatic Chinese Communist offer to reopen the Warsaw talks. It is clear, both from the fact that the Chinese Communists delayed for several weeks in actually beginning the negotiations and their unwillingness to negotiate when the talks began, that for the Chinese Communists the confrontation was simply a symbolic gesture rather than a move designed to bring about a diplomatic solution. In Korea they had observed the reluctance of the United States to undertake or continue offensive military actions once truce negotiations had begun. Perhaps now they felt that to begin negotiations in Warsaw would reduce the likelihood of an American over-reaction to the Chinese Communist probe.

It has frequently been pointed out by those who argue that there was Sino-Soviet disagreement in the Quemoy crisis that Khrushchev did not send his first letter to Eisenhower until the Chinese had signaled their intent to withdraw and the risks were therefore at a minimum.

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However, it should be noted that neither the Soviet Union nor Communist China would take very seriously a proposal for truce negotiations as necessarily indicating a decision to alleviate military pressure. In fact both countries are capable of proposing negotiations and then stepping up rather than reducing their military activity. Thus unless the Soviets were intimately aware of the Chinese Communist strategy, along the lines which have been argued earlier, the fact that the Chinese Communists called for the reopening of the Warsaw talks would not suggest to the Soviets that the Chinese Communists were necessarily about to lessen their military pressure on the Offshore Islands. Rather what was important about the Chinese Communists' statement was that it in fact reduced the likelihood of an American over-reaction. This did make it somewhat safer for the Soviet Union to make a strong statement in support of the Chinese Communists, provided that the Russians clearly understood that the Chinese Communists were not going to push for the capture of Quemoy in the face of American opposition, for example, by firing on American ships.

The Chinese Communists, echoing many Western analysts, have charged that Soviet aid came only when the danger had passed but have not claimed that they were refused an earlier statement:

It is especially ridiculous that the Soviet statement also gives all the credit to Soviet nuclear weapons for the Chinese people's victory in smashing the armed provocations of U.S. imperialism in the Taiwan Straits in 1958. The Soviet paper Krasnaya Zvezda [Red Star] even

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said on August 25, 1963, "The nuclear might of the Soviet Union, the very country which has now been abused by the slanders of Peking, had saved millions of Chinese from nuclear death and defended the sovereignty, security and independence of their country."

What are the facts? In August and September 1958, the situation in the Taiwan Straits was indeed very tense as a result of the aggression and provocations by the U.S. imperialists. The Soviet leaders expressed their support for China on September 7 and 19 respectively. Although at that time the situation in the Taiwan Straits was tense, there was no possibility that a nuclear war would break out and no need for the Soviet Union to support China with its nuclear weapons. It was only when they were clear that this was the situation that the Soviet leaders expressed their support for China.

We have not forgotten and will not forget the support which the Soviet people have given to China on the question of Taiwan.*

The assertion that the first Khrushchev letter came only after the danger of a major Sino-American war had passed is not borne out by the facts. The letter arrived in Washington before it was clear what would take place in the Taiwan Straits. The United States had escorted one convoy to Quemoy without being fired on, but it was still

*"A Comment on the Soviet Government Statement of August 21," September 1, 1963, translation in Peking Review, Vol. VI, No. 36, September 6, 1963, p. 13. While this quote gives credence to the argument that the Soviet support came after the crisis had passed, the Sino-Soviet exchanges in 1963-64 over the Quemoy crisis still leave the situation in doubt. As indicated in the quote above, Chinese statements have been in reaction to Soviet attempts to take "all" of the credit for the success of the operations in 1958. In fact each time the 1958 crisis has come up in the polemics it has been at the initiative of the

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not certain what action the Chinese Communists would take in response to American convoying to within three miles of the island. It was also not known what the United States would do if American ships were fired upon or if the blockade could not be broken without greater American involvement or a bombing of the mainland. There were many possible developments that might have led to a clash between American and Chinese Communist forces and hence to attacks against the mainland. If Khrushchev was in fact waiting until there was no danger of a major war, his letter came too soon. If this was his strategy, he had every reason to wait until a clear pattern of activity was established in the Taiwan Straits. No one in Washington policy-making circles thought that the Soviet Premier's letter had arrived too late to be taken seriously, and for Peking it came just before Communist shells were directed for the first time against U.S.-escorted convoys. In brief, an examination of what was occurring in the Taiwan Straits when Khrushchev's letter arrived in Washington does not support the contention that it came only after the danger of a Chinese-American military confrontation had passed.

Thus there would appear to be no firm evidence of Sino-Soviet disagreement in the Taiwan Straits crisis. On the contrary, the timing of the Khrushchev statement suggests close cooperation between the two countries in the implementation of the Chinese Communist strategy. What the Chinese Communists wanted from the Soviet Union

Chinese. For the 1963-1964 statements and a discussion of them, see Morton H. Halperin, China and the Bomb, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1965, pp. 55-62.

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they had already got during the preceding years, namely, sufficient military power for them to blockade Quemoy successfully against a GRC defense. They also apparently gained the approval of the Soviets to set afoot rumors that the Russians had agreed at the Khrushchev-Mao talks to give the Chinese Communists nuclear weapons. Such rumors provided the threat if not the substance of deterrence at a time when forthright statements of support were not in their interests. In addition, the Chinese received very strong diplomatic support from the Russians in the period when they were seeking to disengage from the crisis, to disguise their losses, and to prevent an American attack on the mainland. On August 30 an "Observer" article in Pravda gave their cause strong support. This was followed quickly by the two Khrushchev letters, the two strongest statements of support that the Soviets had offered to any country up until that time. In fact it should be noted that throughout the crisis the United States did assume that a nuclear attack against the Chinese mainland would be returned in kind by the Sino-Soviet bloc.

As has been noted, the Chinese Communists were probably surprised by the unexpected success of their artillery shelling in the period after September 8. As September wore on and their attacks continued, the Russians may have begun to be worried that the Chinese Communists would press ahead with a blockade despite active American participation in escorting the convoys. At this point there may have been at least some incipient Sino-Soviet disagreement, the Soviets making it clear that, in pledging their support, they had assumed that the

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Chinese Communists were slowly backing away from the conflict. However, there is no evidence from the artillery shelling, which was not increased to the level of imposing a successful blockade, or any other action by the Chinese Communists which suggests that they ever came close to deciding to press ahead with their military action in the face of American involvement in the resupply of Quemoy. Nevertheless, the Soviets may have been somewhat apprehensive during this period.

Thus two conclusions emerge from this brief analysis of the Soviet role in the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis.

(1) There is no clear evidence that there was a Sino-Soviet disagreement. The contention that there was disagreement uniformly assumes that the Chinese would have wanted an early statement of strong Soviet support. Such a statement, however, would not appear to have been in their interest, a supposition borne out by the Chinese Communists' own propaganda and diplomatic activity in this early period. (2) It would seem in fact that the Soviets were prepared to go along with a minor Chinese Communist probe along the lines of the Chinese Communist strategy outlined previously and that the "Observer" article and the Khrushchev letters came at a very early and most opportune time for the Chinese Communists in implementing their strategy of slow and disguised withdrawal.

It is clear that major Sino-Soviet disagreements on several questions, including strategy and tactics towards the underdeveloped areas, began in the 1957-1958 period. This is not to imply that the intense Sino-Soviet disagreement beginning in this period and extending up until the

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present has been exaggerated. It is rather to argue that the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis, rather than being one of the first instances of Sino-Soviet disagreement, was in fact probably one of the last instances of close Sino-Soviet cooperation in international political maneuvering.

GRC PERSPECTIVES ON THE CRISIS

The Government of the Republic of China came no closer than the Chinese Communists in attaining its major objective during the crisis. For the GRC, the Communist move against the Offshore Islands opened up the possibility of a major military clash between the United States and Communist China. The GRC pursued this objective from the first signs of a crisis until October, constrained only by the danger of a too blatant attempt to increase the level of conflict. Recognizing that the American objective was to avoid rather than to bring on a big war, the GRC even feared that the United States really preferred to see the Offshore Islands turned over to the Chinese Communists as part of a two-China arrangement. If the United States had become convinced that the GRC was trying to bring on a major confrontation, it might have withdrawn from active participation in the crisis or tried to force the GRC off the Offshore Islands. At the same time, provocative action by the GRC might have led to a Communist counter-action against which the United States might have refused to retaliate. Thus the GRC was careful to follow the letter and even the spirit of all its explicit agreements with the United States and sought by other means--primarily over-estimating the danger of collapse on Quemoy,

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threatening to bomb the mainland, and not pursuing the blockade with vigor--to increase the involvement of the United States.

From the start, GRC officials recognized that, even if they could not bring on a major confrontation, they could secure two other objectives: stepped up military assistance from the United States and a greater American commitment to the defense of the Offshore Islands. The GRC began pressing these two points in early July and, by the end of the crisis, with considerable success.

The United States rapidly accelerated its military assistance to Taiwan both to betoken the American commitment and to enable the GRC to handle Communist challenges without requiring direct American involvement. The American effort was designed to improve the GRC's ability to resupply the Offshore Islands, to increase firepower, and to defeat the Chinese Communists in any air battles that might occur. Additional landing craft were thus turned over to the GRC, as were F-96's equipped with Sidewinder missiles, 8-inch howitzers for use on Quemoy and other equipment.

The GRC's attempt to secure an American commitment to the defense of the Offshore Islands did not lead to an extension of the Sino-American treaty area to include the Islands nor to an unequivocal statement by the American Government that it considered the defense of Quemoy necessary to the defense of Taiwan. However, it did lead to the Dulles-Morgan exchange and the more publicized Dulles Newport statement. These, together with interpretations of them by American officials, went very far toward

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committing the United States to the defense of the Offshore Islands. Although they were never officially informed of any change in American policy, GRC officials must have felt when the crisis abated that the United States, because of its words and its actions, was prepared to defend the Offshore Islands. And they probably felt that the Chinese Communists also had little doubt of this.

Following the crisis, the GRC may have been relieved to discover that the United States was not going to press again for a withdrawal from the Offshore Islands as it had after the clash of 1954-1955. All that the United States requested was a token reduction of troops on the Islands, and this in return for a substantial increase in GRC firepower. The GRC's interest in holding the Islands stems in part, of course, from the fact that they are the only indisputably "Chinese" territories which it holds.* But it also owes much to the GRC's conviction that so long as it remains in possession of the Islands, neither the United States nor such countries as Great Britain and India can impose a two-China situation on Taipei and Peking. Thus the events of July-October in the Taiwan Straits helped to arrest the drift in American and Western policy toward a two-China situation.

But if the GRC was successful in securing American commitment to defend the Offshore Islands and increased American military assistance, it suffered major setbacks,

* One interesting if minor indication of the symbolic importance which the GRC attaches to the Offshore Islands is the fact that GRC foreign service officers pay a visit to Quemoy before leaving on overseas assignments.

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particularly toward the end of the crisis. Although the Dulles visit to Taiwan did not bring (the perhaps feared) pressure to abandon the Offshore Islands, it did bring the Chinese Nationalists to renounce publicly the use of force in their effort to return to the mainland. Dulles did not get the more sweeping statement he wanted from the GRC--a declaration that the civil war was over--but the statement he finally exacted went a long way toward ending the pretense that the Nationalists were soon to return to the mainland with American support. What the crisis made clear, if the GRC did not already know it, was that the United States was not looking for an excuse to engage the Chinese Communists. On the contrary it was clearly evident that the United States would go to considerable lengths to prevent a major clash and to assuage world opinion, even over the strenuous objections of the GRC.

As already indicated, the ceasefire statements of the Chinese Communists led to heated debates between the United States and the GRC. The readiness of the United States to cease escorting when the Chinese Communists demanded it as a price for continuing the ceasefire and its refusal to escort on odd days resulted in a loss of face for the GRC. It must also have brought home to Chiang an awareness of the forces that could drive the American Government to actions highly detrimental to the GRC's prestige. The willingness of the United States to participate in a new round of talks with Peking was evaluated by Taipei in the same light.

The suspicion aroused particularly among American military officers by the GRC's resupply efforts worsened

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GRC-U.S. relations even further and brought bitterness to Chiang that his word had been questioned.

In summary, the GRC had failed to bring on a major Sino-American war and it was unlikely that it would be in a position to try again. On the other hand, the American involvement in the defense of the Offshore Islands and its commitment to the GRC as the sole government of China was increased. If hopes of the GRC's returning to the mainland were dampened, its ability to survive and to hold its territory probably increased.

AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE CRISIS

American officials from the President down to the naval officers in the Taiwan Straits came away from the crisis with a justifiable feeling of a job well done. The United States was operating under many handicaps in its effort to hold the Offshore Islands while avoiding a major military confrontation in the Taiwan Straits. American policy came under perhaps more intensive and extensive criticism within the United States than has any other major American policy at the time of its execution. Not only newspapermen but many congressional leaders and public figures spoke out vigorously against American involvement in the defense of Quemoy. Within the Administration there was agreement on the policy carried out, but even here there were important differences. There were those who, refusing to believe that the GRC might be trying to drag the United States into a war, were prepared to do what was necessary to defend the GRC. There were also those who were suspicious of the GRC and unhappy about the

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need to defend the Offshore Islands. Outside the United States, support for American policy was limited to a small number of publicists and a few governments in Asia.

American officials believed themselves to be confronted by a united and confident Sino-Soviet bloc. For at least some officials, a major problem stemmed from the difference in objectives between the United States and the GRC and the desire of the Nationalists to bring on a major military confrontation. Added to these difficulties were the legal situation involving the Congressional Formosa resolution and the inability of the Administration, as it defined its obligations to Congress, to declare firmly that it would defend the Offshore Islands.

Despite these problems, the United States accomplished its major objectives. The Chinese Communists were not deterred from beginning the crisis, but they were forced to abandon their effort to blockade Quemoy and were deterred from the invasion that many officials thought they were planning. The Chinese Nationalists were prevented from bombing the mainland and, whatever their own objectives, eventually went along with the American policy of meeting the challenge with the minimum of force. The GRC's restraint, its reduction in the size of the Quemoy garrison, and its renunciation of force made it less likely that the Nationalists would be able to drag the United States into a war and thus made it easier to defend American policy at home.

Regardless of the success of their policy, American officials were relieved to see the crisis at an end. Civilian officials in particular believed that the United

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States had come very close to nuclear war. The President and his chief advisers apparently believed that the Soviet Union would back the Chinese Communists if the United States hit the Chinese mainland with nuclear weapons, and they also believed that they had been quite close to ordering such strikes. The Administration did not give loud public utterance to these fears, as it later did in the Cuban crisis, for fear of intensifying public opposition and because it was unwilling to state publicly that it would defend Quemoy. But the United States had moved in such a way as to prevent a clash that might have led to nuclear war. The American commitment to the Offshore Islands had been made clear and the Chinese Communists were unlikely to miscalculate again. At the same time, the capability of the Chinese Nationalists to resupply the Islands under fire was substantially increased.

Dulles came away from the crisis with the feeling that he had stretched the limits of the Administration's ability to operate without the consent of the public, the Congress, and America's allies. He believed that the GRC had to make some concessions in order to gain public support, and he apparently had his doubts about whether the United States could again defend the Offshore Islands in the event of another Chinese Communist probe.

Other American officials do not appear to have shared Dulles' feeling that the United States barely got by. Some, including General Maxwell Taylor and Gerard Smith, were unhappy about our "excessive" and continuing reliance on nuclear weapons; others, including Twining and Kuter, about our flirtation with conventional defense. Although one result of the crisis was to induce military planners

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to include a conventional annex in their operational plans and some increase in conventional capability, the general feeling in policy-making circles seems to have been that the crisis demonstrated the efficacy of relying on nuclear threats.

Whatever feeling of satisfaction there was about the way in which matters had been handled, there was a lack of systematic interest in "crisis management" at the civilian level and little attention paid to the lessons that the crisis could teach.

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III. LESSONS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

In assessing the lessons for crisis management which emerge from this study of the 1958 Offshore Islands crisis it is necessary to keep in mind the difficulty of generalizing from a single case. It is also clear that much has changed since 1958 both in the world beyond American borders and in the American approach to the management of international crises. In fact the very interest in "crisis management" at the political level post-dates the crisis. Much that could have been learned from the crisis--most obviously the need for a flexible response strategy--has already been learned in other ways. Nevertheless, it seems useful to consider at least some of the issues of crisis management which arose because of the Chinese Communist probe in the Taiwan Straits.

THE RELATION OF MILITARY MEANS TO POLITICAL ENDS

The Offshore Islands crisis of 1958 represented an extreme instance of a general phenomenon that has characterized limited wars in the nuclear age. The battlefield that was fought over, in this case the Quemoy Islands, was of no intrinsic importance to the United States. Its territory and population were very small, its industry insignificant. Indeed, for some American officials there was a positive interest in having the Offshore Islands taken over by the Chinese Communists because it was recognized that a two-China solution would be facilitated by a Chinese Nationalist withdrawal.

This lack of intrinsic value in a territory being

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fought over creates the problem of defining those objectives that are sought only because of their political effects.*

In approaching this problem, the Administration attempted to assess the defense of the Offshore Islands in terms of the general principles it was prepared to support. These were, first, its unwillingness to allow international boundaries to be changed by force and, second, a determination to live up to its commitments and defend its interests. Vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and Communist China, it was felt to be particularly important to demonstrate that the United States had not changed its commitments in view of the Soviet Sputnik and ICBM tests. Indeed, the United States sought to show that it was willing to defend even those territories such as Quemoy to which it was not explicitly committed. It of course recognized that the GRC was the one country which had an intrinsic interest in the Offshore Islands, which represented the only piece of territory under GRC control which was indisputably Chinese. The Chinese Nationalists, in turn, tended to justify the defense of the Offshore Islands not only because of their intrinsic importance, but also because losing the Islands would seriously affect the position of the GRC on Taiwan.

As for the neutral nations and America's allies, the value of American participation in defense of the Offshore Islands was less clear. Almost all of America's allies

* For a general discussion of this question, see Morton H. Halperin, Limited War in the Nuclear Age, Wiley, New York, 1963, pp. 8-10.

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problems, there were still others equally difficult. One major issue with which the State Department grappled throughout the crisis was under what circumstances it would be possible and desirable to negotiate a settlement and what the costs and gains of doing so would be. The question that was constantly posed and never answered was whether the Islands could be negotiated out of the control of the Chinese Nationalists in a way that would avoid the penalties mentioned above. It was generally agreed that during the period when the Chinese Communists were applying military force, this could not be done without great cost. At the same time, various demilitarization schemes considered how to induce the Nationalists to give up the Islands without allowing the Communists to gain control of them. Here again there was no satisfactory way of assessing the relative costs and gains, and the recognition that neither the Communists nor the Nationalists were likely to be interested in, let alone accept, a negotiated settlement tended to make this issue less prominent than it might otherwise have been.

Another similar and knotty problem concerned the defense of the smaller islands in the Quemoy group. The United States decided early in the crisis that it would limit its involvement to Big Quemoy and Little Quemoy apparently because the smaller islands would be difficult if not impossible to defend in the event of a Chinese Communist attack. The fact that the GRC considered these islands part of the Quemoy chain and would have defended them against the Chinese Communists had curious implications for the United States. Since American policy had not publicly singled out these lesser islands in the Quemoy

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and most neutral nations indicated their opposition to the American defense of Quemoy and, in fact, put pressure on the United States to seek a peaceful settlement. At the same time, American officials probably recognized that if the United States did withdraw from the Offshore Islands, some countries, even those who opposed American involvement in Quemoy, might begin to question whether the United States would live up to its commitments to them.

American policy thus hinged on evaluating these political effects. As is generally the case, this was extremely difficult to do. Most officials seemed to believe, along with the GRC, that the future existence of an independent government on Taiwan might well be called into question if Quemoy were allowed to fall and with it one-third of the combat troops of the GRC. There is no way to verify whether or not this would have been the case. Certainly the government on Taiwan would have been shaken by a loss of the Offshore Islands. Given the difficulty of making any certain predictions, and the genuine uncertainties involved, it was not surprising that the United States acted on the assumption that the fall of Quemoy would lead to the fall of Taiwan. It was safer in this case, as it generally is, or appears to be, to take the pessimistic viewpoint. What effect American involvement had on other countries' assessment of American willingness to oppose the use of force and the American determination to live up to its commitments is also difficult to gauge. Certainly, American action moved in this direction, but by how much and at what cost?

If the question of whether the United States should be involved at all in the defense of Quemoy posed difficult

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chain, the refusal to participate in their defense might have created the impression that the United States was not prepared to defend Quemoy itself. While this danger seemed to argue for the defense of all the Offshore Islands, any attempt to defend the smaller islands appeared so absurd to American military planners that nobody pressed it. What seems to have occurred is that the uninhabited pieces of rock called the Tans so dramatized their lack of intrinsic importance that the decision was made not to defend them.

The most difficult issue for the United States arose when it appeared that its convoys might be unsuccessful in breaking the blockade. If this had happened, the United States would have faced the difficult choice of enlarging the war or either permitting the Offshore Islands to be captured or trying to negotiate their transfer. The war could have been enlarged either by permitting the GRC to engage in greater efforts, in particular by bombing the mainland, or by greater American involvement, including convoying all the way in or, at a different level, employment of tactical nuclear weapons. The decisions here became more difficult and more controversial. In a way that seems typical of limited war situations, the United States very quickly decided to step up its own involvement by convoying up to within three miles of the Offshore Islands. When increased operations of this sort are carried on for even a brief period, they tend to be viewed as the limit of what can possibly be done without provoking a much larger crisis. This happens because expectations are built up on both sides as to what each will and will not engage in. Thus as September wore on and the blockade

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continued to be successful, an issue arose as to whether there should be a qualitative change in the American involvement or an effort to seek a ceasefire. The problem was one of assessing alternative negative political effects. On the one hand, to let the Islands fall would be to forfeit the principle of not allowing force to change boundaries and to suggest a lack of American determination. On the other hand, to bring on a larger crisis was to give the impression that the United States was reckless, an ally who might drag her partners into a war. At the least it raised the possibility that the United States might have to abandon its long reluctance to use nuclear weapons. This particular crisis was resolved by breaking the blockade in late September, but it is not clear what alternative would have been adopted had the blockade been successful. And it is difficult even with the benefit of hindsight to assess which course would have been less costly.

The problems discussed here produced a tendency during the Quemoy crisis and in fact a general tendency in limited war situations to "play it safe" by overestimating the consequences of losing the battle. Among other reasons, the difficulties of assessing the consequences of the loss of Quemoy for the government on Taiwan as well as for the American position in the world led to the American decision to defend the Offshore Islands. In this situation, American officials exaggerated the adverse consequences of losing the Islands and ultimately the National Security Council came to equate the loss of Quemoy with the collapse of the entire American position in the Western Pacific.

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It should be clear that statements about inevitabilities sometimes have dangerous consequences. In this instance, because of the consequences that were thought to attend the loss of Quemoy, the United States came fairly close to using tactical nuclear weapons, despite opposition to its policy by most of its allies and many in the United States. It would appear that a rational decision on whether to use nuclear weapons or otherwise to increase the American involvement required a better appraisal of the consequences than one that predicted the worst of all possible worlds.

The difficulty of measuring the effects of various losses can lead to "playing it safe" by falling back upon extreme formulations. If one asserts, for example, that the loss of Quemoy will make it harder to hold Taiwan or more expensive to maintain the American position in the Western Pacific, the inevitable question is how much harder or at how much greater cost? Assertions such as "the loss of Quemoy will inevitably mean the loss of Taiwan" or "the American position in the Western Pacific will collapse if Quemoy is allowed to fall" seem patently absurd in retrospect, but American officials may have felt that to insert the qualifications which they believed should be attached to the predictions would be to fail to express the policy intent of their views.

In turn it would have been difficult for the members of the National Security Council, in making a recommendation to the President, to agree on a precise assessment of the danger involved. A unanimous opinion that the American position in the Western Pacific would collapse

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if Quemoy fell could be taken, and perhaps was taken by the President, as indicating that all of his advisers agreed that these costs, however impossible to specify in any detail, would be very great. Despite the possibility of rationalizing this approach, particularly in an attempt to build a consensus, it is clear that the United States would have found it difficult to determine whether or not it should allow Quemoy to fall in the face of a much greater and more determined Chinese Communist threat. In trying to balance increased American involvement against the costs of losing, one clearly would have had to ask what American actions could be taken on Taiwan or elsewhere that would at least in part compensate for the loss of Quemoy and how much these would cost. So long as the situation was viewed as an extreme one, the tendency was to argue that the United States should do whatever was necessary to hold Quemoy. All of this may serve to explain if not justify the predictions made.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE ENEMY*

In the Quemoy crisis, as in all war situations, the United States forced the question of what information about its own intentions and capabilities it wished to convey to the enemy and, secondly, what were the best

* A number of technical problems relating to the delays in passing messages back and forth were identified during the crisis and in a number of papers written afterwards. In most cases it was pointed out that the deficiencies had been noted prior to the crisis but simply had not been considered of sufficient priority to merit attention. None of these technical issues are considered here.

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means to convey this--whether by public statements, by diplomatic messages, or by actions. Basically what the United States wanted to convey was very simply: it would employ whatever means were necessary to defend the Off-shore Islands if the Chinese Communists sought to take them by military force. However, there were difficulties in making this message unequivocally.

The major failure of American communication during the crisis came before the intensive shelling on August 23. The Chinese Communists began their probe because they believed that there was a substantial possibility that the United States would permit the Chinese to take Quemoy or, alternatively, would force a GRC evacuation. Neither of these alternatives was ever given serious consideration by the American Government. Yet the United States failed to communicate its determination to defend Quemoy to the Chinese Communists. In part this failure to communicate was because American officials at the top could not be persuaded that a crisis was sufficiently imminent that they should give serious attention to the question of whether the United States should issue a public statement of its position. Even in the days just preceding the outbreak of intense hostilities when top officials were finally alerted, they were unable or unwilling to convey a clear message. It was only on August 23 that Secretary of State Dulles agreed to exchange letters with the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, indicating that the United States would be involved in the defense of Quemoy. Why was this letter so long in coming?

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One reason, the importance of which it is difficult to estimate, is simply that the Secretary of State was away on vacation during the two weeks prior to the time that he agreed to issue this statement. During this period more and more officials in Washington became convinced that some action was needed by the American Government to deter a Chinese Communist probe. At the same time it was felt that this action could not be taken unless the United States were in fact prepared to defend Quemoy. Bluffing would be extremely dangerous because the Chinese Communists were likely to probe to the point where they discovered the bluff, and this would simply add to the political cost of allowing Quemoy to fall. Since it was unlikely that the President would make any firm decisions prior to the crisis (and was indeed reluctant to do so even after the crisis began), what was needed was an official competent and willing to assume this authority and to act on it. Short of the President, only Dulles could play this role. Officials up to the level of the Secretary of Defense and the Acting Secretary of State continually expressed their recognition of the need for such a high-level decision and the difficulty of getting it.

After the start of the artillery fire on August 23, American communication with Chinese Communists was by and large a success. The United States made clear its involvement and its willingness to defend Quemoy in a way which deterred military actions in the Taiwan Straits, which ran the risk of bringing American forces into action and succeeded in deterring any more extensive military action by the Chinese Communists if such had been planned.

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American action after August 23 was more successful partly because the Secretary of State, now back on the scene, was willing and able to make public statements authoritatively interpreting and predicting American policy. At the same time the President made a number of decisions which made it clear to all officials that the United States was likely if not certain to intervene if Quemoy were assaulted. Finally the military crisis itself occasioned an increase in the activity of American forces in the Taiwan Straits and hence betokened American involvement.

Nevertheless, problems remained. There was still some hesitation and disagreement about what precisely the United States would do if the blockade could not be broken or if Quemoy were attacked. More importantly, the United States was not prepared to defend the smaller islands in the Quemoy chain but was unwilling to say so publicly lest it invite the Chinese Communists to take them. Any statement which slurred over this question and was then followed by an attack on the smaller islands would give the impression that the United States was going back on its word. The question of whether or not nuclear weapons would be used was unresolved because it depended on the final decision of the President. These factors were probably sufficient to lead the United States to decide that it should try to convey its determination to defend the Offshore Islands to the Chinese Communists by military action rather than by words. However, there was a much more serious and critical problem which in fact dominated this decision. This was the problem of multiple audiences.

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Although the strategy of John Foster Dulles during the 1958 Taiwan Straits crisis has frequently been described as one of calculated ambiguity, it was not ambiguous when it came to communicating with the Chinese Communists. In this regard, American policy was guided, as Dulles was to assert many times, by the recognition that it was necessary to make absolutely clear to the Chinese Communists that the United States would intervene to defend the Offshore Islands. But in relation to the GRC, to America's allies, to world public opinion in general, and to the public and Congress in the United States, the Administration recognized the need for ambiguity.*

In 1954, in the face of another threat to the Offshore Islands under the control of the Chinese Nationalists, the United States Government had asked for and received from the Congress authority to defend the Offshore Islands whenever this defense was necessary for the defense of Taiwan. There was little doubt that the President of the United States had the right to employ military force without congressional authorization when the security of the United States demanded it. It was also possible to interpret the Congressional Resolution in a way that would have enabled the United States simply to assert in August 1958 that it was going to defend the Offshore Islands. Even so, the Administration chose to interpret the Resolution in a much narrower way. It was felt specifically, and Dulles asserted it privately as well as

*The problem in relation to the GRC will be considered below in discussing alliance problems.

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publicly, that the Resolution made it impossible for the United States to say unequivocally that it would defend Quemoy until an attack had actually begun against the Island and, as such, threatened Taiwan.* Thus this reasoning alone was sufficient to keep the Administration from making an unequivocal statement that it would defend Quemoy. And in fact it is this problem that appears to have been critical in the thinking of the Secretary of State.

Moreover it was recognized that there was substantial opposition to the policy of defending Quemoy within the United States and within the Congress in particular. As long as United States policy continued to be ambiguous it was possible to meet some of these criticisms by arguing that the United States had simply not yet committed itself to the defense of Quemoy. The hostile public reaction to Dulles' equivocal statement at Newport suggests what would have occurred had the President or the Secretary of State issued a clear warning to the Chinese Communists. In conversations with allied diplomats who criticized American policy, U.S. officials constantly reiterated that the United States had not yet made any determination to defend Quemoy and that such a determination could only be made by the President. They could thus avoid having to defend the policy of trying to hold the Offshore Islands in the face of a military onslaught by

* It was never made clear why the Administration could not have asserted that, given the situation as it existed, any attack on Quemoy, no matter how mounted, would inevitably pose a threat to the security of Taiwan and would be resisted.

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denying that that was their policy. The United States, it could be urged, was merely seeking a diplomatic and peaceful solution and trying to avoid the necessity of taking a decision on this issue. As for the GRC, the problems and dangers arising from an unequivocal communication that the United States would defend the Offshore Islands were most clear and to these the discussion now turns.

ALLIANCE PROBLEMS

The essence of limited war is a combination of conflicting and cooperative interests between combatants. The Quemoy crisis exhibited not only this factor but also the phenomenon of conflicting and overlapping objectives among allies. In fact, even leaving out the controversial question of Soviet interests, one can identify points on which there was a common interest between the United States and the GRC vis-à-vis the Chinese Communists, but others in which there were common issues between the United States and Communist China vis-à-vis the GRC, and still others in which the two Chinese Governments shared common interests vis-à-vis the United States. To illustrate with some of the main issues: both the United States and the GRC wanted to prevent the Chinese Communists from capturing the Offshore Islands. The United States and the Chinese Communists wanted to prevent a major military clash between the two countries, which, it was argued, the GRC was trying to promote. Finally, the

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two Chinas had a common interest in avoiding a solution which would lead to a two-China situation whereas the United States, or at least some American officials, had an interest in this objective.

American officials in the field and in Washington had at least some understanding of these conflicting interests prior to the crisis. However, events of August, September, and October, 1958, brought home to them in a vivid way the extent to which the objectives of the United States and its chief ally were not in perfect harmony and the need therefore to take these conflicting objectives into account in framing policy. As time passed, it became clear that in many ways the GRC had to be treated as an adversary even while close military cooperation was in process. For example, it had to be acknowledged that the GRC might not share the American urgency about resupplying the Offshore Islands and in fact might even have reasons to avoid doing so.

A major issue in this regard, frequently debated in Washington and in the field, was the question of whether or not the GRC was in fact making an all-out effort to resupply the Islands. This issue posed a difficult problem for those within the Government who were strongly committed to American support of the GRC. These officials, who on this issue included Dulles as well as Walter Robertson and others, were unwilling to admit that the GRC might be dragging its feet. To admit this would perhaps force a reassessment of American policy. On the other hand, to deny it would make it harder to induce Chiang Kai-shek to order an all-out resupply effort. American officials,

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even in recorded conversations with each other, did not frankly accept the existence of conflicting objectives and hence of conflicting policies; they thought it impossible to deal with this situation without thereby calling into jeopardy the whole policy of American commitment to the defense of the GRC.

The conflicting objectives were recognized to be of critical importance in determining what kind of public statements the United States could make. It was feared by many officials that if the United States unequivocally committed itself to the defense of Quemoy, the GRC would simply sit back and force the United States into a more active resupply role, hoping thereby to provoke a clash between the United States and Communist China. Alternatively the GRC might bomb the mainland or take other action which would lead to a major war and so force the United States to come in because of its public commitment. Since the United States was unwilling to commit itself privately or publicly to the GRC, it felt unable to make a clear statement of its position to the Chinese Communists.

Despite the complete dependence of the GRC on the United States for military equipment and for keeping open the access routes to the Offshore Islands, it was able to exert considerable influence on American policy. Indeed, its very weakness was a source of strength,* since the GRC could point out that if its demands were not met, the government might collapse.

* For a general discussion of weakness as a source of strength in bargaining situations, see Thomas C. Shelling, The Strategy of Conflict, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, pp. 21-52.

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A major means by which the GRC was able to affect American policy during the crisis was their control over information, particularly information about the resupply situation on Quemoy. GRC officials could and did constantly point to the danger that the Offshore Islands would soon run out of supplies unless a major resupply effort were undertaken. While American officials increasingly came to recognize that the figures given by the GRC were not completely accurate, it was difficult to develop alternative figures. During much of the crisis Washington relied on the GRC estimates, even if they had to be taken with a grain of salt. Considerable pressure was put on the GRC to supply more accurate figures, but in the end the Administration found it necessary to make their own estimates in Washington, estimates that proved to be more reliable than figures coming from the GRC. At the same time, since the Administration could not be sure that its figures based simply on map studies and pencil and paper calculations were correct, it was forced to take into account the estimates presented by the Chinese Nationalists.

Closely related to the estimates that suggested the gravity of the situation on the Offshore Islands were the GRC statements that the Islands were about to collapse. In addition to the bad resupply situation, GRC officials also emphasized the critical factor of morale and declared that the Quemoy defenders could not be expected to hold out under these conditions. This factor was even more difficult for American officials to judge independently and was in part manipulatable by the GRC.

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The GRC also could and did invoke the threat of surrender. American officials were continually confronted with the fear that the GRC, despairing of help from the United States, might make a deal with the Chinese Communists. Peking continued to play on this fear by offering to open negotiations and attacking the United States in propaganda to the GRC. The United States was limited in the extent to which it could negotiate with the Chinese Communists since officials feared that such negotiations might trigger Peking-Taipei negotiations.

The other means of influencing American policy which the GRC used was the threat to expand the war, in particular by bombing the mainland. American officials feared that GRC bombing of the mainland would lead to Communist bombing of Taiwan, thus calling into play the American guarantees and leading to a major war between the United States and Communist China. Since it was recognized that the GRC favored such a war, there was a real fear that the GRC would try to provoke it. The United States had long recognized this danger and had a number of formal agreements and understandings with the GRC about the American right to be consulted and to approve any attacks against the mainland. However, it was recognized that even within the spirit of these rather binding agreements, the GRC did have the right to bomb the mainland in the face of heavy artillery fire against the Offshore Islands. GRC officials on Taiwan and in Washington continued to raise the threat that they would be forced into bombing the mainland unless more vigorous action were taken by the United States. American officials

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tended to counter this by pointing out that the United States was less likely to intervene if it feared GRC expansion of the war and might not come to the aid of the GRC if they acted in a way that seemed to conflict with the spirit if not with the letter of the American-GRC agreements.

As in indicated above, American ability to deal with the GRC was hampered at least initially by an unwillingness to recognize the adversary relationship involved and to take the necessary action to deal with it. However, even when the problem was recognized and faced up to, the GRC control over information, its ability to threaten to collapse or surrender, and its ability to threaten to expand the war combined to give the GRC influence over American policy by curtailing American efforts to negotiate an end to the crisis.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO THE MILITARY

A major issue raised during the Offshore Islands crisis was the question of how much authority could and should be given to military commanders in Washington and in the field. The issue arose in two connections. The first concerned how much authority commanders in the field would have in demonstrating the American involvement in the defense of the Offshore Islands. The second involved the question of authority to defend Quemoy and most importantly the role of nuclear weapons in that defense.

Unwilling to make a firm public commitment to the defense of the Offshore Islands, the Administration was forced to rely in large part on military actions in order

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to convey to the Chinese Communists its involvement in the defense of Quemoy. In seeking to implement this policy by action, the Administration in Washington relied in large measure on the initiative of its commanders in the field. The major decisions--to dispatch a TAC unit from the United States, to add an aircraft carrier group from the 6th Fleet, to escort to within three miles of Quemoy--were made in Washington, but a host of other decisions, decisions probably critical in making clear American involvement, were made on Taiwan and in CINCPAC headquarters in Hawaii. Questions such as how many ships would be involved in the escort, what maneuvers to carry out in the Straits, and so on were decided there. American military officers in the field were well aware of the task which had been given to them and responded with sensitivity to the problems involved. They recognized that the objective was to convey American involvement without being provocative and without bringing on a major clash between the United States and China. They recognized their responsibility and fulfilled it more easily than would have been the case had Washington officials attempted to direct every move from the Pentagon.

If Washington was prepared to transfer authority for military maneuvering in the Taiwan Straits to officers in the field, it was determined to keep decisions on how to react to invasion of Quemoy centered in Washington. The main issues concerned the necessary degree of delegation of authority to the Joint Chiefs and the extent to which the President had to make up his mind in advance. There was general agreement that a decision in principle

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had to be made as to whether the United States wanted to react quickly to an invasion of the Quemoy Islands. It was agreed that the United States would be involved in their defense, and this led to the question of how much advance authority had to be given to officials in the field or to the military in Washington. Apparently without any disagreement it was settled that officials in the field would simply be told to prepare for the defense of Quemoy and, if there was no time to consult the President, the Joint Chiefs would be authorized on their own initiative to direct the employment of American conventional forces in the event of an invasion of Quemoy.

The authority to use nuclear weapons, however, remained firmly in the hands of the President. Much time was spent at high levels in Washington discussing whether it was necessary to delegate this authority at least to the Joint Chiefs. The tenor of the discussion suggests that the President might at least have considered delegating this authority if he had been advised that this was necessary to assure the defense of the Offshore Islands. However, there was agreement among military planners that the immediate use of conventional force would be sufficient to delay any successful invasion long enough for the President to authorize the use of nuclear weapons. In this situation the President reserved to himself the decision to use nuclear weapons. However, discussions in which he participated and the memorandums which he signed left little doubt in the minds of other officials that he was prepared to use nuclear weapons. They recognized, as apparently did the President, that as long as

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the decision to employ nuclear weapons was his alone, he could change his mind in the event that he was actually asked to release nuclear weapons. However, the President did substantially increase the cost of deciding not to use nuclear weapons at the moment of crisis. He authorized the use of American conventional forces in the defense of Quemoy with the clear understanding that they were to be used only in a last minute effort to deter a Chinese Communist invasion or to slow it down long enough to permit the American nuclear weapons to come into play. The use of American conventional power made sense, the President had been told, only if the use of nuclear weapons would follow almost immediately.

The problems and actions taken in regard to delegation of authority suggest that military officers can at least in some situations be expected to employ limited amounts of political force with sophisticated understanding of the problems of communicating resolve and restraint at the same time. They also suggest that the problem of advanced commitment about the use of nuclear weapons is likely to be a very knotty problem and, as Eisenhower indicated in this case, at the heart of the difficulty in any local crisis in which major violence threatens to erupt quickly.

EXPANSION: PROBLEMS AND INCENTIVES

The overriding principle which guided American military moves throughout the crisis was that the United States would apply only that degree of military force which was necessary to resolve the crisis. There were a

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number of possible actions by the United States in the field of increasing military force, such as escorting all the way in or bombing the mainland--not to speak of the use of nuclear weapons--which would have brought the crisis to a head more quickly and brought into play greater American military power. While American officials recognized these possibilities, the pressures to keep the war limited proved to be extremely great.

Perhaps the major incentive for limiting American involvement was the desire to avoid a major war. There were two different kinds of wars to be avoided here: a large war with the Chinese Communists and a war which would involve the Soviet Union and presumably the use of nuclear weapons against at least American bases. As far as written record reveals, American officials did not distinguish these two dangers in seeking to avoid a major expansion of the war. American officials had no desire to provoke a major military confrontation with the Chinese Communists and hence both of these possibilities were viewed with alarm. While it was recognized that the Chinese themselves also desired to avoid this sort of major confrontation, it was believed that certain actions might provoke the Chinese Communists into bringing on a major war.

Another factor working against an increased American involvement in the war was the recognition of the unpopularity of American policy in Congress and with the American public as well as with America's allies. It was believed that the greater the level of American involvement the greater would be the political cost and the greater would be the pressures on the United States which

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might ultimately lead to a decision to change the policy and agree to abandoning the Offshore Islands.

Two pressures working against limiting the involvement of American forces and for expansion were the desire to make clear to the Chinese Communists that the United States would be prepared to expand its military effort in the event of an invasion and the need to use force sufficient to break the blockade. As indicated above, American officials in the field were given considerable leeway in demonstrating their involvement. The guiding principle was apparently to do things which "showed the flag" without directly affecting military operations or provoking a possible clash with Chinese Communist forces. In relation to breaking the blockade, American involvement was limited to convoying to within three miles and to intensive training and encouragement given to the GRC Navy. Whether the pressure for greater involvement would have overridden the pressures against expansion if the blockade had seemed to be working is impossible to judge, and American officials at the time had real doubts as to what would be done.

The pressures for and against expansion of the military conflict and the American reaction to these pressures suggest the need for greater understanding of the utility as well as the dangers posed by the decision to expand a limited conflict. It may not always be in the American interest to convey a determination not to use more military force than is necessary to cope with the immediate danger. At the same time a better understanding of the way in which a limited war could explode into a major

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conflict is needed. On this and other issues, the 1958 Offshore Islands crisis can provide useful insights and illustrations of the problems. But the U.S. Government will be able to use the lessons of the past to help meet future crises most effectively only if the lessons from this crisis are combined with those of other postwar military crises and these are put into a general theoretical framework.

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