

## **Fait Accompli: New Codeword on Taiwan Security**

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Senator Josh Hawley recently proposed a bill “Taiwan Defense Act” in the US Senate, asking the US to maintain the ability to deny a fait accompli by the People’s Republic of China against Taiwan. When the Tsai Ing-wen administration expresses its gratitude, it should also pay close attention to the new codeword therein on Taiwan’s security: “fait accompli.”

This French term appeared in the bill repeatedly, altogether 32 times. It was also given a definition: “The term ‘fait accompli’ means the strategy of the People’s Republic of China designed to allow the People’s Republic of China to use military force to seize control of Taiwan before the United States Armed Forces are able to respond effectively, while simultaneously deterring an effective combined joint response by the United States Armed Forces by convincing the United States that mounting such a response would be prohibitively difficult or costly.” The bill called it “the most stressing potential scenario,” and cited then Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan, Commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Phil Davidson, Commanding General of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command Lieutenant General David Berger, and the Pentagon’s “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report,” all essentially making the same point: China’s capabilities could seek to achieve a fait accompli that would make reversing Chinese gains more difficult, militarily and politically.

This new codeword has three significant implications. First, the U.S. openly, though indirectly, indicates that it has no ability to rush to Taiwan’s rescue in time to save it when Mainland China attacks Taiwan. This writer has written several op-eds in recent years explaining the causes of this painful fact. They include: though the sole military superpower, the U.S. is spread so thin that China manages to gain a local advantage near Taiwan Strait; Beijing would most likely resort to a surprise attack on Taiwan, thus

catching Washington off guard; Beijing would also attempt a swift victory, submitting Taiwan in an extremely short time; U.S. military bases are located too far from Taiwan, while China's bases are nearby; China's military assets are capable of deterring and keeping the US carrier groups east of Guam; the U.S. allies in East Asia are reluctant to render a helping hand, etc. This being a fact, if Taiwan continues to believe that "the US will come to our rescue," we would be merely engaging in wishful thinking.

Second, the new bill is meant to enhance the strength of US intervention, so it would not have to face the painful choice of abandoning Taiwan in time of despair. It proposes to strengthen the existing joint forces of the US military, to assess the possibilities of kinetic strikes against targets on the Mainland, and to assess the role of the nuclear weapons.

Problems with these potential remedies lie mainly with the time gap. It may take a long time for the Pentagon to transform its mighty forces currently tailored for "counter-terrorism operations" into a force capable of "near-peer duel." It is true that the PRC military is much less experienced in any combat than its US counterpart. But from the outset of its modernization People's Liberation Army has been focused nearly exclusively on the Taiwan scenario, including fending off US carrier groups. Meanwhile the US carriers have comfortably stayed out of the harm's way for decades. But a showdown between China and the U.S., with the new hypersonic missiles in China's inventory, would probably be a replay of the famous David vs. Goliath story in the Old Testament. Psychologically the US military is now treating China as an enemy, but the transformation of Goliath has just begun and it will take quite a few years for the budget, armament, deployment, training and everything else to fall into place.

In other words, we are entering into a period when the US military in East Asia is undergoing a major transition. Hence Taiwan's security will be at its weakest since 1949. Taiwan Defense Act may be well intentioned, but it inadvertently exposes this embarrassing, vital truth.

Third, if the U.S. is not to come to Taiwan's rescue, Taiwan's survival will hinge on whether the PRC will strike. Since Beijing does have the "capability" to do so, the main question would be on its "intention." The most authoritative document in this regard is

China's Anti-Secession Law passed in 2005. It delineates three "red-lines": one, "secessionist forces act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China;" two, "major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China;" and three "possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted." At the time of its promulgation, then President Chen Shui-bian was pursuing "one country on each side," "new constitution," "new name (for Taiwan)," and "plebiscite." It was clear that the first (fact of secession) and second (major incidents) red-lines were aimed at Chen's provocative behavior.

President Tsai wisely avoided those radical moves, thus steering away from the first and second red-lines. She has instead adopted a more low-key approach, managing to cover a lot more ground than her predecessor ever did. The tense DPP/CCP relationship now not only levels with the KMT/CCP feud during the cold-war years, characterized by the so-called "Three Nos" (no contact, no talks, and no compromise) and "Leaning to One Side" (i.e., the U.S.). It actually exceeds the KMT/CCP feud by cutting off the "one country" and "one nation" linkages across the Taiwan Strait – both central to the self-images of the Chinese government and people. Hence it is not surprising that not only the two governments had ceased to communicate with each other entirely, but more importantly, the Chinese people on the mainland who had harbored enormous goodwill toward Taiwan in the past decades are becoming almost universally bitter and resentful.

As a result, the internal discussion on Taiwan inside the Mainland is turning toward the third red-line: if the possibility of peaceful reunification is totally lost. Should China reach a "hopeless" conclusion, the fait accompli scenario may well leap onto its schedule.

When President Tsai was interviewed by CNN February 2019, she said if China were to attack Taiwan, "we would need to fend China off for 24 hours." "After withstanding the first wave of attacks ourselves, other countries throughout the world would stand up in unison and put strong pressure upon China in response." We hope and rather believe that Taiwan could fend China off for 24 hours. But it is becoming increasingly difficult to believe that the international support, mainly the U.S., would come to Taiwan's rescue in time to save it.