

## Learning from a war that never was

Written by Lu Li-shih 盧立時

Monday, 31 August 2020 04:23

---

In their article “The War That Never Was?” in this month’s issue of *Proceedings*, former vice chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral James Winnefeld and former CIA acting director Michael Morrell envisage a scenario in which Beijing “unites” with Taiwan by force in three days.

Viewed together with the live-fire exercise conducted by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), with anti-ship ballistic missiles being fired into the South China Sea on Wednesday, the imagined scenario calls attention to potential misunderstandings and blind spots.

Given that it is situated on a pivotal position of the US’ Indo-Pacific strategy and on the front line of China’s military threats, Taiwan must carefully examine what threats it is facing.

In their former posts, Winnefeld participated in the US military’s highest-level decisionmaking and operations, while Morrell must have read all kinds of top-secret files. They used their expertise to discuss in their article what military operations the PLA could take against Taiwan in January next year.

The backdrop of the article is a US caught in up the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and street protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd.

Chinese leaders sense that the US political transition in January next year could offer a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” as it “would be an even more vulnerable time than usual for US decisionmaking.”

In mid-December, China’s top leadership could therefore decide “to place in motion Operation Red Province — to bring Taiwan back into China.”

Weighing the article’s content and style shows that the authors’ intention is not to give a prediction, nor do they offer any intelligence information, but instead they present a battle scenario, which explains why the authors provide a judgement of a perceived enemy threat in

the first section, subtitled “Why now?”

The article’s middle section — “How” — elucidates the enemy’s possible actions, while the final section — “The Response” — is effectively an “after action review.”

Basically, the article aims to raise the alarm by envisioning possible PLA actions according to the present circumstances and current balance of power.

It is a friendly reminder to Taiwan, but its real significance is to alert the US president and high-ranking military officers that China might take advantage of the power vacuum created by a presidential transition.

The PLA’s live-fire exercise on Wednesday might have been overlooked, but also requires close analysis.

Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post was the first media outlet to disclose that the PLA had fired two anti-ship ballistic missiles — a DF-26B launched from Qinghai Province and a DF-21D from Zhejiang Province — into the South China Sea. Bloomberg News on Thursday reported that the PLA had launched four missiles.

Last year, the PLA test-fired a DF-21D missile from Guangxi Province’s Luorong base to the Dreyer Shoal (渚碧礁) in the South China Sea.

Wednesday’s firings were the first time the PLA fired ballistic missiles from so close to the Taiwan Strait since Taiwan’s long-range early-warning radar system on Leshan (鵞鑾鼻) in Hsinchu County began operating in 2013.

By using trajectories within range of the Leshan radar station, the PLA showed off its anti-access and area denial capabilities to the US military.

## Learning from a war that never was

Written by Lu Li-shih 呂立士

Monday, 31 August 2020 04:23

---

The PLA routinely showcases its weapons and equipment after enhancing their performance or acquiring new equipment.

In 2014, images of the PLA Navy's retired 053H Jianghu-I-class Zhenjiang frigate serving as the target ship in an attack from above emerged on the Internet, and experts thought it had been targeted by a DF-21D missile.

The PLA's military parade celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Second Sino-Japanese War the following year showcased the DF-26 missile, which boasts a longer range.

The DF-26 was formally introduced to the PLA in 2018, while the DF-41 intercontinental ballistic missile was displayed during China's National Day parade last year.

The almost provocative trajectory of the DF-21D from Zhejiang Province to the South China Sea shows the PLA is not afraid of detection by the Leshan station. This could imply that the space technology development of Shenzhou 9 and Tianwen-1 has given China the capability to change missile trajectory.

This would mean that the Republic of China (ROC) Navy's Keelung-class destroyers and Cheng Kung-class frigates do not have sufficient air defense capabilities.

It is time that the government accelerates procurement of retired Burke-class guided-missile destroyers from the US, upgrade their performance upon receipt and coordinate with land-based surface-to-air missile systems so that Taiwan can build more complete missile defense capabilities.

*Lu Li-shih is a former instructor at the Republic of China Naval Academy and a former captain of the ROCS Hsin Chiang.*

## Learning from a war that never was

Written by Lu Li-shih 呂麗詩

Monday, 31 August 2020 04:23

---

Translated by Chang Ho-ming

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/08/31](#)