

US-China conflict over Taiwan possible: report

Written by Taipei Times

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A new study published this week by Foreign Policy magazine concludes that Taiwan remains the one place in the world where China and the US “could conceivably come into direct conflict.”

Drew Thompson, director of China studies at the Nixon Center in Washington and author of the study, wrote: “Some wonder whether China and the United States are on a collision course. Unquestionably, there is deep strategic mistrust between the two countries. China’s rapid economic growth, steady military modernization and relentless nationalistic propaganda at home are shaping Chinese public expectations and limiting possibilities for compromise with other powers.”

However, Thompson also makes clear in the study that while conflict is not inevitable, it is cause for long-term concern.

Taiwan is “an obvious point of disagreement,” he wrote, but there is a growing recognition that the US and China “should engage one another and seek to avoid a conflict that would almost certainly be destructive to both sides.”

The study comes in the wake of Washington’s decision to sell a new US\$6.4 billion arms package to Taiwan and just as the administration of US President Barack Obama is believed to be seriously considering the sale of F-16C/D fighters to Taipei.

Thompson said China conducted another anti-missile test last month shortly after the US announced arms sales to Taiwan. At the same time, China’s leaders vehemently denounced any suggestion that they were embarking on anything other than what they have referred to as a “peaceful rise.”

“But they also don’t explain why they are investing so heavily in this new arms race,” he said.

“Taiwan, long claimed as Chinese territory and well within range of Chinese ballistic missiles and conventional forces, certainly has cause to feel threatened. Even as cross-strait relations have warmed in recent years, Beijing has positioned more medium-range missiles facing Taiwan than ever. When asked why, Beijing demurs,” he said.

The study said that Chinese military leaders have focused on preparing their armed forces to fight a limited war over Taiwan “fully expecting that the United States would enter the conflict.”

“Many weapons systems the PLA [People’s Liberation Army] acquired or developed, as well as the exercises it trained for, were largely aimed at fighting a technologically superior enemy — with particular emphasis on developing tactics to keep the United States from bringing naval assets to China’s shores,” it said.

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“Although simulating a Chinese D-Day on Taiwan might be a tidy demonstration of the PLA’s core mission, the armed forces today are developing capabilities and doctrine that will eventually enable them to protect China’s expanding global interests,” it said.

It added that the PLA’s Second Artillery Corps and science-and-technology units are increasingly capable of space and cyberspace operations, and they have honed the ability to launch and operate satellites to improve communications and intelligence collection.

“Perhaps a generation from now, Chinese military planners might be strategizing more openly about how to acquire overseas basing rights and agreements with allies where they might station their forces abroad. But with China, that process has not begun in earnest. At least, not for now,” Thompson said.

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