

US, Taiwan should cooperate to thwart PRC: expert

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A new study by Robert Kaplan — to be printed later this month in *Foreign Affairs* magazine — concludes that Washington and Taipei should work together to make the prospect of war seem “prohibitively costly” to Beijing.

“The United States could then maintain its credibility with its allies by keeping Taiwan functionally independent until China became a more liberal society,” Kaplan says.

According to RAND, a major Washington-based think tank, by the year 2020 the US will no longer be able to defend Taiwan from a Chinese attack.

China, the RAND report says, will by that time be able to defeat the US in a war in the Taiwan Strait even if the US has F-22s, two carrier strike groups and continued access to the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan.

Kaplan, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, writes that in the 21st century, China will project hard power abroad primarily through its navy.

“The Chinese navy sees little but trouble in what it calls the ‘first island chain’: the Korean Peninsula, the Kuril Islands, Japan (including the Ryukyu Islands), Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia,” Kaplan says.

Aiming to block the US Navy from entering the East China Sea and other Chinese coastal waters, China has modernized its destroyer fleet and has plans to acquire one or two aircraft carriers and could field a submarine force larger than the US Navy’s — which has 75 submarines in commission — within 15 years.

“As part of its effort to control its offshore waters in the Taiwan Strait and the East China Sea, China is also improving its mine-warfare capability, buying fourth-generation jet fighters from Russia and deploying 1,500 Russian surface-to-air missiles along its coast,” Kaplan says.

China’s aim, he says, is to dissuade the US Navy from getting between the first island chain and the Chinese coast whenever and wherever it wants.

“Since the ability to shape one’s adversary’s behavior is the essence of power, this is evidence that a Greater China is being realized at sea as on land,” he says.

And most important to the advent of a Greater China is the future of Taiwan.

“The issue of Taiwan is often discussed in moral terms: Beijing talks about the need to consolidate the national patrimony and unify China for the good of all ethnic Chinese; Washington talks about preserving this model democracy. But the real issue is something else. Taiwan is an ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’ midway up China’s seaboard,” he writes.

Kaplan says that if Taiwan returned “to the bosom” of China, the Chinese navy would not only

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be in an advantageous strategic position vis-a-vis the first island chain, but would be free to project power beyond it to an unprecedented degree.

“China’s strategy to deny the US Navy entry into certain waters is designed not only to keep US forces away generally, but also, specifically, to foster its dominance over Taiwan,” he says in the study.

Beijing, he adds, is preparing to envelop Taiwan not just militarily, but economically and socially.

“If the US simply abandons Taiwan to Beijing, then Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and other US allies in the Pacific Ocean, as well as India and even some African states, will begin to doubt the strength of Washington’s commitments,” Kaplan says.

Strengthening US air and sea power in Oceania would be a compromise approach.

“This approach would ensure that China paid a steep price for any military aggression against Taiwan. It would also allow the United States to scale back its so-called legacy bases on the first island chain but nonetheless allow US ships and planes to continue to patrol the area,” he writes.

“The very fact of China’s rising economic and military power will exacerbate US-Chinese tensions in the years ahead. The United States, the hegemon of the Western Hemisphere, will try to prevent China from becoming the hegemon of much of the Eastern Hemisphere. This could be the signal drama of the age,” he says.

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