
PREFACE

Even a half century after the birth of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Taiwan Strait remains the locus of one of the most dangerous military confrontations in the world. In recent years, a series of Chinese military exercises coupled with the ongoing modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have seemed to raise the stakes in this long-standing staredown and likewise increased its visibility, especially in the United States.

Until 1979, the United States was Taiwan's primary security partner. Today, it remains linked to the island by both force of law and a natural affinity toward a rapidly democratizing polity embedded in a vibrant market economy. But Washington at the same time is pursuing improved relations with Beijing as well as encouraging the PRC's deeper integration with the international system at large. Because the status of Taiwan may be China's single most neuralgic point, the United States is compelled to perform a delicate balancing act—attempting to fulfill its obligations and inclinations toward ensuring the Republic of China's (ROC) survival without making an enemy of the mainland.

This report looks at the near-term military balance between China and Taiwan. Mixing quantitative and qualitative analysis, it explores a range of key factors

that affect the ROC's self-defense capabilities and suggests ways that the United States can effectively contribute to improving the odds in Taipei's favor.

This report was written as part of a project on assessing Taiwanese defense needs, sponsored by the Smith Richardson Foundation. Research for the report was conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of RAND's National Security Research Division (NSRD), which conducts research for the U.S. Department of Defense, for other U.S. government agencies, and for other institutions. Publication of this report was supported in part by the Strategy and Doctrine program of Project AIR FORCE.