

Seventh Fleet Standoff: A Two-Cut Analysis of the Decision to Neutralize Taiwan in June 1950

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Introduction

On June 24, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and the U.S. responded under the auspices of the United Nations. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Omar Bradley said during President Harry Truman's June 25th emergency meeting that the U.S. must "draw the line" for the Soviets,¹ who were widely believed to be behind the attack.² But this is not an article on North Korea other than as a key turning point in American foreign policy history, for it was the Korean invasion that caused the U.S. to apply the Truman Doctrine to Asia.³ The first non-war application of the Truman Doctrine in Asia occurred in the same two-day period as the decision to respond to the Korean invasion, June 25-26, 1950. Over those 48 hours, the second topic for discussion was the fate of Formosa (since renamed Taiwan).

The United States decided to send the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet to protect Taiwan from a Communist Chinese invasion and also to prevent the Nationalist government on Taiwan from continuing its attacks on the mainland. This act, the introduction of the Seventh Fleet into the Chinese theater, is considered the beginning of the U.S. policy to defend Taiwan from China.⁴ Since 1950, this

¹ Philip Jessup, "Memorandum of Conversation by the Ambassador at Large," *FRUS*, 1950, *Volume VII, Outbreak of Hostilities*, June 25, 1950, p. 158.

² Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope: Volume Two of Memoirs by Harry S. Truman* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1956), p. 335.

³ Dennis Merrill, "The Truman Doctrine: Containing Communism and Modernity," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2006): 27-37, pp. 35-36; Denise M. Bostdorff, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), p. 146.

⁴ This new policy commitment was codified in the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). Under this treaty the U.S. fought China in 1954 and 1958. For more information see U.S. Department of State, *Milestones: 1953-1960: The Taiwan Straits Crises: 1954-55 and 1958*, Essay, Office of the Historian, Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State. In 1979, the MDT was replaced by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 that had, among other things, authorized the U.S. to provide

commitment to defend Taiwan has been seen as the largest potential cause of a U.S.-China war.⁵ Because the U.S. is a superpower and China is rising in strength, the Taiwan flashpoint is now considered to affect not only the U.S.'s national security, but the world's international security as well.⁶ This policy, originating with the movement of the U.S. fleet in June 1950, has had significant security ramifications for over six decades.

This article will answer the question: Why did the United States order the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits on June 26, 1950? The analysis will be performed using Graham Allison's multiple-cut system.⁷ The first cut will be the Rational Policy Model and the second cut will be the Bureaucratic Politics Model. The article will be broken down into four sections. First it will present a short overview of the policy that will be tailored to provide background information applicable to both models. Next it will provide a short description of each model. The third section will perform separate cuts on the research question and will thus be split into two subgroups. Finally, the article will conclude with a two-cut resultant answer to the question and an analysis of each model's usefulness to the research question in this case.

Overview of Policy

This section will provide the policy background for both cuts, so it will be tailored to the overall strategic environment.⁸ The first major event was the Truman Doctrine's creation. Conceived after World War II to keep European countries, specifically Greece and Turkey, from falling to the Soviets, Truman declared on March 12, 1947 that "[i]t must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside

defensive armaments and to protect Taiwan from the use of force and other coercions. Also see Shirley A. Kan and Wayne M. Morrison, *U.S.-Taiwan Relationship: Overview and Policy Issues*, CRS Report, Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2014 for more information.

⁵ Richard Halloran, "Taiwan," *Parameters* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 22-34, p. 22.

⁶ Kan and Morrison, *U.S.-Taiwan Relationship*, p. 6.

⁷ This approach is described in Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 3 (September 1969): 689-718; and Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Second Edition (New York City: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1999).

⁸ For more detailed information on this time period, refer to Foreign Relations of the United States: 1949, *Policy of the United States Toward Formosa (Taiwan): Concern of the United States Regarding Possible Conquest by Chinese Communists*, Vol. IX (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949); and Foreign Relations of the United States: 1950, *The China Area*, Vol. VI (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950).

pressures.”⁹ There was a discussion about whether to say, “...to support free peoples *everywhere* who...” but it was decided to remove “everywhere” so that the doctrine would not apply to China.¹⁰ In a Cabinet meeting on March 7, 1947, Truman said that he thought Chiang Kai-shek was not fit to be the leader of the Nationalists and that giving him any money “would be pouring sand in a rat hole.”¹¹ This was the basis of the U.S. effort to aid the Nationalists (on an ad-hoc basis, not under the Truman Doctrine) while simultaneously seeking Chiang’s removal as their leader.

The second policy background element is the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s strategic assessment of Taiwan. Immediately after Dean Acheson took over as Secretary of State in January 1949, he revealed in a National Security Council (NSC) meeting that he and the State Department felt that “from a strategic point of view, China was an area of lower priority.”¹² Acheson then asked the JCS for their assessment of Taiwan’s strategic priority. The JCS responded on February 10, 1949 that if Taiwan fell, “the extent of the threat to the security of the United States would be serious” and that the loss of Mainland China “would enhance the strategic value” of Taiwan.¹³ Furthermore, the JCS said that it was apparent that the U.S. had security interests in Asia and that protection of those interests would rest on controlling the sea-lanes and having locations from which to deploy air power.¹⁴ They concluded that Taiwan must be prevented from falling into Communist hands, but through “diplomatic and economic steps.”¹⁵ The JCS excluded a military option because their primary obligation was to defend Europe, an obligation soon to be codified in the North Atlantic Treaty. The JCS articulated this strategy-to-resource problem as follows: “In spite of Formosa’s strategic importance, the current disparity between our military strength and our many global obligations makes it inadvisable to undertake the employment of armed force in Formosa.”¹⁶ The JCS did recommend stationing a small number of U.S. Navy ships at Taiwan as a deterrent.

⁹ Truman quoted in Merrill, “The Truman Doctrine,” p. 27.

¹⁰ Bostdorf, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine*, p. 87.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Sidney W. Souers, “Memorandum for the President,” *DDRS*, February 4, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

¹³ Sidney W. Souers, “Note by the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council to the Council,” *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Towards Formosa*, February 11, 1949, p. 284.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Acheson immediately rejected any stationing of Navy ships at Taiwan.¹⁷ On March 4, 1949, Acheson shared the JCS conclusion – military action should not be used for Taiwan now or in the future – at a NSC meeting.¹⁸ The memo for this meeting was forwarded to Truman. This was followed by an April 4, 1949 memo by NSC Executive Secretary, Sidney Souers, which said the JCS confirmed, “overt military action by the U.S. in Formosa is not recommended either at this time or under any foreseeable future circumstances.”¹⁹ Obviously upset by the twisting of their assessment, the JCS asked Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson to write to Souers to correct his statement – to clarify that the JCS were not recommending a military option because of lack of resources rather than a lack of strategic interest.²⁰ This is a crucial point for the entire situation. To take action, the U.S. needs strategy and structure. Strategy defines the interest and structure provides the resources to then employ the means.²¹ The JCS clearly defined the strategic need, but they did not possess the structure, and thus recommended against military support. Danger arises when officials equate a lack of resources with a lack of state interest, as Acheson and Souers deliberately did by twisting the JCS’s assessment.

In August, after the North Atlantic Treaty was signed, Acheson again asked the JCS for an assessment of Taiwan. The JCS responded on August 17, 1949 with a reaffirmation of their earlier view that Taiwan was important but that they did not have the resources to defend it from invasion, but that future circumstances could warrant protection. This is how the strategic situation remained until a contentious set of meetings in December 1949, which will be detailed in the second cut.

The third important piece of background information is that in 1949 the U.S. pulled its troops out of Mainland China and South Korea.²² Keeping in mind that there were no troops on Taiwan, the U.S. effectively retreated from the mainland and the first island chain in 1949. Acheson then began to say that the defense line consisted of Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines.²³

¹⁷ Sidney W. Souers, “Draft Report by the National Security Council on Supplementary Measures with Respect to Formosa,” *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, February 1949, p. 292.

¹⁸ Sidney W. Souers, “Memorandum for the President,” *DDRS*, March 4, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

¹⁹ Sidney W. Souers, “Memorandum for the National Security Council,” *DDRS*, April 4, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

²⁰ Louis Johnson, “Memorandum for the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council,” *DDRS*, April 2, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

²¹ Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Jr., Michael J. Meese, and Suzanne C. Nielsen, *American National Security*, Sixth Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 43.

²² Dean C. Allard, “Presence in the Pacific,” *Naval History* 40 (September/October 1994), p. 43.

²³ *Ibid.*

Taiwan was not just important because of strategic considerations; the U.S. had political and economic concerns regarding China as well. The U.S. wanted to retain an open-door policy with China for economic reasons while seeking to prevent a strategic alliance between the Chinese Communists and the Soviets.²⁴ The chances for either of these outcomes were essentially ruined on February 14, 1950 when China signed the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty. Acheson was disturbed by this new alliance²⁵ and George Elsey, advisor to Truman, said in an interview that the White House started viewing the Chinese and Soviets as being in a frightening world-wide Communist conspiracy.²⁶ To make matters worse, the CIA reported on January 4, 1950, that it received a copy of the treaty, which included a secret clause that China must attack Taiwan in the spring of 1950 and the Soviets would enter the war if the U.S. overtly used its military to defend Taiwan.²⁷ Also occurring in January was the disturbing report from Ambassador-at-Large Philip Jessup, who had just met with Chiang in Taiwan. Jessup claimed that Chiang wanted to start World War III in Asia because the U.S. would be forced to defend Taiwan.²⁸

The background leading up to the policy change is fraught with complexity and a divergence between interests and resources. The Truman Administration was not prepared to support Chiang and lacked the necessary resources to apply the Truman Doctrine to Asia. Meanwhile, the State Department had been holding out hope for a Sino-Soviet split to retain economic ties with China only to see that hope logically destroyed by the Friendship Treaty, which was really a defense treaty and operational invasion plan in disguise. All of this combined with Chiang's desire for World War III will provide the background for the first half of 1950 and the lead up to the policy decision in June.

Description of Two Models

The first cut will be viewed through the lens of Model I – the Rational Policy Model (RPM)²⁹ – and the second cut will be Model III – the Bureaucratic Politics

²⁴ Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955: A Joint Reassessment of a Critical Decade* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1989), p. 143.

²⁵ James Chace, *Acheson* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 255.

²⁶ George Elsey, interview by CNN, *The Cold War: Episode 15: China*, Turner Broadcasting System and British Broadcasting Corporation, (1998).

²⁷ R. H. Hillenkoetter, "Memorandum," *DDRS*, January 4, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

²⁸ Ronald L. McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves: Dean Acheson and U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), p. 112.

²⁹ Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," pp. 691-696. This is called the Rational Actor Model in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 13-75.

Model (BPM).³⁰ The best way to initially differentiate between the two models is through the example that Allison uses: that of a chess match. In the Rational Policy Model, one chess player is moving all of the team's pieces to win the game, while in the Bureaucratic Politics Model, numerous players with their own goals share power through bargaining to move the team's pieces.³¹ The major difference between Models I and III is the level of analysis – state as actor, or individual players as actors.

The RPM, as the name would suggest, is underpinned by the assumption of state rationality. Allison defines rationality as “consistent, value-maximizing choice[s] within specific constraints.”³² By assuming the state is rational in seeking to achieve its objectives, this simple model can infer the state's objectives from its behavior.³³ This assumption is what makes the RPM so prevalent in analysis and scholarly circles – behavior is generally observable and assumptions of rationality provide the ability to draw conclusions on state objectives. This is why Allison asserts that the RPM has “significant explanatory power.”³⁴

The unit of analysis for the RPM is a unified rational actor as a decision-maker.³⁵ This actor is generally considered to be the head of state (or top decision-making authority as applicable) and is the embodiment of state goals and actions. The analysis is conducted in four steps: determine state goals and objectives, determine alternative courses of action (COA), conduct a cost-benefit analysis for each COA, and then determine the most value-maximizing decision.³⁶ In a historical study, such as this essay, this model can focus on the decision that was made as the rational resultant, or it can assess the decision to determine if it was in fact the value-maximizing choice. This study, being a two-cut study and with the added benefit of additional historical information, will assess the rationality of sending the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits.

The second cut, performed using the BPM, has the strength of going deeper into the situation and making assessments at a more granular level.³⁷ This level of analysis is not without cost, however; the amount of information and time required

³⁰ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” pp. 707-712. This is called the Governmental Politics Model in Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 255-324.

³¹ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” p. 691; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 6-7.

³² Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 18.

³³ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” p. 693.

³⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 54.

³⁵ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” pp. 693-694; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 24.

³⁶ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” p. 694; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 18.

³⁷ Allison, “Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” p. 255.

to conduct it is generally prohibitive.³⁸ In this case, with a policy question that occurred over 60 years ago, there is enough information to conduct a BPM analysis.

The BPM's focus is not on the state as unitary actor, but on numerous players that interact in a competitive game of politics to achieve their own ends and with the final state behavior being the outcome of this process.³⁹ The BPM is less formal or structured than the RPM, and it also analyzes the situation through a more fluid lens. For the individual players, it is their own power and the action channels that matter, not the formal organizational charts.⁴⁰ In short, players are defined by their effectiveness in influencing policy based solely on how they play the game, not in their position or organization hierarchy, and their power fluctuates based on time and topic.

The unit of analysis for the BPM is "governmental actions as political resultant."⁴¹ From political resultant comes a focus on the politics. Allison looks at politics as being conducted by players that are in a role, and their relative influence is based on their power to achieve their objectives.⁴² Power, defined by Allison, is the ability to influence the outcome.⁴³ The BPM's analytical structure is more in the form of a narrative than the RPM. It seeks to describe the entire political game – organized through action channels and participated in by players with their own goals – and then determine how the resultant policy was reached.⁴⁴ One other major difference is that there is no assumption that the head of state is the decision maker.⁴⁵ This model demands more information and more time, but it can yield a result that is more refined than the RPM, and sometimes contradictory to the RPM analysis.

Finally, it is important to recognize the benefits of doing two cuts on a single research question. Most studies only use one theory with one set of assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses that can be recognized and, ideally, controlled for. Allison argues that because all models simplify through assumptions, it is better to

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

³⁹ Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" p. 708; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 255.

⁴⁰ Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" p. 710; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 265.

⁴¹ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 294.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 296.

⁴³ Allison, "Conceptual Models sand the Cuban Missile Crisis" p. 710; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 260.

⁴⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, p. 304.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

use multiple cuts to counteract each model's weaknesses and ultimately end up with a more accurate set of findings.⁴⁶

Histories of the Policy

Model I: Rational Policy Model

A. Goals and Objectives

The U.S. had a contradictory and confused set of goals immediately prior to the North Korean invasion and the Seventh Fleet being ordered to Taiwan. After the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty was signed, there was still hope that divergent interests between China and the Soviets would destroy their alliance.⁴⁷ This objective of wait-and-see was challenged by the CIA and State Department reports published nearly every month from January to April 1950, which explained that the Friendship Treaty would be solid for the next few years, that it included a Soviet-defense agreement, and that the Soviets were sending military advisors, bombers, and submarines to assist with the invasion of Taiwan.⁴⁸ The next question was whether to apply the Truman Doctrine to Asia.

Truman made a speech in January 1950 in which he announced that he would not defend Taiwan with military force and that the U.S. would prepare for the strategic impact of its loss.⁴⁹ The President made it clear that the Truman Doctrine did not apply to Asia. But as the next few months went on, it appears that this objective was reconsidered. With the Chinese signing and strengthening of the aforementioned Friendship Treaty and the subsequent evaluation of a worldwide Communist conspiracy, Truman seems to have changed U.S. objectives to containment of Communism in Asia and the establishment of a defense line at the first island chain. The question was how to accomplish this while knowing the Soviets would go to war if the U.S. actively defended Taiwan, which would start World War III.

Preventing World War III was another primary goal. On October 19, 1949, the CIA concluded that directly supporting Taiwan was the only way to defend it from almost-certain invasion, but doing so could "conceivabl[y] precipitate World

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Harold F. Gosnell, *Truman's Crises: A Political Biography of Harry S. Truman* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 460.

⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "Review of the World Situation," *DDRS*, January 18, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014), p. 5; Central Intelligence Agency, "Information Report: Chinese Communist Preparation for Invasion," *DDRS*, February 17, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014); Strong, "Telegram for the Secretary of State," *DDRS*, April 13, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014); Gabbert, "Telegram for the Secretary of State," *DDRS*, April 21, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁴⁹ Harding and Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955*, p. 148.

War III.”⁵⁰ This is what Truman struggled with when he made his emergency flight back to Washington after the Korean invasion. Sitting on the plane, Truman struggled with the need to prevent a global war in the present, but he was also concerned about the increased threat of World War III occurring in the future if the U.S. did not respond. Truman saw this situation with Taiwan (and Korea) as synonymous with the early Nazi invasions of surrounding countries, and he wanted to avoid the sort of appeasement that had failed to contain Adolf Hitler’s regime.⁵¹ He also understood that the U.S. was considered to be a protector of Taiwan, even if unofficially, and that if he let Taiwan (or Korea) fall then other states in Europe and elsewhere would question U.S. credibility.⁵² This resulted in a U.S. goal of responding to the Communist threat by containing it while trying to prevent a descent into war with the Soviets and Chinese, simultaneously looking to prevent World War III in the future.

Finally, with the strategy established, there was the question of structure. As the JCS had been clearly arguing for over a year, there was a disconnection between military resources and U.S. global obligations. Truman understood this and wisely stated in his memoirs that a nation can only do what it is resourced to do, and that begins with its citizens.⁵³

In 1945-46 the American people had chosen to scuttle their military might. I was against hasty and excessive demobilization at the time and stated publicly that I was, and General Eisenhower, then Army Chief of Staff, spoke out against it also. The press and the Congress, however, drowned us out.⁵⁴

There were simply not enough resources to send a large number of forces to Korea and to Taiwan to contain the Communists. Additionally, there was a concern that the Soviets’ direction of the Korean invasion, and the Friendship Treaty’s stipulation of a Taiwanese invasion, was precisely intended to make the U.S. move its small, demobilized military to Asia and thus leave Europe undefended. The fear, especially given the U.S.’s 1949 troop withdrawals from Korea and China, was that Asia was a Soviet diversion.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, “Survival Potential of Residual Non-Communist Regimes in China,” *DDRS*, October 19, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁵¹ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 776-77.

⁵² Martin L. Lasater, *The Taiwan Conundrum in U.S. China Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), p. 50.

⁵³ Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 345.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵⁵ Allard, “Presence in the Pacific,” p. 44.

B. Alternatives (Course of Action)

1. Follow Truman's January 1950 statement, do nothing, and let China invade.
2. Send Naval Forces to the Taiwan Straits, neutralize area.
3. Send Naval Forces to the Taiwan Straits, do not neutralize the area.
4. Send U.S. ground, air, and naval forces to Taiwan to defend it.

C. Consequences

Course of Action (COA) 1 would have been the easiest for the U.S. because Truman could have focused on only the Korean invasion. It is always more difficult to prosecute two conflicts or military operations simultaneously. Also, Truman could attempt to justify this COA from a credibility standpoint because the U.S. previously protected Korea but had no such official relationship with Taiwan. Additionally, not sending forces to Taiwan was more in line with current military force levels and also ensured that more of a reserve that could be left in Europe to respond to Soviet aggression. The costs of this COA would be an almost certain invasion of Taiwan based on the Friendship Treaty and the subsequent loss of a key island in the U.S. defense chain. Additionally, this island could be used to attack U.S. forces in Korea and the Philippines, and to disrupt U.S. interests in controlling the Pacific sea-lanes.

COA 2 takes the next step in the escalation spectrum, the introduction of U.S. Naval forces between China and Taiwan with a neutralization of Nationalist attacks on the mainland. This approach allows the U.S. to attempt to stop an almost certain invasion from the Chinese and Soviets and thus attempts to keep Taiwan from falling into Communist hands. Second, by making the approach "neutralization" instead of defense, the U.S. could try to avoid the Soviet assistance clause in the Friendship Treaty. Additionally, the neutralization would serve to also stop Chiang from attacking the mainland, which would risk escalating the situation. This is especially important because of Chiang's statements of wanting to start World War III. This approach would also allow the U.S. to continue to try to remove Chiang from office rather than supporting him. The negatives of this approach are that the Seventh Fleet could not guarantee that the Chinese would not invade, and then the U.S. would be forced to defend itself and thus enter a war with the Chinese and likely the Soviets. This would be a war that the U.S. would not have sufficient forces to execute without dangerously depriving Europe of U.S. defense.

COA 3 is like the second except it does not neutralize the area; it takes no action to stop Nationalist attacks on the mainland. The benefits of this approach, in addition to the ones for COA 2, are that it would keep Chinese forces engaged in

defending against Nationalist hit and run attacks and thus render them unable to move forces north into the Korean theater. The costs of this approach would be more significant than COA 2. With U.S. forces in the Taiwan Straits, any attack by the Nationalists would be considered sanctioned by the U.S. The reason is the Navy would be stopping Chinese attacks in one direction but clearly allowing Nationalist attacks in the other. This would greatly increase the chances of bringing China into the war, and if seen as a U.S. provocation it could also bring in the Soviets. Additionally, Nationalist attacks would probably not have a significant chance of destroying the Communist Chinese state, so they would serve no purpose in that regard.

COA 4 is essentially a full defense of Taiwan. The benefits of this approach would be its clear message of containment to the Communists and a demonstrated willingness to defend Taiwan. This would also send a message to other U.S. protectorates that the U.S. will honor its defense commitments. The final benefit is that a show-of-strength on Taiwan could serve as a deterrent to a Chinese invasion. There are numerous costs to this approach. First, if the Chinese did invade, it would almost certainly lead to war with the Soviets because of the Friendship Treaty. Second, the U.S. would have to transfer troops from Europe, which would open that theater up to Soviet invasion. Third, using troops in Taiwan for a possible invasion would take forces away from responding to the active invasion in Korea. Fourth, by committing to Taiwan, and thus depriving any strategic reserve, the U.S. would leave itself vulnerable to Communist attacks on other island chain nations or in Southeast Asia.

D. Decision

On June 25 and 26, 1950, Truman chose COA 2 and sent the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits to protect it from invasion and neutralize the area. Additionally, Truman said that the next step was to remove Chiang.⁵⁶ Then the President worked to rebuild the U.S. military, starting with extending the draft, which Congress passed on June 27th.⁵⁷

Using the benefit of time and numerous primary and secondary sources, it is clear from the first cut that Truman made the most rational decision. By introducing the Seventh Fleet he defended Taiwan, could still work to remove Chiang, and then built up the military to apply the Truman Doctrine to Asia while still meeting his numerous other global defense commitments.

Model III: Bureaucratic Politics Model

⁵⁶ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 129.

⁵⁷ McCullough, Truman, p. 781.

Having established that Truman made the most rational decision in sending the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits, this cut will seek to analyze the process that led to Truman's decision, and to see if he did in fact make it himself. It will be more fluid than the first cut, but it will generally follow a format of identifying the major action channel, the key players and their goals, and then the process to reach the policy.

The major action channel in the policy process was the National Security Council. Created in 1947, Truman used it to develop options for him to decide on. He wrote in his memoirs, "I used the National Security Council (NSC) only as a place for recommendations to be worked out. Like the Cabinet, the Council does not make decisions. The policy itself has to come down from the President, as all final decisions have to be made by him."⁵⁸ He added that nothing is policy until the President makes a decision in writing.⁵⁹ To direct the NSC Truman relied on his Secretary of State—this was before the creation of the National Security Advisor—to lead the meetings and determine recommendations to be forwarded for decision. Truman wrote in his memoirs, "the Secretary of State makes the final recommendation of policy, and the President makes the final decision." Truman set up his action channel to make sure that he made the decision, but he gave a significant amount of power to Secretary of State Dean Acheson as the person who essentially ran the NSC and framed the recommendations for Truman's decisions. In addition to Truman's standing expectation that the Secretary of State would play a central role, Truman made Acheson the official coordinator of all Taiwan policy on February 28, 1949.⁶⁰ Any change in the Taiwan policy had to first go through Acheson. It would be fair to say that in the Seventh Fleet policy decision, Acheson had equal if not greater power than Truman.

This section will analyze each player's individual policy stances and goals leading up to December 1949. December 1949 is when critical meetings occurred that set off the chain of events that led up to the June 25 and 26, 1950 policy meetings. The first player analyzed will be Dean Acheson. It was demonstrated in the policy overview section that he was not in favor of a military defense of Taiwan when he misrepresented the JCS's strategic assessments. Additionally, being in charge of the NSC, he was the player that would be expected to go to Truman and say that the JCS had determined that Taiwan was as an important strategic interest that the U.S. should defend, but that the military could not defend it without more resources. By not fighting for additional defense spending,

⁵⁸ Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁰ Sidney W. Souers, "Note by the Executive Secretary on U.S. Policy Toward China," *DDRS*, February 28, 1949, (accessed June 15, 2014).

Acheson demonstrated his view that China was a minor issue for the U.S. and the military should not be positioned there.

Acheson had further political goals as well. He believed that before the U.S. could effectively support Taiwan, Chiang had to be removed.⁶¹ He was also convinced that if the U.S. just waited, the Chinese and Soviets would develop a rift.⁶² If the U.S. was unable to remove Chiang and the Chinese invaded, he felt that it would be better to let Taiwan go and to deal with the strategic consequences.⁶³ As 1949 was coming to a close, Acheson was seeking ways to remove Chiang, and if the Chinese invaded then he planned to simply live with it.

As discussed in the JCS assessment, the Department of Defense (DOD) opposed Acheson's view. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson wanted more money for Taiwanese defense,⁶⁴ as did Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley. Bradley also supported stationing ships at Taiwan in its defense, a proposal that had been previously rejected by Acheson.⁶⁵ Finally, Commander of Japan (who had authority over "the China area," which included Taiwan) General Douglas MacArthur had been vocally lobbying for the direct defense of Taiwan due to its critical strategic value.⁶⁶ None of the top three military members appeared to be able to convince Acheson to recommend to Truman any of their goals leading up to December 1949.

The final major sets of players are the China Bloc, China Lobby, and the McCarthyites. The China Bloc was a group of mainly Republican Senators and Congressmen who clashed with Truman and Acheson on the U.S.'s China policy. According to reports of their statements, one of their major goals was to criticize the administration in order to help their reelection campaigns in November 1950.⁶⁷ The China Lobby was made up of hired interests groups, Christian missionaries, businessmen, and those unhappy with Truman's foreign policy.⁶⁸ Historians Jack Anderson and Ronald May write, "[f]ew other lobbies ever exerted such relentless pressure on American foreign and domestic policy."⁶⁹ The McCarthyites for this

⁶¹ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 133.

⁶² Gosnell, *Truman's Crises*, p. 460.

⁶³ Sidney W. Souers, "Memorandum for the President," *DDRS*, February 4, 1949 (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁶⁴ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, pp. 106-107.

⁶⁵ Harding and Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955*, p. 148.

⁶⁶ Fayette J. Flexer, "Memorandum of Conversation by the Counselor of Embassy in the Philippines," *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, December 7, 1949, pp. 263-65.

⁶⁷ Harding and Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955*, p. 148.

⁶⁸ Lewis McCarroll Purifoy, *Harry Truman's China Policy* (New York City: New Viewpoints, 1976, p. 161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

article will be dealt with in conjunction with the China Bloc and analyzed in the next section. The China Bloc's goal was to win reelection, and the China Lobby's goal was to change the administration's policy to actively defend Taiwan and to retain economic access to China (to a degree, access was the China Bloc's goal as well).

With the goals established, this section will describe the political process that went into making the decision to deploy the Seventh Fleet. In December of 1949, Johnson asked Acheson for additional money to defend Taiwan. Acheson objected because he had already given "the China area" money to Korea, Indochina, and the Philippines. Johnson, becoming angry at this news, replied that the JCS agreed with him and he wanted the money diverted to Taiwan.⁷⁰ A few days later on December 23rd, Bradley sent a proposal to the NSC for a new military policy for Taiwan. It included a modest military training and advisor program combined with increased political and economic programs.⁷¹ Acheson's Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East rejected it within 24 hours.⁷²

This led to a contentious debate, detailed in McGlothlen's *Controlling the Waves*, between the State Department and the DOD on December 29, 1949. Bradley argued that he was in favor of the military program even if it only postponed the Nationalist government's collapse because it would prevent a Chinese invasion in the interim. Acheson retorted that the military would fail and it would damage the U.S.'s prestige. It was at this point that Johnson, fed up with Acheson's stonewalling, stormed out of the room.⁷³ The remainder of the meeting's record comes from Acheson's notes. Acheson wrote in a Memorandum of Conversation that he argued:

We must also face the certainty that throughout Southeast Asia the Communists will seek to extend their domination, probably through subversive methods and not invasion. We must do our utmost to strengthen the neighbors of China. What we have to do is build up their capacity.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, pp. 106-07.

⁷¹ Louis Johnson, "Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense," *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, December 23, 1949, pp. 460-461.

⁷² Butterworth, "Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, December 28, 1949.

⁷³ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 107.

⁷⁴ Dean Acheson, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, December 29, 1949, p. 465.

Additionally, he maintained that the U.S. should wait for the inevitable China-Soviet split and that if the U.S. were to defend Taiwan militarily it would provide grounds for Communist propaganda charges of U.S. imperialism. Bradley responded that if he understood correctly, Acheson was prepared to let Taiwan fall for political reasons, to which Acheson answered, "I was inclined to regard the political price as too high to pay for the purchase of some additional time."⁷⁵

A few days later, on January 4, 1950, the CIA issued an intelligence report detailing the Friendship Treaty's invasion mandate and the Soviets' promise of military support against overt American defense of Taiwan.⁷⁶ After reading the report, Acheson convinced Truman that the best way to get ahead of the Taiwan issue was to give a speech to settle the policy for good.⁷⁷ Truman held a news conference on January 5th in which he said:

The United States has ... no desire to obtain special rights or privileges, or to establish military bases on Formosa at this time. Nor does it have any intention of utilizing its Armed Forces to interfere in the present situation. The United States Government will not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil conflict in China. Similarly, the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa.⁷⁸

Truman's declaration that the U.S. would not defend Taiwan started a massive controversy in Washington.⁷⁹ Acheson met with the China Bloc that same day to explain. He said that the U.S. should not defend Taiwan because Bradley did not consider it a "vital interest" and because it would open the U.S. to propaganda as an imperialist state.⁸⁰ Sarkesian *et al.* defines a vital interest as one which a state will deploy its military to defend.⁸¹ Using this definition, it is clear that Acheson was again misrepresenting the spirit of Bradley's assessment. Bradley said that he could not make Taiwan a vital interest due to a lack of troops, not a lack of

⁷⁵ Dean Acheson, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1949, Volume IX, U.S. Policy Toward Formosa*, December 29, 1949, pp. 465-467.

⁷⁶ R. H. Hillenkoetter, "Memorandum," *DDRS*, January 4, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁷⁷ Harding and Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955*, p. 148.

⁷⁸ Harry S. Truman, "The President's News Conference," *Truman Library*, January 5, 1950, <http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=574&st=&st1=> (accessed July 10, 2014).

⁷⁹ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 108.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108

⁸¹ Sam C. Sarkesian, John Allen Williams, and Stephen J. Cimbala, *US National Security: Policymakers, Processes & Politics*, Fourth Edition (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), p. 9.

strategic interest. The China Bloc completely disagreed with Acheson and said this could “affect [the] future attitude of support of a bipartisan foreign policy.”⁸²

Following that meeting, the China Bloc summoned Acheson to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 10th and the House Foreign Affairs Committee on January 11th. At these hearings, Acheson blamed the decision to not defend Taiwan on Chiang’s incompetence and said that the defense perimeter only included Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines. He excluded Taiwan, which was not in line with what Bradley, MacArthur, and Johnson had been saying for years. Again the China Bloc was not satisfied.⁸³

On February 9th, Joseph McCarthy made his famous speech alleging that there were Communist agents in the State Department, and specifically in the Far East section, which was why the U.S. had surrendered Taiwan.⁸⁴ McCarthy’s charge put even more pressure on Acheson. A week later on February 17th, the CIA issued a new report that predicted there would not be a China-Soviet split for at least a few years.⁸⁵ Then in March the Nationalists began a blockade of the Mainland and bombing its ports.⁸⁶ Amidst the Nationalist actions, the China Bloc, and McCarthy, Acheson had to do something.

Acheson responded by convincing Dean Rusk to leave his position as the fourth highest-ranked man in the State Department to take over as Director of the State Office of Far Eastern Affairs. Acheson hoped that Rusk’s appointment would mollify the China Bloc and McCarthy; and in the process, Rusk became Acheson’s most influential advisor on Taiwan.⁸⁷ There is no evidence, however, that Rusk’s appointment had any influence on the China Bloc or McCarthy.

In April the CIA released a report reaffirming its prediction of a Communist invasion of Taiwan by the end of 1950.⁸⁸ This was followed quickly by an April 13th memo to Acheson from State personnel in Taiwan that there was conclusive proof of Soviet fighter planes staged to assist in the Taiwan invasion.⁸⁹ Just days later on April 16th-17th, China invaded the Nationalist stronghold on the nearby island of Hainan.⁹⁰ Within a week Acheson received another memo from State

⁸² Dean Acheson, “Memorandum of Conversation by the Secretary of State,” *FRUS, 1950, Volume VI, The China Area*, January 5, 1950, p. 263,.

⁸³ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 109.

⁸⁴ Lasater, *The Taiwan Conundrum in U.S. China Policy*, p. 115.

⁸⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “Review of the World Situation,” *DDRS*, January 18, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014), p. 5.

⁸⁶ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 114.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁸⁹ Strong, “Telegram for the Secretary of State,” *DDRS*, April 13, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁹⁰ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 118.

personnel in Taiwan that there were Soviet subs in the Taiwan Straits.⁹¹ All expectations were that the Chinese and Soviets would invade Taiwan within the next few months.

Dean Rusk decided to conduct a study on the best way to approach the Taiwan problem. After completing a report that has been compared to a dissertation, he settled on one recommendation among numerous analyzed policy options.⁹² Rusk recommended a policy of using the American military to neutralize Taiwan until the Japanese peace treaty or the United Nations could install a new government there. He analyzed two courses of action to achieve this policy. The first was offering military assistance under the conditions that Chiang would resign, all Nationalist attacks on the mainland would cease, and the U.S. would get to pick the interim leaders until the UN could oversee the installation of a new permanent government. The second course of action was to send the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan and then orchestrate a coup. Rusk recommended the coup.⁹³

At a meeting on the morning of May 30th, Rusk met with the State Office of Intelligence and Research to discuss his study. He made a statement that Taiwan “presents a plausible place to ‘draw the line’ and is, in itself, important politically if not strategically, for what it represents in continued Communist expansion.”⁹⁴ Later that day Rusk met with Acheson to present his report and recommendations. There is no evidence from this meeting, but Rusk was reported to have said that the situation dictated that action needed to be taken quickly. Acheson then told Rusk that he would take the recommendations to Truman to be considered.⁹⁵ Acheson met with Truman every Monday and Thursday, and talked with him by phone almost every day.⁹⁶ Truman was likely aware of Rusk’s recommendations within 24 hours.

There is no evidence whether Truman, Acheson, or the NSC discussed or began implementing one of Rusk’s recommendations prior to June 24th. Almost all assessments say that the Korean invasion was the moment when the Taiwan policy changed.⁹⁷ Even the editor of the FRUS expresses this.⁹⁸ But is it really true? After

⁹¹ Gabbert, “Telegram for the Secretary of State,” *DDRS*, April 21, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

⁹² McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 121.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-123.

⁹⁴ Howe, “Memorandum by the Deputy Special Assistant for Intelligence to Mr. W. Park Armstrong, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research,” *FRUS*, 1950, *Volume VI, The China Area*, May 31, 1950, p. 347.

⁹⁵ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 124.

⁹⁶ McCullough, *Truman*, p. 752.

⁹⁷ Harding and Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955*, p. 163.

⁹⁸ Editor, “Editorial Note,” *FRUS*, 1950, *Volume VI, The China Area*, p. 367.

the Korean invasion, Truman met with all of the major players from State and Defense in the Blair House for what was essentially a wartime NSC meeting. The State contingent included Rusk and DOD's was made up of the Secretary and all of the Joint Chiefs. Acheson took charge of the meeting at Truman's request⁹⁹ and began by reading MacArthur's June 14, 1950 memo that assessed Taiwan as strategically important and recommended an immediate military survey team be sent there to assess the necessary requirements for establishing a military defense.¹⁰⁰ After discussing Korea, Truman turned to Taiwan. Acheson recommended that the Seventh Fleet be sent there to neutralize the area until a UN settlement could be reached to remove Chiang.¹⁰¹ This recommendation was a combination of Rusk's two courses of action. Truman decided instead to order the fleet to sail towards Japan from the Philippines. It would take two days to get to either location, so Truman had 24 hours to decide whether to send the fleet to Japan (to support Korea) or to Taiwan.¹⁰²

On the night of June 26th the same group met again in the Blair House. Acheson led the meeting, and this time he said that the U.S. could not afford a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. In his biography of Acheson, James Chace argues that once Truman decided to defend Korea, Acheson could not justify letting Taiwan be invaded.¹⁰³ But "justify" to whom? The most likely conclusion is the China Bloc and China Lobby. While it cannot be determined if they had caused Acheson to change his mind, in June and throughout the beginning of 1950 they clearly had some independent effect on the Taiwan policy. So at that second meeting, Acheson recommended to Truman that the Seventh Fleet be sent into the Taiwan Straits to neutralize the area – to prevent a Chinese invasion and to prevent further Nationalist attacks on the mainland. Agreeing with Acheson, Truman issued the order and explained that the next step after neutralization was replacing Chiang.¹⁰⁴ The evidence indicates that the policy Acheson recommended to Truman was Dean Rusk's revised policy from his May 30th report and that this policy was a combination of Rusk's two alternatives. When this is considered along with Truman's quick declaration that removing Chiang was the next step, it supports the conclusion that when the Korean War started, Truman and Acheson were already

⁹⁹ McCullough, *Truman*, p. 779.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas MacArthur, "Memorandum on Formosa, by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Far East, and Supreme Commander, Allied Powers, Japan," *FRUS, 1950, Volume VII, Outbreak of Hostilities, June 24-30*, June 14, 1950, pp. 161-165.

¹⁰¹ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 128.

¹⁰² McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 128; and Jessup, "Korean Situation," *DDRS*, June 26, 1950, (accessed June 15, 2014).

¹⁰³ Chace, *Acheson*, p. 284.

¹⁰⁴ McGlothlen, *Controlling the Waves*, p. 129; and *DDRS* June, 26, 1950.

considering Rusk's policy recommendation. The Korean War did not cause the Taiwan policy change; Rusk's report did. The war only sped up the timetable for implementation.

The Bureaucratic Politics Model's more refined level of analysis provides many new illuminating details about the decision to send the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan. First, Truman clearly made the decision. Second, any decision Truman made on Taiwan, whether in June 1950, or all the way back to when Acheson took over the State Department in January 1949, was framed and communicated by Acheson. If Acheson was not convinced by a proposal, as he was not with Bradley, Johnson, and MacArthur's recommendation for military assistance, it never went to Truman for consideration. Third, the final decision to send the fleet and neutralize the area can be traced back to Dean Rusk's May recommendation to modify U.S. policy. This model answers the question by demonstrating that the U.S. sent the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan based on Truman's decision, but through an action-channel powered by Acheson and a policy developed by Rusk.

Conclusion

The decision to send the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits in June 1950 has had far-reaching effects on U.S. and international security. Taiwan is still considered a flashpoint between the U.S. and China, and this article attempts to determine how this vital U.S. policy decision was made. It did so through the use of Allison's multiple-cut approach made up of the Rational Policy Model followed by the Bureaucratic Politics Model. As Allison argues, combining the resultants of the two approaches produces a much more valuable answer than using only one. The resultant answer is that Truman made the rational strategic decision to implement a U.S. policy of protecting Taiwan with the Seventh Fleet, which was framed and recommended to him by Acheson, and developed through an extensive study by Rusk in April and May of 1950.

This is a research question for which both approaches worked well in complement. Model I established the rationality of Truman's decision based on the strategic environment while Model III described the political process to get to the policy. If one model had to be selected as the superior in this case, it would be Model III for three reasons. First, the process, and specifically Rusk's in-depth assessment, provides evidence that this critical and far-reaching policy was not decided within 48 hours of the Korean invasion – as is often stated – but was studied and considered for months prior. Second, Model III provides evidence that, if Acheson would have allowed the Defense Department to make the case for protecting Taiwan, it is possible that the U.S. military presence would have served as a deterrent that would have prevented the Friendship Treaty from including

plans for a 1950 invasion and for Soviet intervention. The Soviets likely would have wanted to prevent World War III just as the U.S. did. A large portion of the headaches associated with Taiwan in 1949 and 1950 could likely have been prevented if Acheson was more neutral in his influential position on the NSC. This leads to the third point Acheson's clear preference for politics over strategic interest on the NSC supports the creation of a neutral National Security Advisor to ensure the President is hearing both the political and military sides of every national security policy dilemma.¹⁰⁵ Taiwan will remain a critical flashpoint between the U.S. and China for the foreseeable future, but this article finds that the origination of U.S. policy to protect Taiwan was the most rational choice, made by Truman, communicated by Acheson, and created in a deliberative dissertation-quality study by Rusk.

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¹⁰⁵ President Eisenhower, within weeks of taking office, created the position of "Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs" to oversee the National Security Council. For more information see <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act>.

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