

CHINA'S ANTI-SECESSION LAW – WE'D BETTER TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

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China's rulers have unveiled an anti-secession law which seeks to create a legal pretext for a military attack on Taiwan. We can ill afford to shrug this off as merely more belligerency from a regime addicted to rattling sabers and thumping chests.

The crush-Taiwan-under-certain-circumstances measure was presented to the 3,000-member National People's Congress on March 8th. The body— a rubber stamp for the Communist party – is expected to duly ratify the law on March 14th.

The legislation authorizes China's cabinet and Central Military Commission to “execute (*unspecified*) non-peaceful means and non-peaceful measures” against the island, if Taipei makes moves (again unspecified) toward independence or if Beijing believes such developments are in the offing. Also, “non-peaceful” means and measures would be required “if possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted.”

Basically, Beijing is saying to Taipei: You take action which we consider movement toward a formal declaration of independence – and we attack. We decide you're about to make such moves – we attack. If your people stubbornly refuse to surrender their sovereignty and join our jolly gulag – we attack.

The anti-secession law must be viewed in the context of China's relentless drive for a military capable of invading the island and countering an anticipated U.S. intervention.

China's military budget will rise 12.6% this year. This comes on the heels of a decade of annual double-digit spending increases. Over the past 15 years, the People's Republic has steadily modernized its forces -- complimenting the world's largest standing army.

Pending acquisitions from Russia include advanced jet fighters, destroyers and submarines. The PRC has roughly 700 short-range missiles targeting Taiwan.

In testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee last month, CIA Director Porter Goss noted, “Improved Chinese capabilities threaten U.S. forces” in Asia. Goss also observed, “China continues to develop more robust, survivable nuclear-armed missiles as well as conventional capabilities for use in a regional conflict.”

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld says China’s naval expansion (designed to eventually push America out of Asia) is a matter his department “thinks about and is concerned about and is attentive to.”

With all of this thinking, attention and concern, why the administration’s tepid response to China’s latest verbal aggression?

Referring to the anti-secession law, White House Spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters, “We oppose any attempt to determine the future of Taiwan by anything other than peaceful means” – which is what Washington always says when Beijing does something brutish or menacing.

State Department official Richard Boucher cautioned that passage of the legislation “is not going to help solve the problem.” (Well, beat me with a limp lo mein noodle!) Unfortunately, Foggy Bottom has helped to create *the problem*, by consistently sending the wrong signals to Beijing.

In a PBS interview in December, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said the Taiwan Relations Act obligates us “to keep sufficient force in the Pacific to be able to deter an attack.” But, Armitage added, “we are not required to defend” Taiwan from such an attack. So we’re supposed to keep sufficient force in the region to – what? Watch as Taiwan is overrun by the Tiananmen Square thugs?

In the course of an Asia trip earlier in the month, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell said the goal for both sides of the Taiwan Straits should be “reunification.” (Powell later claimed he misspoke, but the damage was done.)

The more we temporize, equivocate and misspeak, the worse the problem becomes.

Taiwan's 23 million people deserve our support to maintain their hard-won democracy and avoid the clutches of a police state. How can we fight to establish democracy in the Middle East while ignoring a clear and present danger to a democratic success story in Asia?

Taiwan is the beginning, not the end of China's ambitions. With Taiwan's economy (the 14th largest in the world) harnessed to its own, China will dwarf the rest of Asia economically – Japan included.

With Taiwan's naval and air bases, the People's Republic will control the most important sea lane in the world and be positioned to project its influence over much of the Asian Pacific.

Now is the time to still the rattling sabers. China must be told that its anticipated conquest of Taiwan is not an "internal matter." By acquiescing to its One China delusion, we're buying ourselves a world of trouble.