

Appendix 9 -- U.S. Department of State's Policy Memorandum on Formosa (1949)

Source: *Military Situation in the Far East*, hearings before the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 82d Congress, 1st session, Part III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), pp. 1667-69.

December 23, 1949

Policy Information Paper-Formosa. Special Guidance No. 28, December 23, 1949.

I. Problem

To formulate information policy which will minimize damage to United States prestige and others' morale by the possible fall of Formosa to the Chinese Communist forces.

II. Background

1. Comment on Formosa is on the increase as the Communist advances on the Chinese mainland leave the island as the last substantial part of China under Nationalist control. Attention is focused by three principal elements:

1. Communists; world-wide, who charge the United States with conspiring to build the island into a fortress to be taken over by the United States (if it does not already control it), thereby trying to brand the United States with the mark of aggressive imperialism, and also hoping to get us involved in a risky and unpromising venture;

2. Pro-Nationalists (principally in the United States) who consider Formosa a redoubt in which the Government could survive, and who tend to create an impression the United States is delinquent if it fails to "save Formosa";

3. Groups in the United States who are inclined to be critical of the United States for failure to act to prevent loss of the island to the Communists, largely because of [the] mistaken popular conception of its strategic importance to United States Defense in the Pacific.

2. Loss of the island is widely anticipated, and the manner in which civil and military conditions there have deteriorated under the Nationalists adds weight to the expectation. Its fall would threaten:

1. Loss of United States prestige at home and abroad to the extent we have become committed in the public mind to hold it;

2. Damage to the morale of other nations, particularly in the Far East, which are disturbed by the Communist gains and fear its possible further advances.

3. Formosa, politically, geographically, and strategically, is part of China in no way especially distinguished or important. Although ruled by the Japanese (as "Taiwan") for 50 years, historically it has been Chinese. Politically and militarily it is a strictly Chinese responsibility.

It is true that the technical status of the island remains to be determined by the Japanese peace settlement, but the Cairo agreement and the Potsdam declaration and the surrender terms of September 2, 1945, looked to its return to China and the United States facilitated its take-over by Chinese troops shortly after V-J Day.

Even the small United States military advisory group sent there at Chinese Government request was completely withdrawn a year ago. Merely a handful of military attaché personnel

with diplomatic status remains. The United States never has had military bases there, and never has sought any special concessions there.

ECA [Economic Cooperation Administration] work done on the island, particularly through the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction, has been of purely economic and technical nature for assistance in improvement of conditions, and no quid pro quo has been sought.

4. United States public opinion has concerned itself primarily with the question of the island's strategic importance; there has been insistent demand from a few sources for military action by the United States, but it has not assumed significant proportions. Rather, public opinion obviously is divided and uncertain, and there is no apparent consensus for a particular course of active intervention.

III. Treatment

A. If rising public interest warrants it, gradually increasing attention may be paid Formosa, to establish publicly the facts indicated below. Overseas use should be made of unofficial materials in public analysis and comment appearing both at home and abroad, as well as official statements as they may appear. Label conflicting public statements properly as "individual expressions of opinion," as "unofficial," etc.

B. All material should be used best to counter the false impressions that:

1. Formosa's retention would save the Chinese Government;

2. The United States has a special interest in or "designs on" the island or any military bases on Formosa;

3. Its loss would seriously damage the interests of either the United States or of other countries opposing communism;

4. The United States is responsible for or committed in any way to act to save Formosa.

C. Without evidencing undue preoccupation with the subject, emphasize as appropriate any of the following main points:

1. Formosa is exclusively the responsibility of the Chinese Government:

(a) Historically and geographically a part of China;

(b) The national government has run the island's affairs since the takeover and is responsible for present conditions there;

(c) The United States has assumed no responsibilities or obligations, actual or moral.

2. Formosa has no special military significance:

(a) It is only approximately 100 miles off the China coast;

(b) Other potential objects of Communist aggression are closer to points on the Chinese mainland than to Formosa;

(c) China has never been a sea power and the island is of no special strategic advantage to the Chinese Communist armed forces.

3. Economic assistance in Formosa has been for economic and social purposes, has been consistent with demonstrated United States concern for the welfare of the Chinese generally, and has involved no thought of special concessions for the United States.

4. In areas of insistent demand for United States action, particularly in the United States itself, we should occasionally make clear that seeking United States bases on Formosa, sending in troops, supplying arms, dispatching naval units, or taking any similar action would:

(a) Accomplish no material good for China or its Nationalist regime; (b) Involve the United States in a long- term venture producing at best a new area of bristling stalemate, and at worst possible involvement in open warfare;

(c) Subject the United States to a violent propaganda barrage and to reaction against our "militarism, imperialism, and interference" even from friendly peoples, and particularly from Chinese, who would be turned against us anew;

(d) Eminent suit purposes of the U.S.S.R., which would like to see us "substantiate" its propaganda, dissipate our energies and weaken effectiveness of our policies generally by such action.

5. In reflecting United States unofficial demands for action of various kinds in Formosa, avoid giving them prominence unwarranted by their limited (usually individual) source, and make clear that the total of such demands evidences concern and frustration in some quarters but does not add up to a consensus on any particular position different from that officially taken.

D. Avoid:

1. Speculation which would show undue concern with whether Nationalists can hold the island or when Communists may take it; -

2. References which would indicate important strategic significance, or that the island is a political entity;

3. In output to China, any emphasis on bad conditions in Formosa under the Nationalists, although to other areas reference can be made among reasons why Nationalists are vulnerable there as elsewhere;

4. Statement that Formosa's final status still is to be determined by the Japanese peace treaty;

5. Name "Taiwan"; use "Formosa."