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Memo on the Quemoy Crisis

In 1949, with the Communists under Mao Tse-tung consolidating their grip on the country, deposed Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek led 1 million of his nationalist followers to Taiwan. The only thing he and Mao had in common was their insistence that Taiwan remained part of China. The Nationalist held islands of Jinmen (Chin-men in Wade Giles but often referred to as Kinmen or Quemoy) and Mazu (Ma-tsu in Wade-Giles), just 8 miles off the coast of mainland China, between Taiwan and mainland China, were occupied by Chiang Kai-Shek's forces but claimed by the Chinese Communists. Matsuo is a single island, while Quemoy is a group consisting of Quemoy, Little Quemoy, and 12 islets in Xiamen Bay.¹

Chiang fortified these two islands as bases for his re-conquest of China. Chiang provoked China on two occasions by moving large numbers of troops to the islands, and both times the US responded with military actions, including nuclear threats, in support of Chiang's provocations.

On 05 January 1950, President Harry Truman announced “the United States will not involve in the dispute of Taiwan Strait,” which meant America would not intervene if the Chinese communists were to attack Taiwan. However, on 25 June 1950 the Korean War broke out, and President Truman reacted by declaring the “neutralization of the Straits of Formosa”² on June 27. The Seventh Fleet was sent into the Straits under orders to prevent any attack on the island, and also prevent the Kuomintang forces to attack on China. From that point on, Taiwan was placed under US military protection.

¹ “China.” [CIA World Factbook](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html).

<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>>. 21 Feb. 2008.

² The full text of President Truman’s 1950 statement is available here:
<http://www.geocities.com/taiwanstatus/taiwanstatus>

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During the First Taiwan Straits Crisis, the Peoples Liberation Army launched heavy artillery attacks on the offshore island of Quemoy after the US lifted its blockade of Taiwan, making possible Nationalist attacks on mainland China. The Truman Administration had resisted calls by hard-liners to “unleash Chiang Kai-shek.” But shortly after his inauguration, on 02 February 1953 President Eisenhower lifted the US Navy blockade of Taiwan which had prevented Chiang's force from attacking mainland China. During August 1954, Chiang moved 58,000 troops to Quemoy and 15,000 to Matsu. Zhou En-lai declared on 11 August 1954 that Taiwan must be liberated. On 17 August 1954 the US warned China against action against Taiwan, but on 03 September 1954 the Communists began an artillery bombardment of Quemoy, and in November, PLA planes bombed the Tachen Islands. On 12 September 1954 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommended the possibility of using nuclear weapons against China. And on 23 November 1954 China sentenced 13 US airmen shot down over China in the Korean War to long jail terms, prompting further consideration of nuclear strikes against China. Despite domestic political pressure, President Eisenhower refused to bomb mainland China or use of American troops to resolve the crisis. At the urging of Senator Knowland, the United States signed the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Nationalist government on Taiwan on 02 December 1954.

On 18 January 1955 mainland Chinese forces seized Yijiangshan [Ichiang] Island, 210 miles north of Formosa and, completely wiping out the ROC forces stationed there. The two sides continued fighting on Kinmen, Matsu, and along the mainland Chinese coast. The fighting even extended to mainland Chinese coastal ports. The US-Nationalist Chinese Mutual Security Pact, which did not apply to islands along the Chinese

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mainland, was ratified by the Senate on 09 February 1955. The Formosa Resolution passed both houses of Congress on 29 January 1955. The Resolution pledged the US to the defense of Taiwan, authorizing the president to employ American forces to defend Formosa and the Pescadores Island against armed attack, including such other territories as appropriate to defend them.

On 15 February 1955 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill advised against US atomic defence of Quemoy-Matsu. But on 10 March 1955 US Secretary of State Dulles at a National Security Council (NSC) meeting states that the American people have to be prepared for possible nuclear strikes against China. Five days later Dulles publicly stated that the US was seriously considering using atomic weapons in the Quemoy-Matsu area. And the following day President Eisenhower publicly stated that "A-bombs can be used...as you would use a bullet." These public statements sparked an international uproar, and NATO foreign ministers opposed atomic attack on China. Nonetheless, on 25 March 1955 US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Robert B. Carney stated that the president is planning "to destroy Red China's military potential," predicting war by mid-April.

On 23 April 1955 China stated at the Afro-Asian Conference that it was ready to negotiate on Taiwan, and on 01 May 1955 shelling of Quemoy-Matsu ceased, ending the crisis. On 01 August 1955 China released the 11 captured US airmen previously sentenced to jail terms.

In the first Taiwan Strait crisis of 1954-55 the USSR had been quite ambiguous in its support for China's campaign to "liberate" Taiwan, whereas the United States had indicated that it was willing to use tactical nuclear weapons in defense of the island.

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During the crisis, it became evident that the USSR was not going to be drawn into a war with the United States that was not of its own choosing, and the PRC called off its military operations against Quemoy. The PRC could claim a limited victory because Chinese Nationalist troops had withdrawn from Tachen Island during the previous month.

Even as the crisis ended, however, the Nationalists began to reinforce Quemoy and Matsu, and the PRC began to build up its military capabilities across the strait.