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Cooperation or Conflict in the Taiwan Strait? ByRALPH N. CLOUGH.
Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Ins., 1999. xii,
156 pp. $54.00 (cloth); $21.95 (paper).

This timely book, written by a veteran diplomat and
astute observer, underscores a dilemma in international
politics and American foreign policy in the post-Cold War
"new world order." A Cold War legacy, the half-century
standoff between Taipei and Beijing nevertheless triggers
fresh debates and acquires new significance with changing
geopolitical and domestic parameters, as the 1996 and 1999
crises portend. This book is to be commended for its balanced
analysis of the intractable China-Taiwan problem. Its policy
recommendations for managing (but not solving) (p. 87) this
dilemma, in which the U.S. has great stakes, are sensible but
also predictable.

The author makes three main arguments. First, the
relationship between Taiwan and mainland China is shaped by
both centrifugal and centripetal forces (p. ix). Increasing
economic ties and expanding network of people-to-people
links draw them together. But their irreconcilable positions
over Taiwan's status ensure mutual antagonism and conflicts.
Second, the author believes that "the positive aspects of cross
strait, people-to-people relationships far outweigh the negative
ones" and can help "temper but not prevent" the deterioration
in the two sides' political relations (p. 65). Third, the United
States' main goal should be preventing a crisis from
developing in the Taiwan Strait that would compel the U.S. to
"choose between allowing Taiwan to be subjugated by
military force or intervening with U.S. forces to prevent it" (p.
115). He advocates a policy of "strategic ambiguity" that
would afford Washington more options to respond as
circumstances dictate.

Most of the topics covered in the book have been
discussed or debated before, such as changing
U.S.-China-Taiwan relations (chapter 2), the "political
impasse" over Taiwan's status (chapter 3), the impact of
Taiwan's democracy on its quest for international recognition
(chapter 5), and the role of the U.S. (chapter 7).

But this book's greatest contribution to the field is the
author's painstaking documentation of incidents of cooperation
(chapter 4). The most striking example is the agreement
between the two sides' oil parastatals to jointly explore oil in
the South China Sea (pp. 57-58).

Economic complementarity (p. 51) contributes to a
division of labor, with the mainland providing inexpensive
land and labor, Taiwan providing capital and know how, and
Hong Kong serving as a conduit. The resulting economic
integration-a Greater China-fuels the mainland's export boom
and maintains Taiwan's prosperity. This pattern follows the
"flying geese" model of East Asian development.

However, the author also concedes that both sides' political
considerations hamper their beneficial economic ties.
"Both governments see risks as well as gains in the economic
relationship," he asserts (p. 65). For Beijing, economic
interdependence alleviates the tendencies for Taiwan to
become independent, but it also strengthens Taiwan's position
in the global economy. For Taipei, economic dependence on
the mainland jeopardizes Taiwan's security. But creating
constituencies on the mainland that have a stake in preserving
these beneficial ties and thus oppose PRC's using force against
Taiwan can also enhance Taiwan's security (p. 56).

The central question to the author is "whether the
forces drawing them together will be sufficient to overcome
their political differences" (p. 52)-hence the question mark in
the book's title.

If a cooperative strategy has a double-edged sword
nature, then a confrontational strategy betrays even more
dilemmas. On Beijing's diplomatic squeeze on Taipei, Clough
argues that the PRC's unrelenting campaign to prevent the use
of the term "Republic of China" paradoxically "encouraged
the rest of the world to think of the island of Taiwan as a
separate state called 'Taiwan,' which functioned independently
in the world community and had never been a part of the
PRC" (p. 91).

On Taiwan's "pragmatic diplomacy" aiming at
international recognition, Clough asks "Can closer symbolic
ties with foreign countries counterbalance the increased risk of
PRC military action against Taiwan and the effort to
strengthen mutually beneficial ties with the PRC?" (p. 25).
These sober questions defy easy answers.

In fashioning the proper U.S. role in the
China-Taiwan row, Clough insists that the U.S. "must be
guided by its national interests" (p. 113). He also asserts, "U.S.
interests in expanding global economic interdependence and in
democratization would both be served by a Taiwan that was
drawing closer to mainland China rather than pulling away"
(p. 119).

These premises call into question whether the U.S.
has adequately encouraged a democratic Taiwan to become a
catalyst for a democratic China, which contributes to
America's long-term interests. Ever since the 1972 Shanghai
Communiqué established the "one China" paradigm,
inTELlectual complacency has dominated discussions on the
complex U.S.-China-Taiwan relations, despite tremendous
changes (e.g., the end of the Cold War, Taiwan's
democratization, and the Tiananmen movement). Clinging to
this "simpler" but outdated framework, some analysts view
Taiwan's democracy mainly as a wild card that can seriously
disrupt the (more important) U.S.-PRC relations, not as
conducive to U.S. values and long-term interests.

Clough shares his concern that if the Democratic
Progressive Party candidate wins the 2000 presidential
elections, Taiwan may declare de facto independence,
prompting the PRC to attack Taiwan and dragging the U.S.
into war. But political realities have made DPP politicians
pragmatic. The agreements among Taiwan's three major
political parties (on Taiwan's de facto independence) are more
significant than their differences.

Where this book leaves off spearheads one important
future research agenda: the implications of Taiwan's
democracy-for Taiwan, for China, and for the U.S. New
thinking on U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan is long
overdue.

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