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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
18 August 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Probable Effects in China and Taiwan
of a GRC Attack on the Mainland

Without massive US support for the GRC across the board, including direct military participation in the operation itself, Chiang Kai-shek's proposal to land on the South China coast, cut the main lines of communication between China and North Vietnam, and seize Kwangtung Province has very little chance of success.

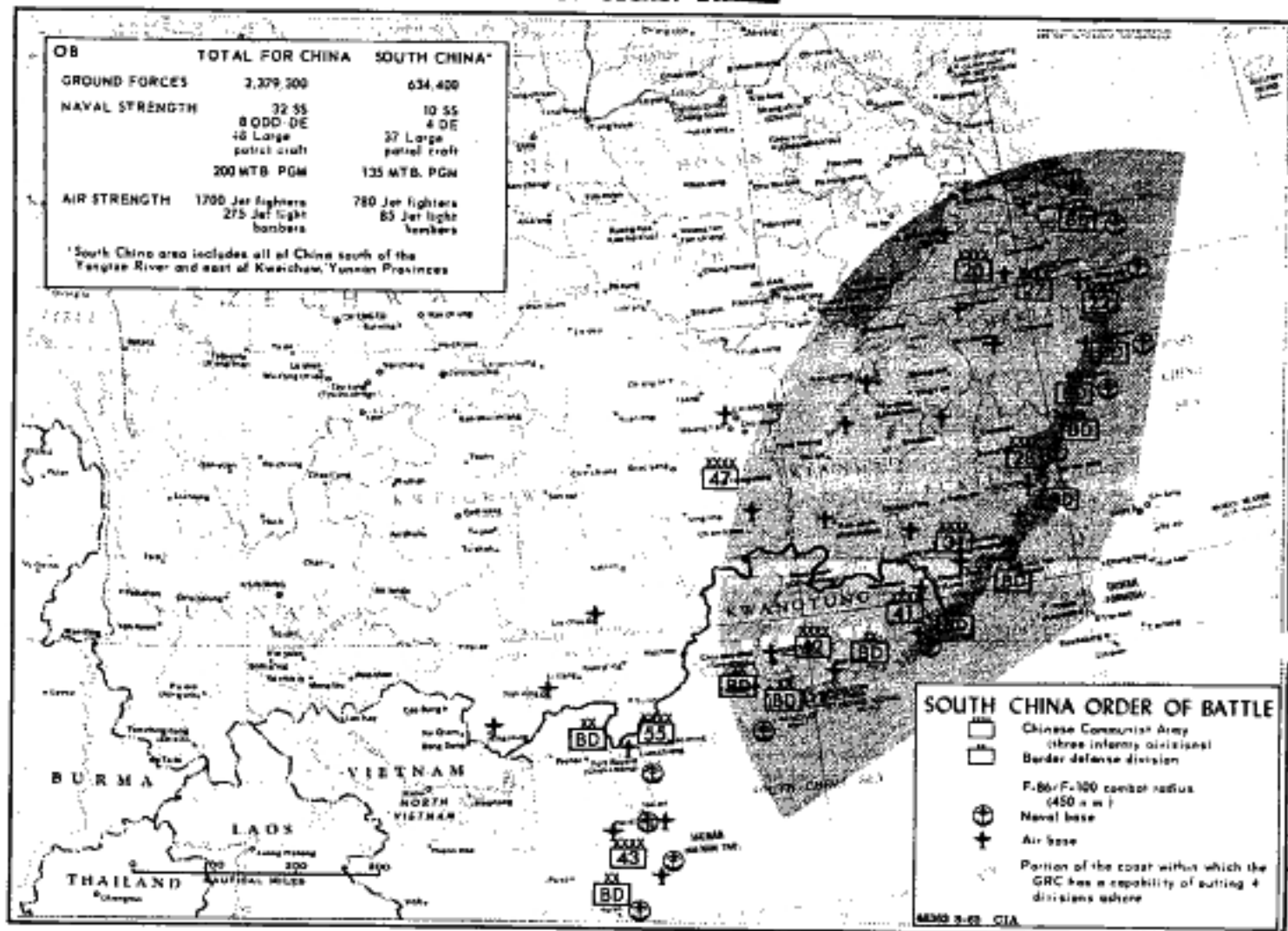
A Kwangtung Expeditionary Force (KEF) launched from Taiwan and relying on unaided GRC capabilities would be small. Within a radius of approximately 250 miles the Nationalists are believed capable of putting four divisions ashore--about 50,000 troops--and supporting them for perhaps 30 days. At any greater distance from Taiwan GRC capabilities would be sharply reduced. The GRC task force would have to overcome determined opposition by Communist motor torpedo boats and light patrol craft--of the type that sank two Nationalist ships off the coast south of Kinmen on 6 August.

The GRC air force could provide only marginal air cover for assault elements landing on the northern coast of Kwangtung and probably only intermittent support south of Swatow (see map showing GRC air force radius of action). Once on the beach, GRC troops would be face to face with vastly superior Communist ground forces.

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In the Canton Military Region alone the Chinese Communists have more than 300,000 regular troops--infantry, artillery, and armor--grouped in five armies. In addition the Communists have six border defense divisions in this area. These units, and the bulk of the more heavily armed regular troops, are deployed on or near the coast where they would be immediately available to oppose GRC landings. Communist troops would have air support from fighter and bomber units which, although probably inferior to GRC air force in quality, would have the advantage of fighting from nearby bases and would have numerical superiority. (see map)

Unless one assumes that major Chinese Communist military units would immediately defect and join forces with the GRC invaders--something we consider extremely unlikely--a successful hit-and-run commando raid in strength is the best result that could be hoped for. Even this would be a chancy operation which could easily turn into a debacle involving the destruction or capture of the greater part of the attacking force. The repeated failure of small-scale (about 30-man) butcher and bolt raids by GRC commando teams between late 1962 and mid-1964 points up the risks of attempting coastal landings.

The net effect of these raids, of which there were 33 in 1963 and 25 during the following year, appears to have been to improve Chinese Communist detection capabilities. The teams encountered only the first line of Communist coastal defense, local militia and Public Security units. These forces displayed no inclination to cooperate with the raiding teams, which were killed, taken prisoner, or driven off in a matter of hours. We have no reason to believe that the end result of a larger operation by unsupported GRC troops would be substantially different, although it might take more time.

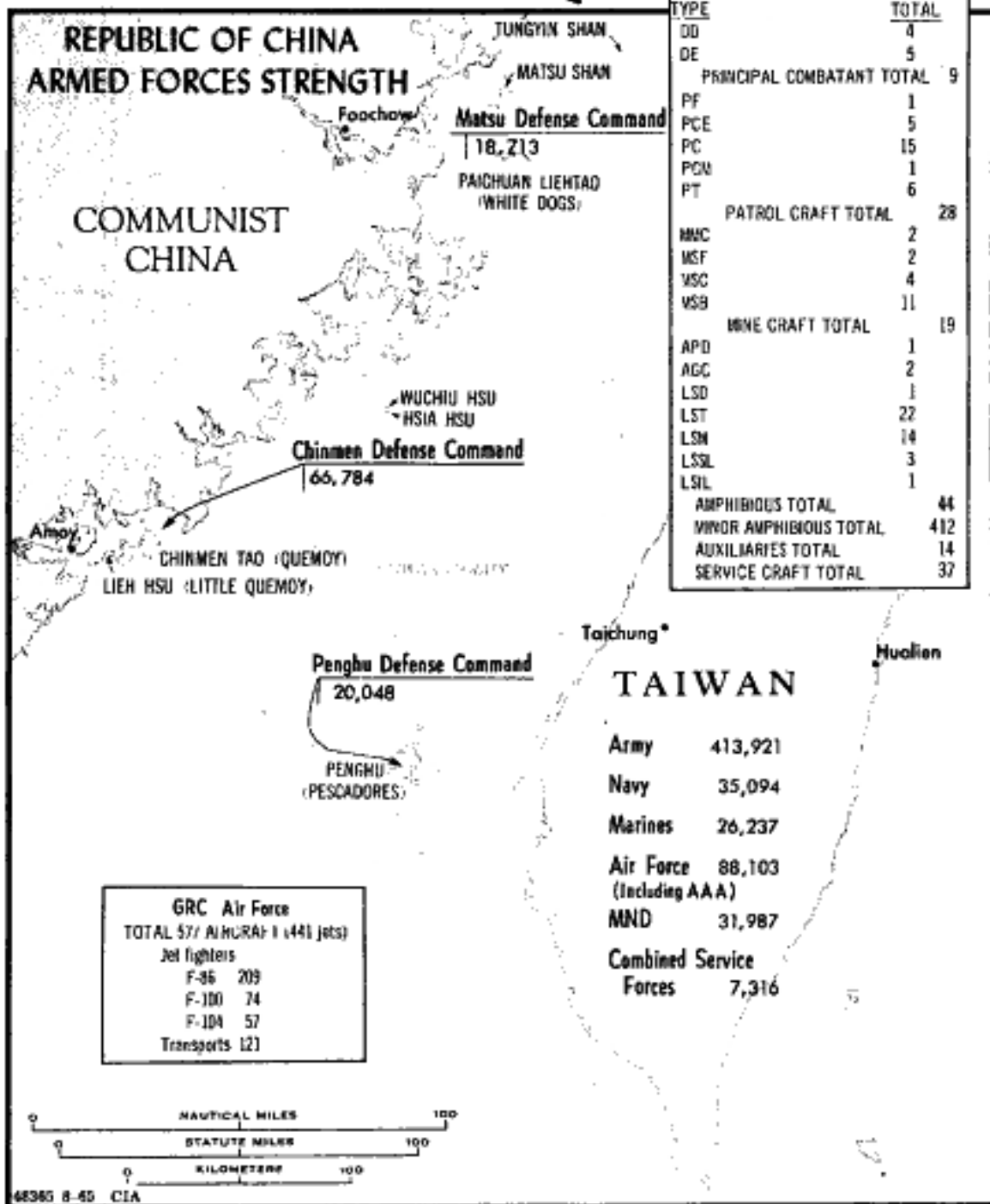
If the GRC succeeded in putting a sizable force ashore, local defense units would probably resist to the best of their ability in an effort to buy time for the deployment of regular troops. These would

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be quickly concentrated and committed to contain and ultimately to destroy the invaders. There is little doubt that Communist troops would be able to achieve this objective. The PLA is an effective combat force, well trained and heavily indoctrinated. It performed creditably in Korea, demonstrated its ability to fight and win during the 1960 campaign against GRC irregular formations--stiffened by Special Forces units sent from Taiwan--operating in Burma near the Chinese frontier, and more recently in the 1962 border war with India.

The private GRC estimate of the chances for success in an operation lacking US support is probably not very different from our own, and it seems clear that Chiang Kai-shek has a more ambitious scenario in mind. At a minimum he probably envisions massive US backing for the operation up to the beach, with the expectation that if things do not go well once his troops are ashore the US will enlarge its commitment by direct participation (at least in the air) in the campaign on the mainland.

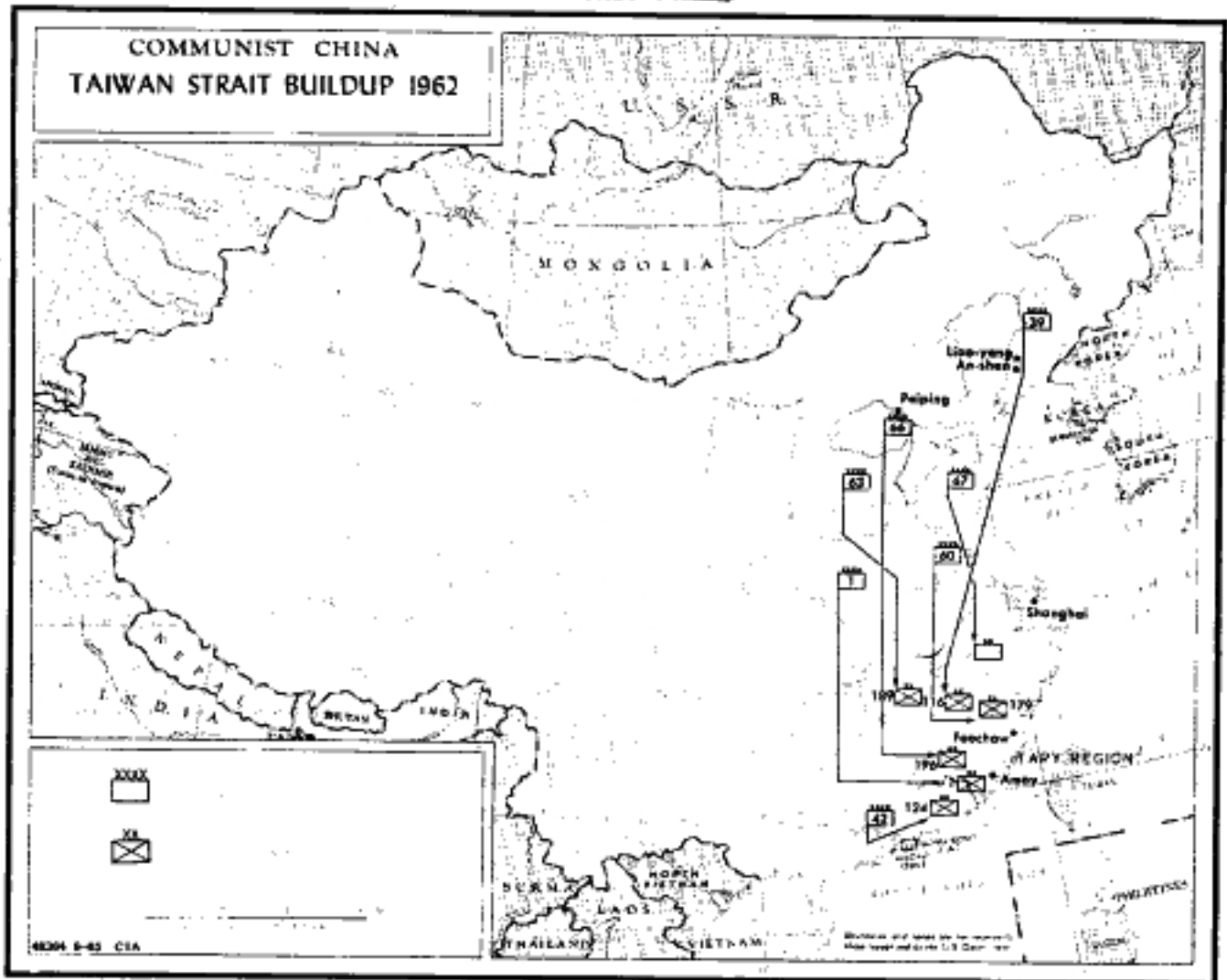
With US naval and air support up to the water's edge the prospects for a GRC landing in force would be considerably better, but the outlook for success in the ultimate objective of seizing and holding all or most of Kwangtung Province is dim at best. Even the largest expeditionary force the GRC could muster and put ashore with US assistance would be heavily outnumbered by the reinforcements the Communists could quickly deploy from the strategic reserve to back up their forces already in place in South China.

During 1963 the GRC worked out a detailed plan for an amphibious attack against Kwangtung. The operation involved 538,000 men--army, navy, and air force--the bulk of the entire Nationalist military establishment. Only a skeleton garrison force of regular troops, strengthened by a call-up of reserves, would be left behind to defend Taiwan and the Off-shore Islands. The plan was carefully reviewed by a top level Sino-American committee which included Admiral Alan Kirk--then US Ambassador in Taipei--and COMUSTDC Vice Admiral Charles Nelson.

Examination of the proposed operation revealed serious deficiencies in many key areas. The GRC did not have enough amphibious lift for the operation or trained crews to man additional landing ships if these were provided by the US. The Nationalist navy lacked sufficient ships for beach preparation and fire support missions. They did not have enough tactical aircraft with the range required for interdiction and close support missions, nor an adequate pool of trained pilots to replace combat losses. All the armed services were found to be short of trained specialists, especially key technicians for logistics units required to support sustained operations. The total GRC deficit in all categories of supply needed for the operation amounted to approximately a million and a half tons.

Admiral Melson commented that if these deficiencies were eliminated the GRC expeditionary force could probably seize a beachhead and take over the port of Swatow but would be unable to break out of their initial lodgement without assistance from US troops. It is questionable how long GRC troop morale would hold up if the expeditionary force remained bottled up inside a Swatow perimeter. The senior officers and NCO's in the GRC armed forces are mainlanders and would probably remain strongly motivated. The majority of the rank and file, however--approximately 85 percent of the riflemen in the line--are Taiwan-born, have no stake in reconquering mainland China, and might lose heart quickly under continuous heavy pressure.

The Communists would react swiftly to cope with an invasion. The PLA, a land army of some 2.3 million men, is the backbone of Peiping's military strength. Nearly one third of this force is already deployed along the China coast from Shanghai to the DRV border--a total of approximately 634,000 men. These troops include 30 regular infantry divisions, nine artillery divisions, one armored division, and 12 border defense divisions. Forces in the area of the GRC landing would be committed at once to blunt the initial thrust and contain the invasion until reinforcements in overwhelming strength could be deployed from the strategic reserve in north and northeast China.



The Communist troop build-up in the Taiwan Straits area during June 1962 provides some indication of the speed with which additional forces could be brought in. Apparently in response to what Peiping interpreted as a possible threat of US-supported action by the Nationalists, the Communists moved six infantry divisions and one artillery division into Fukien Province in about one week's time, raising the order of battle strength there from 194,000 to 311,000. (see map)

Additional air support for defending Communist forces in Kwangtung could probably be marshalled with equal speed. During the 1962 build-up four fighter regiments were deployed to backup fields in a matter of days. Chinese Communist air strength now within operational range of the Kwangtung coast includes 390 jet fighters and 25 jet light bombers. This force could be augmented in short order. Peiping has a total of 1,700 jet fighters and 275 jet light bombers and there are at least seven unoccupied but usable airfields in South China to which additional air regiments could be deployed. Much of the Chinese Communist air force is obsolete by Western standards, but would nonetheless be effective against invading troops lacking local superiority.

The GRC belief that a large-scale invasion would trigger mass desertions from the ranks of the PLA appears to have little basis. The armed forces have always received preferential treatment and continuous, high pressure political indoctrination. Even during 1960-62, the years of greatest popular unrest on the mainland during and just after the "leap forward" economic disaster there was no evidence of significant disaffection in the PLA. Apart from about 14,000 Chinese prisoners of war captured in Korea--many of whom were one-time Nationalist soldiers--who elected to go to Taiwan rather than return to Communist control in early 1954, there have been only a handful of low level defectors from the armed forces. Moreover, soldiers are seldom tempted to abandon a victorious standard, and unless the Nationalists were able to inflict a series of surprise defeats on Communist forces from the outset of the invasion a mass turnover of major Communist units appears very unlikely.

GRC hopes for a popular uprising which would hamper the Communist defenders and aid the Nationalist cause also appear illusory. All our evidence concerning the state of popular attitudes in coastal areas of southern China indicates that a large-scale invasion would not spark a revolt at the present time.

The degree of popular disaffection that exists in the mainland population is sometimes exaggerated by observers outside China. There was considerable unrest in 1960-62 when several successive crop failures created semi-starvation conditions in many areas. Recent travelers and refugees from southern coastal areas, however, consistently report that the food situation there has improved substantially.

Communist instruments of control--the police and public security forces--probably are basically loyal to the regime. Low-level party officials bear the brunt of public censure for regime failures and have been subjected to a harsh new "purification" campaign during the past year. Their morale has probably dropped but extremely few have defected, suggesting that their situation has not yet destroyed basic loyalty in this key group.

Southerners in general have always resented governments of any kind imposed on them from the north, and probably see little to choose between the Communists and the Nationalists. They have many reasons to dislike the present regime, with its stifling political controls and record of economic failure, but by all the evidence the Chinese Nationalists still remain deeply discredited in their eyes.

The GRC could, therefore, probably expect little or no help from the civilian population. At best the majority of the people would remain neutral while the issue was in doubt, waiting to throw in their lot with the winning side. At worst, the population might be convinced by Communist propaganda that the landing was a foreign invasion by "imperialist" forces and rally patriotically behind the regime.

Communist military reaction would probably not be limited to simply repelling the GRC invasion in Kwangtung. The Offshore Islands would almost certainly come under military pressure. Heavy artillery attacks would probably be the first step, followed by an attempt to seize some or all of the islands if the Communists concluded that a quick victory over reduced garrison forces was possible. Large-scale amphibious attacks on Taiwan itself would probably not be attempted but commando raids might be launched from the mainland against military installations clearly associated with the GRC attack. GRC naval installations in the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands and at Tsoying, and port facilities in Kaohsiung might be targets for such operations. The Communists might also attempt to bomb airbases in southern Taiwan used by the GRC air force to support the invasion forces. In any such attacks, however, the Communists would probably try to avoid actions which would increase the enmity of the Taiwanese population.

One of Peiping's major objectives would probably be to turn the Taiwanese against the Nationalist government and if possible to promote a "patriotic" revolt against the GRC and its "imperialist masters" in the US. Communist propaganda would portray the GRC invasion as a ruthless exploitation of Taiwanese "comrades" to serve the interests of foreigners.

The Taiwanese population holds little love for mainland Chinese of any political coloration and has no sympathy for Communism. For this reason, Peiping's calls for a rising to "reunite" Taiwan with the mainland would probably have little appeal. It seems likely, however, that the combination of military reverses which would discredit the GRC leadership and mounting casualties--largely Taiwanese--would increase dissidence among the population to a point which would gravely threaten the stability of the Nationalist government. Morale of the ruling mainlander elite, sustained in part by the dream of eventual return to the mainland as conquerors, would almost certainly plummet.

Peiping would exploit the invasion attempt domestically to strengthen its position by appeals

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to Chinese patriotism, seeking to re-awaken enthusiasm for regime programs across the board as part of a National effort to repel foreign aggression. Victories over the attacking forces would be played up as evidence of Communist power, and new proof that Mao's dictum "all imperialists are paper tigers" is correct. Abroad, Chinese Communist propaganda would seize on an unsuccessful US-supported GRC attack to bolster the idea that Chinese hegemony in East Asia is the "wave of the future." At the same time, Peiping's propaganda would underscore the threat to world peace created by "US aggression" in order to discredit the US and stimulate deterrent pressure on Washington from US allies and neutral nations.

The Chinese Communists could be expected to back up menacing propaganda statements charging that the US was starting an "Asian war" by troop movements and other threatening military demonstrations designed to show that Peiping was capable of enlarging the conflict at any point along an arc extending from Korea to the Indian Border. It is probable, however, that Peiping would hold off on any such escalation and concentrate on destroying the GRC landing force or driving it into the sea.

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