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Taiwan's Offshore Islands: Pathway or Barrier?

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BOOK REVIEWS

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Taiwan's Offshore Islands: Pathway or Barrier?, by Bruce A. Elleman. Newport Paper 44. Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2019. 147 pages. Available for download at digital-commons.usnwc.edu/. Free.

In *Taiwan's Offshore Islands*, Bruce Elleman, the William V. Pratt Professor of International History at the Naval War College, contextualizes and criticizes the common conception that Taiwan and its coastal possessions were insignificant during the Cold War. To do so, he contradicts the popular position that the Sino-Soviet divergence resulted from internal differences—rather than external pressures—by chronologically and thematically analyzing the role that Taiwan and its maritime territories played in fostering the Communist fracture.

Through his extensive use of then-contemporary commentary, maps, and diagrams as well as current research, Elleman succeeds in demonstrating that Taiwan and its coastal possessions acted as a fulcrum for American foreign policy during the early Cold War. True to his roots as not only a diplomatic but an international historian, Elleman fortifies his argument with declassified documents and a variety of other primary sources from all sides, meticulously researched in presidential archives and elsewhere.

The focus of the book is on the early stages of the Cold War, and Elleman demonstrates that both Democrat Harry S. Truman and Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower embraced U.S. policies with respect to Taiwan. The first chapter introduces and frames the topic by providing a succinct summary of the tactical and strategic significance that Taiwan and other coastal island chains have had in the region's history, such as during the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64) and the Sino-French War (1884–85).

From this largely military perspective, Elleman transitions to discussing the Nationalists' 1949 flight from mainland China to offshore strongholds. Chinese Nationalist forces retained a large presence on Taiwan and a lesser but nonetheless important presence on several outlying island chains, including on Quemoy (Jinmen) and Matsu (Mazu). Because the People's Republic of China (PRC) wished to assert complete territorial control while the Republic of China (ROC) regarded Taiwan and its coastal possessions as potential springboards from which to conquer the mainland,

these outposts became points of tension contested between Communist and Nationalist forces (p. 62). Neither side possessed sufficient resources to accomplish its preferred endeavor, but the Nationalists established a naval blockade and the Communists maneuvered their enormous army along the coast and shelled Nationalist territories.

In the aftermath of the Korean War (1950–53), “[s]upporting the Nationalists’ military and morale was a major American goal.” To this end, “[t]he delivery of high-tech equipment and training in its use proved invaluable” (p. 72). Furthermore, despite reluctance to commit itself to a military defense of Taiwan, the United States instituted an embargo of the PRC. Notwithstanding sporadic incidents, a period of relative—if uneasy—peace ensued.

This situation was shattered in 1955 when PRC elements began to bombard Taiwan’s littoral territories. The PRC simultaneously renewed efforts to capture the Dachen island chain, the most isolated of Taiwan’s coastal possessions. While the distance between the Dachens and the main body of Nationalist forces on Taiwan meant that “to stage an invasion of Taiwan from the northern offshore islands did not make any military sense,” it is true that “the Dachens were psychologically important to Taiwan’s defense” (p. 48).

The eventual (February 1955) evacuation of Nationalist troops from the Dachen Islands, with assistance from the U.S. Navy, was viewed with apprehension by the international community; Australia compared their evacuation to the 1938–39 fall of Czechoslovakia. However, “[r]ather than pushing the United States and Taiwan farther apart, . . . greater cooperation

leading up to the evacuation of the Dachens led to closer relations between Washington and Taipei” (p. 52).

The same could not be said with regard to Sino-Soviet affairs. While Washington-Taipei relations were complementary, the Sino-Soviet relationship was transactional, competitive, and fraught with suspicion. The United States sought to deepen these latent divisions by “using a wide variety of military, economic, and political means” to drive “[Communist] China and the USSR together so as to heighten their mutual hostility” (p. 113).

The second Taiwan Strait crisis (1958)—which “arose from the PRC’s goal of halting the blockade once and for all and thereby freeing itself to diversify its overseas trade away from the USSR”—signified the success of the United States in isolating the PRC economically (p. 77). The Chinese were willing to risk armed confrontation, in part because they judged the potential economic benefits to be greater than the potential consequences. The crisis was resolved—effectively, if unofficially—when the ROC was induced to reduce its offshore garrison and end its coastal blockade, with the assurance of continued American support; the Communist Chinese bombardment soon ceased.

We might ask how this situation has changed today. To what extent and in what ways do economic incentives remain viable routes to meaningful and lasting policy changes? Can military force, especially naval, be brought to bear in our current context without igniting widespread conflict? How much autonomy can be tolerated from allies? These questions remain as pertinent now as they were then, and Elleman’s study provides a very useful resource.

Elleman set out to answer the question in the title: Did Taiwan's offshore possessions function as barriers or pathways, and how, for whom, and why? The answer, somewhat limited as it is by the dichotomous framing of the question, is yes—and no. While Taiwan's offshore possessions remained a psychological liability to the Chinese Nationalists, and in some instances had to be sacrificed on the altar of political and military expediency—as the Dachens were in 1955—they consistently functioned as a barrier to the Chinese Communists and a figurative pathway for American interests in the area. Elleman's study demonstrates the importance of examining history as part of the process of developing contemporary strategy. In their policy and strategy toward Taiwan, American policy makers had to chart a careful course between the Scylla of general war and the Charybdis of perceived indifference; current public servants would do well to follow their example.

RYAN DRADZYNSKI



Care for the Sorrowing Soul: Healing Moral Injuries from Military Service and Implications for the Rest of Us, by Duane Larson and Jeff Zust. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017. 273 pages. \$26.95.

The concept of moral injury (MI) has gained much traction in recent years with respect to America's military. *Care for the Sorrowing Soul* is a remarkably well-written book that explores MI and its devastating effects on combat veterans. As with other psychological injuries, MI often is misdiagnosed because it is invisible, with no telltale signs or symptoms. However, it is painful and often deadly for veterans

and can have long-term consequences for both family members and caregivers. It is a growing concern in the military and for military leaders.

Initially, the authors lay the foundation and introduce the concept of MI. They define *moral injury* as “the complex soul wound that results from a person's inability to resolve the differences between one's idealized values and one's personal experiences” (p. 5). It is important to note that the term *moral injury* still is misunderstood and misused by active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and caregivers alike. Additionally, those experiencing MI may try to hide the effects because they are ashamed or uncomfortable, thus making a diagnosis all the more difficult. Moreover, as the authors highlight, the effects of MI are felt by more than combat veterans alone; the “moral injuries experienced by soldiers are also experienced by society” (p. 17). This is why it is important to understand what MI is and what it is not.

Larson and Zust introduce a simple construct known as the “two-mirror model” to explain how MI occurs. Moral dissonance results when the first mirror, or the “ideal self,” and the second mirror, or the “perceived self,” show different things. In other words, when someone's actions are not in consonance with the beliefs or values developed throughout that person's life, it creates moral dissonance. Moral dissonance leads to confusion, and eventually to MI. The bottom line can be explained as follows: “Conflicts between soldiers' ideal and perceived self-images generate ‘value-based’ moral dissonance that results in moral injury” (p. 82). The resulting MI undermines the warrior's sense of worth.