

### Topic and Research Question

Despite a deeper lack of studies aimed at the *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA) in East Asia, the region is regarded by some as a melting pot for the concept. The pretty much biggest influential role in this regard goes to China, which as a rising global power has already for some quite time shown an interest in RMA that according to its government has its own implemented Chinese characteristics. The other interesting actor in this sense is Taiwan, who is expected to react to the Chinese RMA and overall related defense developments in one way or another.

Therefore, the main research question of this work was to better understand *how Taiwan has responded or is responding to China's pursuit of RMA*. The thesis tests the suggested hypothesis that Taiwan has and still is responding by developing its own RMA counter capabilities against China by implementing a mixture of indigenous means and RMA contributions from the United State's (US), which are a key benefactor to Taiwan.

To help with the main research question, a set of subquestions has been identified:

- *What is the Chinese RMA?*
- *What is the applicability of an RMA set in Taiwan?*
- *What effect does the presence of the US have on the Chinese and on the potential Taiwanese RMA?*
- *What strategic arrangements benefitting from the RMA concept do China and Taiwan have against each other?*
- *Does Taiwan have counterbalancing assets against China in the primary RMA related military capabilities areas?*
- *Do both countries' assets abet their respective strategic arrangements?*

### State of the Art

The subject of RMA on its own has no majority consensus and is mostly oriented at the concept's initiator the US. Proponents claim that with evolving defense measures there is a constantly rising need to keep various military aspects better interconnected while also keeping an upper hand against the competition (Chapman 2003, Kiss 2014, Sahgal and Anand 2007). At the core is an ongoing debate of what

can be considered as a transformation and what is simply a natural transition (Dombrowski and Ross 2008). A well embraced view in this discourse is a dose of healthy skepticism that scales down the RMA concept to a more transitive *Modernization-Plus* development, where different states interested in defensive upgrading are according to their capabilities trying to achieve the most optimal defensive standard that they possibly can (Bitzinger 2005, Tan 2011).

### Methodology and Approach

RMA in itself has several schools of thoughts of which William Owens' *System of Systems* (SoS) is the most well received one, serving also as an anchor for this analysis. Its main focus relies on the interconnectivity of the constantly evolving assets in the military and defense developments; trying to shape an overarching system where all important aspects from information gathering, force jointness to precision force deployment are more transparent and maneuverable to the interested party in charge (Chapman 2003).

The empirical part is separated into two sections. The first section aims to define the RMA notion of both cases, so as to narrow down their potential and limitations for the concept. Taiwan's RMA applicability was assessed by looking at its insecurity towards China, economic affordability to make military based purchases and the actual acquisition of armaments from beyond the borders (Raska 2011). The second section compares key RMA capabilities, which according to main SoS norms include a combination of information processing (mainly Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), military platforms and precision force. Both sections combined provide respective RMA outlooks, which are used in answering the main research question.

### Main Facts

1. China's still ongoing RMA development has achieved a firm base, which was formed thanks to many foreign military acquisitions (mostly from Russia). Obtained foreign advancements today tend to be rather implemented as complementary subsystems for Beijing's own broader indigenous RMA efforts. Being regarded as an enforcing tool for the mainland's regime security, the development process of this RMA is strictly planned and transitive in its unfolding. As such, China's RMA fits

the norm of a *Modernization-Plus* process with Chinese characteristics, which resemble a patient development and non-transparent requirements, that are shrouded with a desired opacity output.

2. The applicability of RMA to Taiwan has proven to be viable. Taipei's military awareness is kept relatively high due to Beijing's still unchanged stance of retaking the island; even by means of preemptive force if necessary. Despite budgetary constraints and a low access to the outside modern military market, Taiwan still has a good economic affordability rate to either finance its own indigenous defense initiatives or to get certain needed military procurements directly from Washington.
3. The US has no official RMA related cooperative partnership with China. Washington's own past RMA power projection only ignited the mainland's interest in the concept, but it never directly took part in its formalization or development process. As for Taiwan's potential RMA, the US serve both as the island's provider of capabilities and as an advisor for its military planning and development, what is also often a cause of Beijing's reluctant military cooperation with Washington.
4. China relies on a swift Anti-Access/Area-Denial strategy, with which it seeks to decapitate and entrap Taiwan from its surroundings. With this in mind, Taiwan seeks to prevent such an isolation attempt while also maintaining a flexible defensive and offensive military response to withhold such oppression. Thus Taipei's strategic arrangement consists of a mixture of an active and a passive defense, which should provide the island and its outskirts with both a long lasting survivability chance and an offensive utilization to ensure a better foreign intervention commencement.
5. China demonstrates both a qualitative and a quantitative strength in its main RMA capabilities, which greatly abet the strategic arrangement of secluding Taiwan. To this, Taiwan too has proven to have more adequate counterbalancing assets to its disposal than it does not. Of note are mostly the island's hardening and repair capabilities together with a well thought out infrastructure planning. While the island presents superb information processing capabilities together with a promising missile development, it has quite some imbalances in terms of its military platforms. Due to budgetary constraints, Taipei prioritizes more strategically needed maritime assets over its lacking air force.

### Results

The results have shown, that Taiwan is responding in a RMA related manner directly to China's own strategic decisions. Even though this response includes several noticeable indigenous efforts, at its backbone lie many direct and indirect contribution efforts from the US, which despite a certain personal strategic ambiguity also justify Taipei's own defensive posture and the option of a vital outside intervention attempt. In terms of a viable RMA, Taiwan similarly to China is also behaving among the lines of a transitive *Modernization-Plus* process, mainly because its actual defensive measures were tailored mostly alongside with the mainland's own military development decisions over the course of time. Despite this similarity, Taipei's inner political disparity, budgetary constraints, the from Beijing imposed limitations and even Washington's reoccurring hesitant approach in terms of providing some necessary defensive procurements; all slow down the pacing of Taiwan's counter-response. While China has far more opportunities together with resources to maintain or even pick up the pace of its transitive RMA development, Taiwan is more confined in keeping its capabilities as much normalized and smartly utilized as possible. On the other side, it is also due to these limitations that the island's indigenous scene is being kept enforced by prioritizing ongoing strategically balancing domestic efforts together with some desired future prospects of which a modern domestic submarine fleet and new aircraft assets are the most ambitious ones. All in all, despite Taiwan's keeping-up with the mainland, Beijing's constantly rising RMA capabilities are becoming more befitting to its strategic arrangements than Taipei's slower moving response.

### References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/>

### About the Author

Michal Wuketich holds a Bachelor degree in the Japanese Studies from the University of Vienna. This thesis is part of the MA Program on East Asian Economy and Society at the University of Vienna.

Contact information:

[michael.belmont@gmail.com](mailto:michael.belmont@gmail.com)