

Observation no: 110

Country-year: 1953

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

Chiang Kai-shek was granted presidential powers over the Republic of China (Taiwan) on March 1, 1950. Though he originally gained control over mainland China in a coup, his position in Taiwan was given to him in a petition from the newly formed legislative body of Taiwan.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

Chiang Kai-shek's regime was the first in the history of the Republic of China located in Taiwan.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Chiang Kai-shek was a career military officer and the commandant of the officer candidate training school before ascending to head the Republic of China in mainland China and then on Taiwan. While serving as head of state during the civil war, he also acted as supreme commander of the military.

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

No.

I could find no evidence of ethnic or sectarian barriers to entry to the Taiwanese officer corps.

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

¹ Robert Payne, *Chiang Kai-Shek* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), pg. 293.

While there are no strict ideological requirements, the Taiwanese military leading up to 1953 was organized, vetted, and designed to support the KMT regime. Loyalty to that regime was paramount to obtaining a senior position in the Taiwanese military. By pure attrition after years of civil war and geographic isolation, most of the senior military officers in this period were highly loyal to the KMT.²

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

While I was unable to find any direct evidence of required party membership within the senior officer corps, I could find no senior officers in this time period that were not members of the KMT. And, because Chiang Kai-Shek's focus on the military during this time was primarily about loyalty and political indoctrination, circumstantial evidence indicates that it would have been impossible to rise high in the ranks of the military without KMT party membership. Later in the decade, there is evidence of a concerted effort to register military members as KMT party members (this is even more significant because the Taiwanese military was a conscript military and therefore was unable to "select" out disloyal members initially). Additionally, the political warfare department had a regimented system of isolating non-loyal military members and transferring them to disciplinary units or removing them from the military.³ All of this evidence strongly suggests that senior officers would have needed to be members of the KMT.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

A department of political affairs was established under the Ministry of National Affairs to conduct political training. The department stationed a political commissar within military units.⁴ Political education was considered pivotal to order and military effectiveness and the Taiwanese military underwent significant organizational changes in order to emphasize political education.

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

² Monte Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan's Development* (Armonk: East Gate Book, 1997).

³ Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan's Development*: 75.

⁴ Hollington K. Tong, *Chiang Kai-Shek* (Taipei: China Publishing Company, 1953): 536.

Yes.

During the period from 1949 to 1953, Taiwan was under martial law and the military was used as a means to put down communist dissent.⁵ In addition, the military was used in 1947 to defeat a rebellion of native-Taiwanese who resisted KMT authority after the Japanese surrender.

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

The military was used to cement authority, but governance was firmly placed under the KMT.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

The Taiwan Garrison Command was formed to put down any anti-government forces and to implement martial law.⁶

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

Yes.

The General Political Warfare Department included a counterintelligence section, tasked with seeking out and identifying disloyal elements of the Taiwanese military.⁷

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

Yes.

In 1950 a significant purge of tens of thousands of officers was conducted. The purge got rid of officers that were not loyal to the KMT and those who were

⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, "Towards Civilian Supremacy: Civil-Military Relations in Taiwan's Democratization," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2002): 57-84.

⁶ Monte Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan's Development* (Armonk: East Gate Book, 1997).

⁷ Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen*.

considered vestiges of the war with the Japanese and the mainland struggle with the Communists.⁸

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

The Central Standing Committee meetings and the National Defense Dialogue Meetings provided means through which civilian leadership directed military leaders on military organization, etc.⁹ The Central Standing Committee consisted of party members, including former and current military members. The National Defense Dialogue consisted primarily of top military leaders, but was headed and guided by the President.

⁸ Hollington K. Tong, *Chiang Kai-Shek* (Taipei: China Publishing Company, 1953): 492.

⁹ Bullard, *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan's Development*, 82.