FTCN Replay: China's Growing Threat to Taiwan a Multi-Domain Challenge for Global Security

In a recent episode of **From the Crows' Nest**, host and AOC's Director of Outreach and Advocacy Ken Miller sat down with **Duncan McCrory**, a PhD researcher at the Freeman Air and Space Institute at King's College, London, to discuss one of the most pressing security challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region: China's escalation toward Taiwan and its implications for global stability.

The 2027 Timeline: A Looming Deadline

McCrory emphasized the urgency of the threat, referencing what's known as the "Davidson window" – a timeline indicated by Admiral Phil Davidson, former Commander of US INDOPACOM, suggesting potential Chinese military action by 2027. "The threat of an invasion, the fact that Xi Jinping has vowed reunification with Taiwan by force if necessary … those should not be taken as empty words, and we should not for a second underestimate China and its ambitions here," McCrory said.

The scale of potential Chinese military action is staggering. According to McCrory, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) represents "the world's largest military force by active serving personnel with over 2 million active duty plus around half a million reserves and then a further half a million approximately in paramilitary personnel."

What makes this threat particularly concerning is the Chinese Communist Party's absolute control over military forces.

“President Xi has absolute control over the PLA from the executive level through the Central Military Commission, there will be absolutely no hesitation if he decides that the use of force is the necessary course of action,” McCrory said.

Beyond Taiwan: Global Economic Implications

The conversation highlighted how a Chinese invasion would extend far beyond Taiwan’s borders. Miller and McCrory discussed the broader economic implications, noting that approximately one-fifth of global maritime trade – worth roughly $2.5 trillion worth of goods – passes through the Taiwan Strait.

“If you can imagine the disruption that would cause on our supply chains, not just automotive manufacturing. But you know what happens if we suddenly get a cut off of the semiconductor supply into the defense sector?” McCrory asked, pointing to the cascading effects on global defense capabilities.

The Russia-China Partnership: A Complicating Factor

The discussion also touched on the concerning alliance between Russia and China, which President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping described in February 2022 as a “no limits relationship.” While McCrory noted that this partnership differs from NATO-style integration – being more based on self interest rather than true collaboration – he emphasized that this shouldn’t diminish Western concerns about potential coordination between the two powers.

“President Putin could take advantage of what’s already a very stretched US force displacement across the globe. If there’s a pivot toward, a strong pivot towards in the PACOM at the expense of some of the defense of Europe, Putin could use that to take advantage,” McCrory said.

Electromagnetic Spectrum: The First Domain to Control

Miller and McCrory discussed the critical importance of

information dominance in any coming potential conflict. McCrory said China's doctrine of "system destruction warfare," which "prioritize[s] achieving information dominance by denying adversaries the ability to access the spectrum to their ability to coordinate forces, to weaken their will to fight and compel them to cease hostilities."

The PLA's approach involves targeting "sensors, communications and data links that make up those integrated systems architectures" to "achieve an effect that would paralyze adversary joint operations."

Lessons from Ukraine and the Path Forward

Drawing parallels to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, McCrory highlighted potential defensive strategies Taiwan could adopt. He referenced Dr. Tom Withington's paper published by RUSI on **"Manoeuvre Warfare and the Electromagnetic Spectrum,"** emphasizing the importance of "surprise, deception and agility across the spectrum" that Ukraine has successfully employed against Russian forces.

"How do we harness that collective brain power [within the Association of Old Crows] to come up with helping Taiwan to become a more resilient and asymmetric force so they can defend themselves and give China pause for thought in terms of if they do engage with this, this could be a very protracted and costly endeavor," McCrory said.

The Diplomatic Question

McCrory stressed that while diplomatic efforts continue, strength through deterrence also remains crucial. "If anything, [diplomatic efforts] are crucially important and need to continue. But I think while that's happening, there's still a need to prepare," he concluded.

The conversation underscores the complex, multi-domain nature of the challenge facing the West in the Indo-Pacific, where electromagnetic spectrum operations, cyber warfare, and

traditional military capabilities converge in what could become the defining security challenge of the coming decade.