

China eyes 'armed unification' with Taiwan by 2027: key academic

Mainland can bring the island under its control in a week, Jin Canrong says

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BEIJING -- Chinese President Xi Jinping will employ force to unify Taiwan with China by 2027, an influential Chinese academic who advises Beijing on foreign policy told Nikkei.

Jin Canrong, a professor in Renmin University's School of International Studies, notes that the People's Liberation Army already has a posture superior to that of the U.S. to deal with a contingency involving Taiwan.

He is known as one of China's most vocal hawks, and his online comments are followed by many.

Xi has set Taiwan unification as a goal but has not indicated a timeline. Jin said: "Once the National Congress of the Communist Party of China is over in the fall of 2022, the scenario of armed unification will move toward becoming a reality. It is very likely that the leadership will move toward armed unification by 2027, the 100th anniversary of the PLA's founding."

This echoed a view expressed in March 2021 by Adm. Phil Davidson, the since-retired commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee with regard to Taiwan: "I think the threat is manifest during this decade -- in fact, in the next six years."

On whether the U.S. would have a military response to a Chinese move to take the island, Jin said that "China already has the capability to unify Taiwan by force within one week" and that "the PLA can defeat any U.S. force within 1,000 nautical miles of the coastline."

The PLA is believed to have a strategy of keeping U.S. naval vessels out of the waters around China -- and thus refining its ability to launch missile attacks against American forces there.



Jin Canrong is known for his hawkishness on the U.S. and advises the Chinese government on foreign policy. (Photo by Tsukasa Hadano)

Jin pushed back against the view in Japan that, in the words of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, "a Taiwan emergency is a Japan emergency."

"Japan should absolutely not intervene in a Taiwanese emergency," he said. "The U.S. already cannot win against China on this. If Japan intervenes, China will have no choice but to defeat Japan as well. [Japan] must realize that a new change is occurring."

Jin is skeptical that peaceful unification can be achieved, saying: "It will difficult with Democratic Progressive Party President Tsai Ing-wen in power. If [an opposition] Kuomintang candidate wins the presidential election in 2024, relations will improve, but the Kuomintang has no support."

As for what Taiwan should do, Jin said it should enter into discussions on unification: "The only choice they have is to talk to mainland China as soon as possible. The longer it takes, the more disadvantageous it becomes for Taiwan," he said.

On Sino-American relations this year, Jin was pessimistic.

"It will be a more difficult year than 2021," he said. "China will have its party congress in the fall, and the U.S. will have its midterm elections in November. With such a weighty political schedule, the rivalry between the countries is likely to be very clear."

In addition, Taiwan will hold local elections in November. "China could be a target of criticism during those elections," Jin said. "This will also affect China-U.S. relations."

The U.S., the U.K. and others have announced diplomatic boycotts of the Winter Olympics, which begin this week in Beijing. But Jin dismissed this as unimportant. "Every country, including the U.S., is sending players," he said. "Many foreign companies are sponsoring the event. The fact that some countries are not sending high-ranking officials is not an issue."

In 2022, China and Japan will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations. Jin criticized the Japanese side, saying: "The Chinese government hopes to stabilize relations on the 50th anniversary. However, Japan has become too conservative,

including former Prime Minister Abe's comments on the Taiwan issue, and the situation has become difficult."

The economy will be the top issue at the National People's Congress in March, said Jin, who expects the government's annual growth target to remain at 6%.

"There is a very important party conference this year," he said. "It does not look good to have low goals."