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The Republic of China Air Force Today

by Roy Choo and Peter Ho

Modern Taiwanese Air Power

The Republic of China Air Force Today

Roy Choo and Peter Ho



New to me are authors Roy Choo and Peter Ho, who have recently given us a detailed and admirably slim volume on the current state of the Republic of China (Taiwanese) Air Force.

It is a timely review of this air force in view of the massive expansion of the PLAAF on the Chinese mainland and the avowed intent of the People's Republic to one day reunite the mainland with the offshore territories.

The book is focused only on the Air Force and makes little or no mention of any form of the air assets used by either the Taiwanese Army or Navy. It begins logically enough in Chapter 1 with an historical overview of the establishment of the air force and its role to date in maintaining the separate nature of the island. Continuing with a detailed section on the organisational structure of the force today in Chapter 2, it goes on to explain how the Taiwanese have developed various means of dispersing their aircraft from the main air bases to underground shelters and the use of sections of motorway in lieu of runways.

This is followed by an analysis of other forms of air defence than manned aircraft, as well as the probable development of a surface to surface offensive missile capability. Although such systems are rarely officially acknowledged they are much speculated upon by observers and the local media as a possibly meaningful deterrent to the mainland's perceived policy of aggression. Leaked information suggests that the most recent system, the Hsing Feng 2, can reach mainland coastal ports and air bases, having a possible range of some 2000km.

The authors include, at this point of the book, an updated order of battle of the air force for April 2021, and while not quoting actual numbers it does detail the type and location of the individual fighter wings and other aircraft. Maps show locations of these bases.

Chapter 3 is for me the most interesting section of the book. In it author Roy Choo explains the geopolitical background to the current situation as well as assessing the nature of the military threat posed by the mainland. He then tackles the likely forms of response the ROCAF have available to them. One particularly interesting section in this chapter is what he refers to as "grey-zone warfare" being carried out by the PRC against Taiwan. By that he means the attempts by the PLAAF particularly to wear down, short of open military action, the forces available to the ROCAF. He cites mainland "encirclement drills" where H-6 bombers and their escorts fly around the perimeter of the islands Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) but requiring Taiwanese aircraft to shadow the potential intruders from their own side of the line. Additionally there are increasingly frequent crossings into the ADIZ by PLAAF aircraft usually involving crossing the mid-point line established as the western boundary of the ADIZ down the centre of the Straits of Taiwan, the body of water separating the offshore islands from the mainland. Choo quotes sources saying that in 2020 fighters were scrambled from QRA posts on almost 3000 occasions. He states that the costs on man-power and aircraft maintenance are likely to become unsustainable in the future as men and machines are worn out by the constant need to respond to the challenge. It is even suggested that the life span of the current ROCAF fighter fleet will be more likely to be decided in Beijing than Taiwan.





Following that, the author goes on to examine the over-riding importance of American support for the islands which he regards as paramount to the survival of the Taiwanese government, and considers that given the on-going power politics being played out between the USA

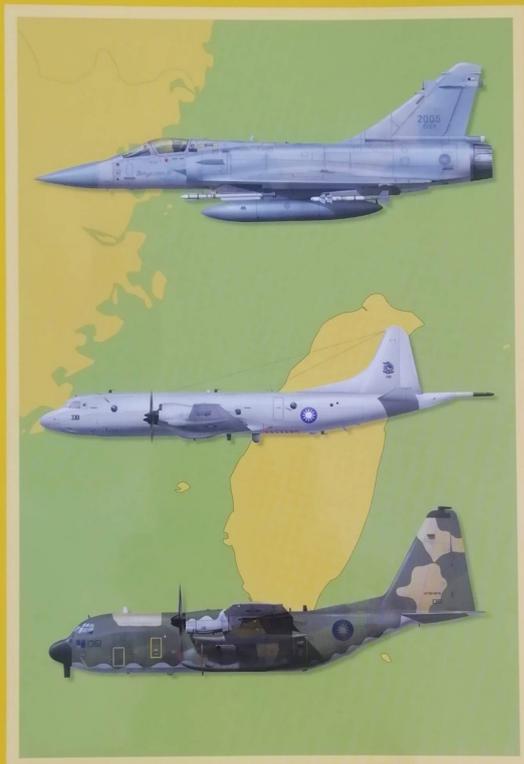


and the PRC across the globe, that relationship is safe. It remains to be seen, however, whether the US withdrawal from Afghanistan causes several countries across the globe, Taiwan included, to revisit the perceived permanent nature of their relationship with the USA.



For the modellers among you Chapter 4 will probably be the most valuable, covering the various aircraft currently in use by the ROCAF. It includes a number of excellent photographs of the machines in use including the F5E, F16A/B, Mirage 2000 and from a western perspective the most interesting of them all, the locally developed Indigenous Defence Fighter or Ching Kuo, the F-CK-1C/D. The chapter also covers transport and training aircraft such as Hercules, Orion and Hawkeye and various other VIP types.





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The final chapter looks at the future of the ROCAF, mainly from the point of view of acquisition of new aircraft such as the 66 Block 70 F16Vs and a new trainer, the T-5 Yung Ying, based on the Ching Kuo fighter, to enhance the self-sufficient policies of the current government. The growth in the building and use of drones, although slower than elsewhere, is also covered before concluding with an assessment of how the future might unfold.

The book concludes with several pages showing the badges and patches of the various squadrons of the ROCAF followed by a comprehensive bibliography for further reading on the subject.

Authors Choo and Ho have packed a great deal of information into this slim new volume from Harpia Publishing. It is current, clear and well written, and provides an important counter-point to the earlier similar but not so slim series of books from the same publisher on the air power of the PRC. Several of these have been reviewed in earlier issues of this newsletter.

This book breaks much new ground especially for interested readers in the West, informing students of current world events as well as stimulating the creative juices of the modelling community. I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in a part of the world that will become of increasing importance to all of us as the 21st century proceeds.

Indigenous Defence Fighter Ching Kuo - model by **David Thomas** in 1:48 scale

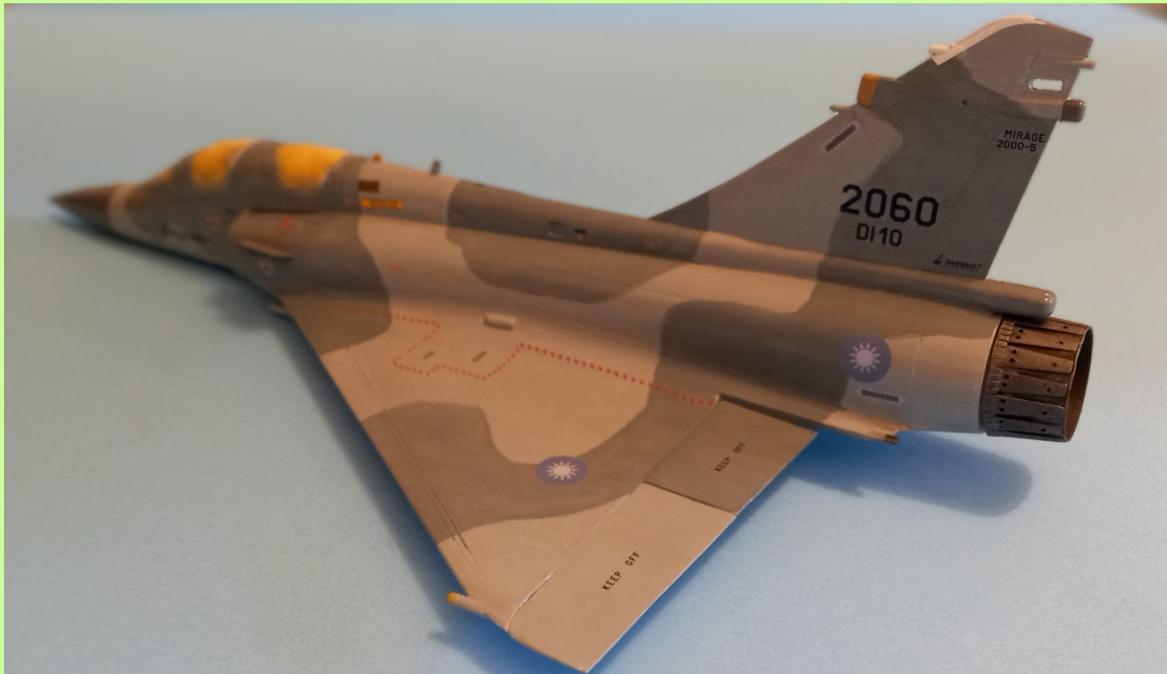


As a modeller I am sorry to have to admit that as yet I have only produced one model of a ROCAF machine, that of a Ching Kuo from Freedom Models in 48th scale, but I think this book is likely to encourage me to build more. However, for modellers of any of the major scales, kits of the various aircraft are reasonably easy to find and can be supplemented by accurate decals from several producers, notably Best Fong, to be found at www.bestfong.com. Several of these decal sheets have also been reviewed favourably in previous issues of the newsletter.

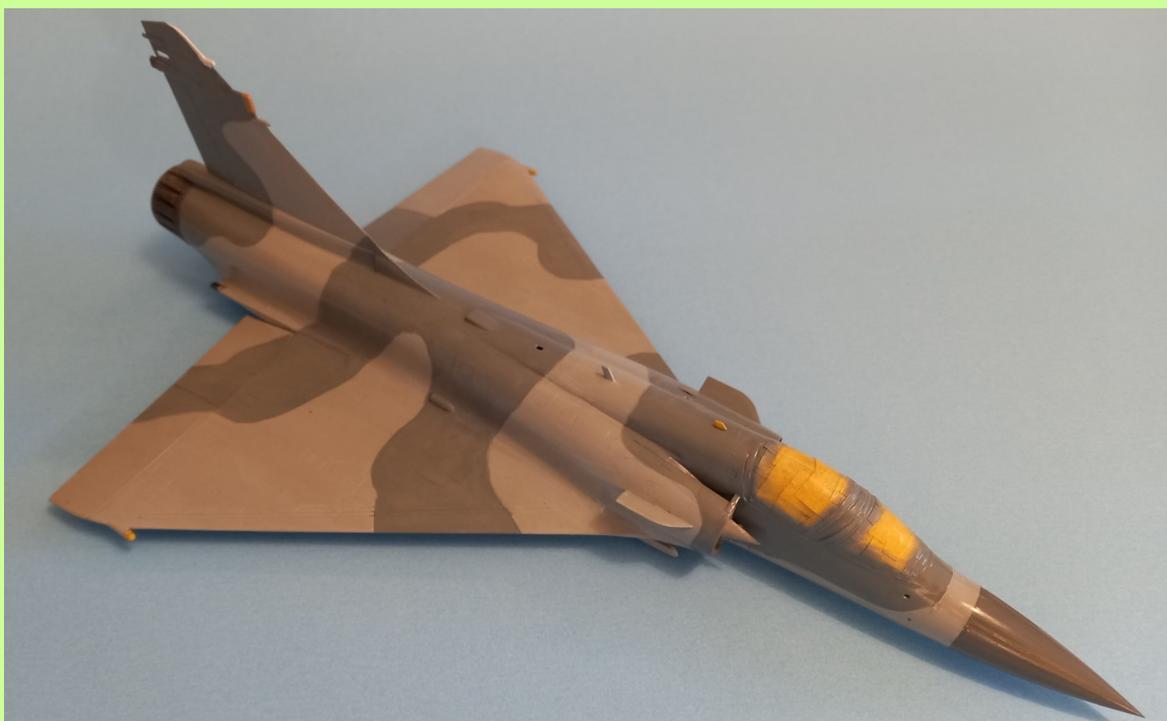
David Thomas.



Mirage 2000-5DI from *Kinetic Model Builders Guild* via **Mark Ascott** of IPMS Mirage SIG (1:48)



Unfinished Mirage 2000 single seat EI and twin seater DI models by **Mark Ascott**. (1:72 scale)





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