

Taiwan / The Apple of Discord in The Pacific Ocean

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ABSTRACT

Taiwan, officially-self called the Republic of China, is an island state close to China, dominating the straits separating the North from the South China Sea (Taiwan Strait or Formosa¹ Strait). Austronesian aborigines originally inhabited the island. Chinese settled it from the opposite coast, while it was a Dutch and Portuguese colony (1624-1668). The island was recaptured in 1683 by the Chinese and remained in their possession until their defeat by the Chinese -Japanese War in 1895. The island returned to China's sovereignty after the Second World War ended. Taiwan today is a de facto state that has claimed an autonomous course since 1949, even though until 1971, the United Nations recognized Taiwan as the representative of China. However, the People's Republic of China has not stopped claiming it has legal sovereignty over Taiwan and the Penghu, Kinmen & Matsu Archipelago, and other smaller islands currently under Taiwan's sovereignty and are located in the East and South China Seas. Is Taiwan a Chinese island, and should it be incorporated into China under the "One China" principle, or will it survive as an independent state with a different political and social system from the People's Republic of China? Could U.S. support for the Taiwan regime push tensions with China over the edge?



Source: Google Maps

¹ The Portuguese gave the name Formosa to Taiwan (beautiful island)

CHINA TAIWAN RELATIONS

After the Second World War ended, Taiwan and other Chinese territories occupied by the Japanese were returned to China. However, in 1949 when the Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung prevailed in the Chinese Civil War, what remained of the defeated Conservative Government (Kuomintang), its leader Chian Kai-shek and 1,500,000 anti-communist Chinese fled to Taiwan. In Taiwan, Chian Kai-shek established a government-in-exile and imposed a dictatorship even though the mainland Chinese who followed him were only 14% of the island's total population². Chian Kai-shek's goal was to retake mainland China and expel the Communists. The Chian Kai-shek regime represented China for about twenty-two years in the United Nations. However, the opinion of many member states finally prevailed that a Chinese island should not represent the enormous size of mainland China. The General Assembly of The United Nations, at its 26th Session on 25/10/1971 by resolution 2758³, recognized that the legal representation of China was that of the representatives of the People's Republic of China and expelled the representatives of Chian Kai-shek. With generous financial support from the U.S., Taiwan was able to develop as a modern state.

After the opening of the Chinese economy and the restoration of relations with the U.S., along with the easing of restrictions on visiting and investing in China, Taiwan-China relations improved, and in 1991 Taiwan declared an end to the War with the People's Republic of China. China proposed integrating Taiwan into the People's Republic of China as an autonomous region like Hong Kong (One Country, Two Systems).

Taiwan did not accept the Chinese proposal, and in 2000 the Government of Chen Shui-bian supported the country's independence and revived the old rhetoric against the regime of the People's Republic of China. China was alarmed and passed a law condemning secessions and threatening to use non-peaceful means if Taiwan attempted to secede. In successive elections, the Presidents supported the independence of the country. Taiwan-China relations improved further during the Presidency of Conservative Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016). While Ma clearly expressed the policy of the three no "no independence, no amalgamation and no use of force," he insisted a lot and, to some extent, succeeded in having good cooperation with China in trade, investment, tourism, and the fight against crime⁴.

After 2016, with the election as President of Tsai-Ing-wen, who comes from the Democratic Progressive Party, the good climate in relations broke down. Re-elected for a second term, Tsai-Ing-wen insists on the issue of sovereignty, firmly claims respect from China, and refers to a separate identity for her country. Hong Kong protests in 2019 and their violent suppression

² What's behind China-Taiwan tensions? BBC, News, 2 August 2022.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34729538>

³ Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations. UN General Assembly (26th sess.: 1971) <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192054>

⁴ Chen, P.K., Kastner, S.L. and Reed, W.L., 2017. A farewell to arms? US security relations with Taiwan and the prospects for stability in the Taiwan Strait. *Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace*, pp.221-238.

fueled anti-Chinese sentiment in Taiwan. Pelosi's⁵ visit to Taiwan and Tsai-Ing-wen's visit to the U.S. escalated the tension and reactions from China.

THE ISSUE OF TAIWAN AND US-CHINA RELATIONS

From the beginning, the issue of Taiwan was treated with care by both sides, emphasizing its peaceful settlement. Mao Tse-tung's statement to American President Nixon during his visit to China in 1972, repeated by Professor and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in a lengthy interview he gave to the Economist recently, is typical. Mao Tse-tung did not. He seemed to be in a hurry and believed that sooner or later, it might, and in a hundred years, Taiwan would become an integral part of China again⁷. In this first high-level meeting, which marked the beginning of the US-China Dialogue, they also discussed the issue of Taiwan. In the Shanghai joint communique summarizing the positions of both sides, they stated that, among other things, the resolution of the Taiwan issue⁸.

US-Taiwan relations have remained informal since January 1, 1979, when the Carter Administration opened diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, the U.S. did not close the door to Taiwan and chose an alternative approach because they didn't want to lose contact with Taiwan. As compensation for breaking official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, on April 10, 1979, the U.S. and Taiwan agreed to an unofficial bilateral relationship, including commitments to Taiwan's security. Key elements of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA, P.L.96-8; 22 U.S.C. § 3301 et seq.)⁹ are as follows: 1) the American Taiwan Institute, a private agency, will conduct Relations with Taiwan. This Institute will have similar functions to embassies and will have as staff U.S. Government personnel; 2) U.S. policy is to be able to resist any violence that could undermine Taiwan's economic and social system; 3) The U.S. will provide Taiwan with defense equipment and services, in such quantity as will enable Taiwan to maintain its defense capability, and 4) the type of weapons for sell to Taiwan shall be decided by the President and Congress taking into account the needs of Taiwan and following procedures provided by law. The Taiwan Relations Act greatly angered China. President Reagan's third communiqué of August 17, 1982, attempted to reassure China that the U.S. did not intend to challenge China's territorial sovereignty and

⁵ Why Pelosi went to Taiwan and why China's angry, Associated Press, 2 August 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/explainer-why-pelosi-went-to-taiwan-and-why-china-s-angry-/6684414.html>.

⁶ Haenle, P & Sher, N., 2022. How Pelosi's Taiwan Visit Has Set a New Status for Us-China Tensions, *CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE*

⁷ "They are a bunch of counter-revolutionaries. We don't need them now. We can wait 100 years. Someday we will ask for them. But it's a long distance away." (A conversation with Henry Kissinger, The transcript of his meeting with our journalists, Economist, 17/05/2023)

⁸ The U.S. side declared: The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations in Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes. (Joint Statement Following Discussions With Leaders of the People's Republic of China, Shanghai, February 27, 1972.

⁹ <https://www.ait.org.tw/taiwan-relations-act-public-law-96-8-22-u-s-c-3301-et-seq/>

interfere in its internal affairs¹⁰. On the one hand, there were assurances to China that the U.S. would gradually reduce selling arms to Taiwan and that the weapons sold would not differ in quantity and quality from those sold in previous years¹¹.

Despite the assurances, the U.S. continued to supply Taiwan with weapons. In parallel with preparing the third communique, the U.S. responded to a request from the Government of Taiwan. The U.S. unilaterally pledged to provide guarantees through clarifications on the communiqué¹². The Six Assurances, if and informally, assured that the U.S. would continue to support Taiwan despite the severance of diplomatic relations. The Six Assurances have been affirmed by all U.S. governments and, in 2016, became official but non-binding with their adoption by the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.¹³

China considers that despite the commitments made by the U.S. based on the joint communiqués¹⁴, “they are trying to use the Taiwan issue to limit China.” It is a fact, after all, that if one reads the communiqués, one finds that on the part of the U.S., there is no recognition, adoption, and support for the People’s Republic of China’s view of Taiwan, even if it is chosen not to be challenged¹⁵.

Presidents Carter, Clinton, and Obama followed the “One China” policy. They tried to resolve strategic issues bilaterally & kept the Taiwan issue low. However, the Trump administration viewed China as a strategic rival and sought to strengthen bilateral relations with Taiwan. In this context, they included the declassification of documents related to the “Six Agreements,” visits of high-ranking officials of the U.S. Government to Taiwan, the passage of U.S. Navy ships

¹⁰ “The United States Government attaches great importance to its relations with China, and reiterates that it has no intention of infringing on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, interfering in China’s internal affairs, or pursuing a policy of “Two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan.” (United States-China Joint Communique on United States Arms Sales to Taiwan, point 5)

¹¹ “Having in mind the foregoing statements of both sides, the United States Government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution. In so stating, the United States acknowledges China’s consistent position regarding the thorough settlement of this issue” (United States-China Joint Communique on United States Arms Sales to Taiwan, point 6.)

¹² Taiwan: Political and Security Issues, 2021.IN FOCUS, *Congressional Research Service*, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>

¹³ 114TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION H. CON. RES. 88, CONCURRENT RESOLUTION passed on May,16,2016) <https://congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/>

¹⁴ In 1972, 1978, and 1982 joint communiqués between China and the US, the US recognizes: 1) the People’s Republic of China “as the sole legitimate government of China”, 2) recognizes but does not confirm the Chinese position that there is no single China and Taiwan is part of China and they promise to maintain only unofficial relations with Taiwan. In the 1982 communique, the US promised to reduce arms sales to China (Congressional Research Service. In Focus. Taiwan Policy and Security Issues,updated January,4,2021)

¹⁵ Chong Ja Ian, 2023.The Many “One Chinas”: Multiple Approaches to Taiwan and China. *CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE*

through the straits, and the provision of support for Taiwan's relations with the 14 countries that recognize Taiwan.¹⁶ Moreover, President Donald Trump's National Security Council announced a comprehensive China strategy in May 2020 and later declassified the Indo-Pacific strategy. The strategy aims to protect the U.S., maintain peace through a policy of power, and advance American prosperity by renewing the core pillars of the U.S. economy¹⁷. As Kissinger mentions, Trump may have sought a better trade balance, but with his tactics, he created conditions of conflict. The Biden administration continued the Trump policy but adopted liberal rhetoric.

In September 2021, the AUKUS (USA-UK-AUSTRALIA) agreement surprised almost everyone. While China expressed its annoyance, the relative embarrassment on the part of the USA and the enthusiastic statements of the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Australia strongly showed that the signatories states of the AUKUS agreement worked in a closed circle, with secret diplomacy long before its announcement. Moreover, notwithstanding (BREXIT), the United Kingdom took an active role in the conclusion of the AUKUS, possibly seeking its total reinstatement as an international regulatory factor.

Today the challenges are increasing on both sides. After Pelosi & Chai exchanged visits, China withdrew its fleet, encircled Taiwan, and recently tried to block American ships from crossing the Straits.

WHY TAIWAN'S ISSUE MATTERS?

Taiwan, one of the 4 Asian Tigers¹⁸, is a particular case. In addition to its remarkable economic growth, it has developed into a democratic state with institutions and a high level of governance. If China conquers Taiwan, it will become an occupied territory ruled by the one-party dictatorship of China (Santoro, D & Cossa, R, 2023., p:9). The loss of a democratic country operating with high democratic standards will strengthen authoritarianism and naturally strengthen China's influence (Santoro, D & Cossa, R, 2023., p:9). Moreover, Taiwan dominates the production of chips in semiconductors and high-tech products. If Taiwan stops supplying and participating in the largest technology companies, such as Apple and Nvidia, in the U.S. and globally international trade would be adversely affected (Santoro, D., and Cossa, R., 2023, p:10).

More than fifty years since the recognition of China's legal representation at the United Nations by the People's Republic of China and more than forty years since the establishment of US-China

¹⁶ Fourteen countries (14) recognize Taiwan as a state. Fifty-one (51) recognize China as the only legitimate government representing the Chinese people. Twenty-seven (27) countries do not recognize either the Government of the People's Republic of China or the Government of Taiwan. And seventy-four (74) countries accept the "One China" policy with differences between them related to their economic interests and cooperation with the People's Republic of China (Chong Ja Ian, 2023).

¹⁷ O'Brien, R., and Herman, A, 2023. The President Can't Counter China on His Own/ Congress Must Commit to America's Bipartisan China Strategy. *Foreign Affairs*,
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/president-biden-counter-china-congress-american-bipartisan>

¹⁸ By the term Asian tigers we refer to four countries in Southeast Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) that, thanks to the liberal economic policy and mainly to the very successful export policy they implemented, achieved an amazing rate of growth since the '60s.

diplomatic relations, the issue of Taiwan has always been a source of tension in their relations, especially in terms of the continuation of arms sales. In this matter, the U.S. has an ambiguous policy. On the one hand, it seeks peace and broad cooperation in the Pacific, and on the other hand, it wants to maintain a deterrence dynamic with Taiwan.” A reduced U.S. commitment to Taiwan could help transform the basic structure of cross-Strait relations from a deterrence dynamic to a compellence dynamic” (Chen, P.K., Kastner, S.L. and Reed, W.L., 2014: p.222). During this time, the People’s Republic of China became a significant economic power and global actor. The U.S.’s continued sale of arms to Taiwan could lead to conflict because the integration of Taiwan is an essential issue for the People’s Republic of China¹⁹. It is a fact that both the U.S. and Taiwan will have to adapt to the new geopolitical balances that are being formed²⁰.

A series of events reinforces the view that a war of nerves is taking place that could escalate into a major crisis if restraint is not exercised on all sides. The raging War in Ukraine and the tension constantly fueled by aggressive actions on both sides create conditions for igniting conflicts in other countries close to China and Russia.

First, there is the shooting down on February 6, 2023, of a Chinese observation balloon. The balloon flew from Alaska to Canada and the USA until the U.S. Air Force shot it down in South Carolina. U.S. fighter jets have since shot down three mysterious flying objects, one over Alaska in the northwestern U.S., another over the Yukon in northwest Canada, and a third over Lake Huron in the northern U.S.²¹

On March 14, 2023, a new naval agreement was signed within the framework of AUKUS to provide Australia with at least three missile-powered submarines from the U.S. and the creation of a US-U.N. Kingdom & Australia of a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines that will use state-of-the-art technology and have Rolls-Royce engines built in the United Kingdom²².

On May 25, a Chinese digital attack against critical telecommunications infrastructure in Guam was reported. Guam, with Andersen Air Force Base and Apra Harbor, is the most advanced U.S. outpost in the Pacific, and it is no coincidence that a message was given to the U.S. and its allies in this way.²³

Japan, worried about the possible effects of China’s invasion of Taiwan²⁴, is pushing for the upgrading of the partnership with the other allies, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, J.J., 2014. Say goodbye to Taiwan. *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/say-goodbye-taiwan-9931>

²⁰ Freeman, C., W. Jr. “Beijing, Washington and the Shifting Balance of Prestige”, speech delivered at China Maritime Institute, Newport, RI, May, 10, 2011, <http://chasfreeman.net/576>

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/04/us/politics/chinese-spy-balloon-shot-down.html>

²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-64945819>

²³ <https://asiatimes.com/2023/04/time-for-a-us-japan-taiwan-security-pact/>

²⁴ https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IssuesandInsights_VOL23_SR2.pdf

and the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. The U.S. must develop a collective resilience strategy with its allies to do this. Taiwan and Japan have good relations and are interested in a cooperation agreement between the U.S., Japan, and Taiwan. Also, in the context of AUKUS, some people think Japan could help in high-tech areas such as hyper sonics or cybersecurity²⁵.

CAN TAIWAN REMAIN INDEPENDENT?

In today's situation, while Europe and the whole world are watching the development of Russia's confrontation with Ukraine, the possibility of a conflict over Taiwan is causing concern. Besides the geographical differences, there are some other essential similarities and differences between Ukraine and Taiwan. The most basic similarity is that both seek their independence by all means, and the most fundamental difference is that the U.S. strongly supports the independence of Ukraine while supporting the principle of "One China."²⁶ If the U.S. wants to deal with the "economic predation of China,"²⁷ it should do more to protect small countries from Chinese aggression (Cha, V,2023: p.91).

There are, of course, differing views on American aid to Taiwan. Glaser²⁸ believes that not selling arms to Taiwan would positively build trust and reduce strategic competition. However, the opinion prevails that in this way, on the one hand, they would leave the road open to China's revisionism, and the dynamic of deterrence would be in danger of becoming a dynamic of compellence²⁹. On the other hand, they would send the wrong message to their Pacific allies, especially Japan. The loss of Taiwan will affect not only the U.S. economy but "could trigger an economic recession in America and across the world" (Santoro, D, & Cossa, R,2023,p:10). In any case, Taiwan's claim is not just a show of prestige but a matter of substance. Rightfully Taiwan has become the apple of discord between the U.S. and China

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²⁵ https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IssuesandInsights_VOL23_SR2.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/world/europe/china-russia-taiwan-ukraine-analysis.html>

²⁷ https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/nyt-pos-sendeontai-oi-kriseis-se-taiwan-kai-oekrania-se-apostase-8000-chlm_gr_62eaa4d8e4b09fecea4a5088

²⁸ Glaser, L., "A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (2015): 49-90. See also Charles L. Glaser, "Will China's Rise Lead to War? Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2011): 80-91.

²⁹ Chen, P.K., Kastner, S.L. and Reed, W.L., 2017. A farewell to arms? US security relations with Taiwan and the prospects for stability in the Taiwan Strait. *Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace*, pp.221-238.

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