

THE TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, TAIWAN, AND CHINA AT THE START OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Alison Cordeiro Sousa

The Republic of China (ROC), commonly referred to as Taiwan, is an island located approximately 200 kilometers from the People's Republic of China (PRC). It operates with an independent government and is officially recognized as a sovereign state by 15 nations, as reported by G1 (2021). This recognition complicates formal diplomatic relations between the PRC and those nations that acknowledge Taiwan, including Paraguay, Honduras, and Guatemala. Despite the United States withdrawing from the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty in 1980, Washington has continued to supply arms to Taiwan, warning Beijing that any military aggression against the island would provoke a U.S. response.

In 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao enacted the Anti-Secession Law, which allows for non-peaceful measures against Taiwan if it seeks formal independence from the mainland, as noted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2005). This legislative framework has exacerbated tensions in the triangular relationship between the U.S., Taiwan, and China over time.

To fully grasp the current state of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations, it is crucial to examine the historical context, identifying when, how, and why these connections were established, as well as their long-term effects on the international system.

The complex relationship between the U.S., China, and Taiwan spans more than five decades. On October 25, 1971, the United Nations General Assembly, with the U.S. as a permanent member, officially recognized the communist government of Mao Zedong as the legitimate representative of China, as discussed by Buzan and Wæver (2003). This recognition followed the Korean War and was influenced by U.S. concerns over the spread of communism in Asia and China's split with the Soviet Union, highlighted by FACAMP (2015). During the Cold War détente period, both the U.S. and China aligned their international political interests to counter a "common enemy," as explained by Saraiva (2008).

Following the Sino-Soviet split, Beijing found itself diplomatically isolated. In July 1971, Henry Kissinger made a secret trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and by November of the same year, China had secured a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (Saraiva, 2008). On February 21, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed the Shanghai Communiqué, which established that both the U.S. and China would collaborate against any country seeking hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, the communiqué recognized the PRC as the representative of all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait (Saraiva, 2008).

Formal diplomatic relations were established on January 1, 1979, and as previously noted, the U.S. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act on April 10 of the same year, allowing for official but not diplomatic relations. Since January 1, 1980, after the Sino-American Treaty, the U.S. has continued to sell military equipment to the Republic of China (ROC) (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The PRC regards Taiwan as a rebellious province that remains part of its territory (Ivanov, 2022). Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and China's tacit support of the Russian offensive, there has been increased speculation within the international community about Beijing's intentions regarding Taiwan (Yeung, Gan & Jiang, 2022). For instance, China's abstention during the UN Security Council vote on a resolution condemning Russia has fueled these concerns (Tadeu, 2022). This raises questions about how the global community would respond if China were to launch an assault on Taiwan.

While the White House quickly downplayed President Biden's remarks about not sending troops in the event of a Chinese attempt to retake Taiwan (Costa, 2022), Yeung, Gan, and Jiang (2022) argue that no other nation is as deeply entangled in the dispute as the United States. The U.S. has a complicated history with both sides and has long walked a delicate diplomatic tightrope. This growing tension between the countries has only intensified over time.

Other aspects include the Republic of China's (ROC) investments in state-of-the-art submarine fleets to further enhance its security and defense capabilities in the region. The construction of nearly 10 new submarines began in the port city of Kaohsiung, with sea trials expected by 2025 (Lendon, 2020). Since 2019, Taiwan has acquired approximately \$15 billion worth of military equipment from the U.S. (Harris, 2022),

including dozens of F-16 fighter jets, M1A2T tanks, and portable Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.

On May 30, 2022, China conducted military exercises involving 30 aircraft, including 22 fighter jets, in Taiwan's airspace. The following day, the U.S. announced a cooperation plan between the American National Guard and Taiwan's military forces (G1, 2022). China claims sovereignty over the island, asserting that Taiwan is part of its territory. Conversely, Taiwan accuses Beijing of deliberately conducting tests within its airspace. President Joe Biden has maintained a firm stance, stating that in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the U.S. is prepared to respond militarily, as noted by Liptak and Judd (2022). This statement was made alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in the Tokyo metropolitan area on May 23, 2022.

It is evident that relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of China (ROC), and the U.S. are becoming increasingly strained in the international system. On one hand, China views Taiwan as part of its territory. On the other, a survey conducted by Statista (2022) reveals that over 60% of the Taiwanese population across various age groups (20-29, 30-39, and 40+) prefer to maintain the status quo, not considering themselves part of China. Meanwhile, under Joe Biden's administration, the U.S. asserts that any attack on Taiwan involving force will prompt direct military intervention.

Lastly, with China increasing its military expenditure by 7.1% (Tian, 2022), surpassing its GDP target, the country may be preparing for both defensive and offensive military actions against the so-called 'rebel province' (Taiwan). While it remains uncertain whether conflict or war will break out in the short or long term, tensions between China, the U.S., and Taiwan have been escalating over the past five decades.

REFERENCES

Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security* (pp. 144-182). Available at: <https://ir101.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Buzan-Waever-2003-Regions-and-Powers-The-Structure-of-International-Security.pdf>. Accessed May 31, 2022.

Copper, J. C. (2022, May 29). *Taiwan*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan/Economy>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Costa, C. (2022, May). *Casa Branca corrige fala de Biden sobre intervenção militar em Taiwan*. Available at: <https://revistaoeste.com/mundo/casa-branca-corrige-fala-de-biden-sobre-intervencao-militar-em-taiwan/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Facamp. (2015). *Crise conjunta – Conflito Sino-Soviético, 1969*. Available at: https://famun.com.br/2015/es/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/FAMUN-2015_ES_Crise-Sino-Sov.pdf. Accessed May 31, 2022.

G1. (2021, October 27). *China reage aos EUA e diz que Taiwan não tem direito de ingressar na ONU*. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2021/10/27/china-reage-aos-eua-e-diz-que-taiwan-nao-tem-direito-de-ingressar-na-onu.ghtml>. Accessed May 31, 2022.

G1. (2022, May 31). *China faz exercícios militares em espaço aéreo de Taiwan*. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2022/05/31/china-faz-exercicios-militares-em-espaco-aereo-de-taiwan.ghtml>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Harris, B. (2022, April 14). *Document reveals \$14 billion backlog of US defense transfers to Taiwan*. Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/04/14/pandemic-delays-spark-14-billion-backlog-of-us-defense-transfers-to-taiwan/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2022). *Real GDP growth*. Available at: https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/TWN/ADVEC. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Ivanov, V. (2022, April 19). *Rebel island: Is China once again ready to resolve the "Taiwan question" by force?*. Moscow. Available at:

[post.com/in/world/rebel-island-is-china-once-again-ready-to-resolve-the-taiwan-question-by-force33241/](https://www.post.com/in/world/rebel-island-is-china-once-again-ready-to-resolve-the-taiwan-question-by-force33241/). Accessed June 1, 2022.

Lendon, B. (2020, December 20). *Taiwan investe em submarinos de última geração para afastar ameaça chinesa*. Available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/taiwan-investe-em-submarinos-de-ultima-geracao-para-afastar-ameaca-chinesa/>. Accessed May 27, 2022.

Liptak, K., & Judd, D. (2022, May 23). *Biden diz estar disposto a "responder militarmente" se a China invadir Taiwan*. Available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/biden-diz-estar-disposto-a-responder-militarmente-se-a-china-invadir-taiwan/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2005, March 15). *Anti-Secession Law (Full text)(03/15/05)*. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceus/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2022.

Santos, L. G. T. D., & Silva, B. D. S. (2019). *A importância simbólica e estratégica de Taiwan na geopolítica do Leste da Ásia* (pp. 5-6). Available at: <https://reer.emnuvens.com.br/reer/article/download/345/162>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Saraiva, J. F. S. (2008). *História das relações internacionais contemporâneas: da sociedade internacional do século XIX à era da globalização* (2nd ed., pp. 231-251). São Paulo: Saraiva. Available at: <https://acervo.enap.gov.br/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=51512>. Accessed May 28, 2022.

Statista. (2022, January 25). *Opinion on cross-strait relations in Taiwan as of January 2018, by age group*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/874679/opinion-on-cross-strait-relations-in-taiwan-by-age-group/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Statista. (2022, May 19). *Total military aircraft strength in the Asia-Pacific region in 2022, by country or territory*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/934070/asia-pacific-military-aircraft-strength-by-country/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Tadeu, V. (2022, February 25). *Brasil e 10 países votam por resolução crítica à Rússia na ONU; China se abstém*. Available at:

<https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/brasil-e-10-paises-votam-por-resolucao-critica-a-russia-na-onu-china-se-abstem/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Tian, Y. L. (2022, March 5). *China plans 7.1% defence spending rise this year, outpacing GDP target*. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/china-defence-spending-rise-outpace-gdp-target-this-year-2022-03-05/>. Accessed June 1, 2022.

Yeung, J., Gan, N., & Jiang, S. (2022, May 25). *What you need to know about China-Taiwan tensions*. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/24/china/china-taiwan-conflict-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html>. Accessed June 1, 2022.