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THE TAIWAN PROBLEM IN CHINA-USA RELATIONS

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Abstract

The China - Taiwan conflict is one of the most relevant and sensitive topics in China-US relations. Territorial conflict with Taiwan is one of the few issues that can potentially lead to escalation of tension between the United States and China. This article analyzes the China - Taiwan conflict in contemporary Chinese and American foreign policy. The historical conflicts between China and Taiwan from World War II to the present day are examined, showing the role of the United States in escalating the issue. The evolution of Sino-American relations in Northeast Asia in the 21st century and its impact on Taiwan is also explored.

Keywords Taiwan, China, US, international relations, diplomacy, sovereignty, cross-strait relations, geopolitical tensions, One China policy, regional security.

INTRODUCTION

The Taiwan issue in China-US relations remains an important and persistent issue with far-reaching implications for regional stability, international diplomacy and global security. As one of the most contentious aspects of their bilateral relationship, Taiwan's status has long been a source of tension in relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States. Taiwan's strategic importance is underscored by its geopolitical location in the Asia-Pacific region and its historical ties to both powers.

Understanding the relevance of the Taiwan issue against the background of evolving power dynamics and changing alliances is important in contemporary international relations. The United States' long-standing responsibility for Taiwan's security and democracy under the Taiwan Relations Act and China's firm assertion of its sovereignty over the island highlight competing interests in the political arena.

The Taiwan issue is linked to broader geopolitical trends such as China's rise as a global power, US-

China strategic competition, and regional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Political, economic, and security considerations surrounding Taiwan territory add complexity to China-US relations, shape the strategic interests of both countries, and affect their global interactions.

This article explores the multifaceted aspects of the Taiwan issue in China-US relations, its historical roots, contemporary relevance, and implications for regional stability and world order.

METHODS

This article applies a qualitative research method to examine the Taiwan issue in China-US relations. The research is based on a variety of sources, including official government documents, scholarly books and articles on the Taiwan issue in China-US relations, news articles, and authoritative media reports. It comprehensively analyzes the Taiwan problem in China-US relations, combining qualitative and historical methods.

DISCUSSION

In 1949, Mao Zedong's Communists seized power in Beijing after defeating Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalists in a civil war.[1] The government led by the KMT cut ties with China and retreated to the island of Taiwan. In 1950, Taiwan became an ally of the United States, which was waging a war with China in Korea. [2] The United States has deployed a fleet in the Taiwan Strait to protect its ally from a possible attack from Chinese territory. In 1954-1955, the first crisis broke out in the Taiwan Strait.[3] Beijing launched artillery attacks on Taiwanese-controlled islands off China's southeast coast. Taipei lost control of some islands and moved the remaining forces and population to Taiwan. In 1958, the second Taiwan Strait crisis occurred. [4] Beijing launched a number of artillery attacks on the Taiwanese-controlled islands of Kinmen and Matsu, close to Chinese territory. Taipei countered these attacks with weapons supplied by the US. China couldn't assert its sovereignty over any island controlled by Taiwan. These crises highlighted the instability of the situation and the possibility of armed conflicts in the region. Despite these tensions, the United States remains committed to Taiwan's defense, as evidenced by the deployment of naval forces in the Taiwan Strait. In 1979, the United States adopted the "One China Policy" and changed diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing.[5] Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping proposed "one country, two systems" and "peaceful reunification" as possible alternatives to taking Taiwan by force. In 1979, the US passed the Taiwan Relations Act [6], in which the US decision to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing was based on the peaceful determination of the future of the Taiwan issue, forcing Washington to help provide Taiwan with means of self-defense. In 1982, US President Ronald Reagan promised to not change the Six Assurances to Taiwan, including the Taiwan Relations Act.[7] In the 1990s and early 2000s, cross-Strait relations fluctuated between periods of tension and decline, influenced by domestic political changes in Taiwan and China's changing stance on reunification. In 1995, President of Taiwan Lee Teng Hui visited the US for a reunion at Cornell University, which drew criticism from Beijing and led to increase in tensions.[8] In 1996,

the third Taiwan Strait crisis occurred when Taiwan held its first direct presidential election.[9] In response, Beijing launched missiles at sea areas near Taiwan; Washington sent planes to the region. President of Taiwan Lee Teng-hui won by a landslide in March. In 2000, Chen Shui-bian was elected as the president of Taiwan. For the first time the Democratic Development Party (DPP), which supported Taiwanese sovereignty and official independence, came to power.[10] In March 2005, Beijing passed an anti-secession bill outlawing Taiwan's secession. [11] In April, the leaders of Taiwan's main opposition KMT and the Chinese Communist Party met for the first time since 1949. President Ma Ying-jeou came to power in May 2008, supported by the KMT, which favors closer ties with China [12] and put aside political disputes with China to discuss deals ranging from tourism to commercial flights. The signing of various agreements, including the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), signaled the improvement of cross-strait relations and a pragmatic approach to resolving disputes peacefully. 2016 Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Development Party wins the presidential race in January under a political platform to oppose China, in June China cuts all official ties with Taiwan.[13] In December 2016, US President Donald Trump broke decades of US diplomatic precedent by having a direct telephone conversation with President Tsai Ing-wen. [14] In 2017, the Trump administration approved a \$1.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan, angering Beijing. In March 2018, Trump sent high-ranking US officials to Taiwan to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts and signed legislation that further angered China. In September 2018, the US State Department approved the sale of up to \$330 million in spare parts for F-16 fighter jets and other military aircraft to Taiwan, which China warned could jeopardize cooperation between Beijing and Washington. In a two-hour conversation between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in July 2022, Biden stressed that "the policy of the United States has not changed and the United States strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait." . [15]

United States politician Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan as the speaker of the US House of Representatives on August 2, 2022. A delegation of five House Democrats accompanied Pelosi on the visit. The two-day trip to Taiwan was part of an Asia tour that included stops in Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. President Joe Biden tried to talk her out of it, but didn't stop Pelosi from leaving; the White House later approved his right to visit the island nation. Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu hosted Pelosi and her delegation. Shortly after her arrival, Pelosi said her visit was a sign of the United States' "commitment to supporting Taiwan's democracy." Pelosi's trip included a visit to the Legislative Yuan and a meeting with President Tsai Ing-wen before departing for South Korea. The visit was condemned by the People's Republic of China, which sent warnings to the US government through diplomatic channels. After Pelosi's departure, the PRC began military exercises surrounding Taiwan, which lasted from August 4 to August 7, 2022. Additional "regular" exercises were announced in the Yellow and Bohai Seas until August 15 and September 8, respectively, but ended on August 10.[16]

Taiwan's ruling party candidate Lai Ching-Te, also known as William, won the presidential election on January 13, 2024. Democratic Progressive Party candidate William Lai Ching-Te faced off against two rivals, Hou of the KMT and former Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je, a member of the junior Taiwan People's Party. He is known for his staunch anti-China and pro-democracy stance. The Democratic Development Party, led by Lai, has consistently supported Taiwan's independent identity and has openly rejected China's territorial claims.[17] But he has insisted during the election campaign that he has no intention of declaring independence. In addition, he said, Taiwan does not need to formally secede from China because it is already sovereign under its official name, the Republic of China. During the election, Lai pledged to work closely with America to strengthen Taiwan's defense forces. This comes as China's military crackdown on the island nation escalates. Lai Ching-Te served as Taiwan's vice president from 2020 until winning the last presidential election. In 2017, he stated

that he is a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence" and is in favor of strengthening ties not only with America, but also with other liberal democracies. However, over time, Lai moved away from his hardline stance on China. Still, Lai represents separatism and is seen as a threat to China's relationship with Taiwan. Beijing has repeatedly called him a "dangerous separatist".

Beijing, which has expressed concern that Lai's election could lead to hostilities, faces a setback if the Democratic Development Party wins a record third consecutive term in power. US President Joe Biden has promised to defend Taiwan against any invasion. China, on the other hand, sees Taiwan as a breakaway province that it will one day take back.

RESULTS

Taiwan is strategically located in the western Pacific Ocean, bordering China, Japan and the Philippines. Its location provides a gateway to Southeast Asia and the South China Sea, important for global trade and security. Taiwan's proximity to mainland China makes it an important factor in military planning for China and other regional powers. Control over Taiwan would increase China's ability to project its power into the western Pacific and threaten key US allies such as Japan and South Korea. Taiwan is a major economic player in the global market, particularly in the semiconductor and electronics industries.[18] Its economy is closely linked to regional and global supply, making it strategically important for regional stability and economic security. Taiwan produces more than 60% of the world's semiconductors and more than 90% of its state-of-the-art.[19]

The Taiwan issue is a long-standing and multifaceted aspect of Sino-US relations, encompassing historical, political, economic and strategic aspects. Its importance goes beyond bilateral relations, influencing regional stability and global geopolitics.

For China, Taiwan is an integral part of its territory, and any challenge to its sovereignty over Taiwan is seen as a threat to its national unity and territorial integrity. The United States, while officially recognizing the "One China" policy, maintains close

ties with Taiwan and supports its democracy and self-defense capabilities, reflecting its commitment to maintaining Taiwan's autonomy and security.

Control over Taiwan is of strategic importance to China and the United States. Taiwan's location in the Taiwan Strait allows it to control important sea lanes and military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. The US sees Taiwan as a crucial ally, a cornerstone of its Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at counterbalancing China's influence and maintaining stability in the region.

The Taiwan issue has deep political symbolism for China and the United States. China sees Taiwan's reunification as a key national interest, signaling its rebirth and rise as a global power. Rather, the United States sees its support for Taiwan as a demonstration of its commitment to democracy, human rights, and freedoms in the face of authoritarian expansionism (a focus on expanding the economy and government) that aligns with its broader foreign policy goals.

Both China and the US use the Taiwan issue to exert diplomatic pressure and influence on each other and other countries in the region. China often uses the threat of diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions to dissuade countries from supporting Taiwan, while the US uses diplomatic support and security guarantees to strengthen Taiwan's international standing and autonomy.

The Taiwan issue justifies the buildup and strategic deployment of military forces by China and the United States, which increases their respective military capabilities and deters potential adversaries. Military drill of force in the Taiwan Strait is a sign of determination and readiness, signaling a commitment to each other and regional actors to protect their interests in the region.

Taiwan's economic importance creates opportunities for China and the United States. Taiwan serves as an important trading partner and investment destination, contributing to economic growth and prosperity in the region. Economic cooperation with Taiwan will help China and the United States to take advantage of Taiwan's advanced technology sector and innovation capabilities, mutually beneficial partnership and

economic development.

Tensions over the Taiwan issue pose inherent risks that could lead to a military confrontation or conflict between China and the US. Provocative actions by both sides or misrepresentation of their interests can cause a crisis with unpredictable consequences, destabilize the region and undermine global security.

Increased tensions over Taiwan could destabilize the wider Asia-Pacific region, disrupting trade, investment and regional cooperation. Uncertainty over Taiwan's status creates volatility in financial markets and supply chains, affecting global economic stability and growth.

The Taiwan issue contributes to geopolitical polarization, intensifying the competition and struggle between China and the United States. This polarization hinders efforts to address common global challenges such as climate change, pandemics and economic development as countries align across opposing geopolitical blocs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Taiwan issue remains an important and complex factor in shaping Sino-US relations, with far-reaching implications for regional stability and global geopolitics. As China and the US develop their relationship with Taiwan, negotiation, diplomacy and peaceful resolution of disputes are priorities for both sides. Constructive cooperation, mutual respect and adherence to international norms and principles are essential in building trust among all stakeholders.

China should give priority to diplomatic dialogue with Taiwan in order to explore ways to resolve the Taiwan issue peacefully, refrain from provocative actions or rhetoric that may increase tension in the Taiwan Strait, and demonstrate its commitment to peaceful coexistence. Closer economic ties with Taiwan provide economic incentives to promote integration and mutual benefit, promote stability and cooperation, respect Taiwan's autonomy, and refrain from coercive tactics while recognizing Taiwan's right to self-determination.

The United States should maintain strategic uncertainty regarding Taiwan's defense commitment, prevent aggression and avoid

unnecessary provocation, strengthen diplomatic ties with Taiwan, and expand the international space for Taiwan, which refers to its security and support for its government. In order to improve relations, it should promote cultural, educational and civil society exchanges between Taiwan and China, promote multilateral cooperation involving regional stakeholders and international organizations on the Taiwan issue, and seek inclusive and cooperative approaches to solving the issue.

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