



Taiwan Strait Tensions Between China, Taiwan, and the US (2022) By Marjorie Hansen and Tristan Quist



Source: <https://www.islamtimes.org/en/news/283554/taiwan-simulates-2017-invasion-by-china>

Tensions over the **AUTONOMY** (self-governance) of the island of Taiwan is a growing area of concern in **US FOREIGN** policy. As the **PRC** or **PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA's** influence and power grows, the **US** government is shifting more focus toward the Pacific. Tensions are rising with China who is our near-peer **COMPETITOR** in the region. The **US** is concerned about the **TAIWAN STRAIT** because that area is the most likely to cause a war between the United States and China.¹ The Taiwan or **FORMOSA** (meaning beautiful) Strait is a 112 mile (180km) wide strait separating China from the island of Taiwan. A strait is a narrow water passage connecting two larger bodies of water, usually two seas.

¹ Brendan Scott, "Analysis | Why Taiwan Is the Biggest Risk for a US-China Clash," *Washington Post*, accessed December 20, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-taiwan-is-the-biggest-risk-for-a-us-china-clash/2021/10/06/8efdbdf2-268b-11ec-8739-5cb6aba30a30_story.html.

Spell: TAIWAN COMPETITOR STRAIT
The PRC stands for what? PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
The word used for self-governance was ____. AUTONOMY
What word means beautiful? FORMOSA
Tensions are rising with China who is our near-peer _____ in Asia.
COMPETITOR

What area did I say is most likely to cause a war between China and the US? TAIWAN STRAIT, FORMOSA STRAIT

What does a strait connect? TWO LARGER BODIES OF WATER, TWO SEAS

How wide is the Taiwan Strait? 112 MILES (180 KM)

What is the capital of Taiwan? TAIPEI CITY

Why are China and Taiwan fighting over who's in charge of the government of Taiwan? Well, that conflict originated from the CHINESE Civil War (1945-1949) when the NATIONALISTS and COMMUNISTS fought for control of China. In the face of a Communist victory, Nationalist forces fled to the island of Taiwan. That explains why Taiwan, aka the REPUBLIC OF CHINA (or ROC) continues to formally maintain, according to its 1991 constitution, that it is the rightful government to all of China.² But although that is the formal policy, most ROC citizens identify as Taiwanese, not as Chinese.³ And no one seriously expects Taiwan to attempt to invade China regardless of its official policy. It is far more likely for mainland China to invade Taiwan.

Spell: CHINESE GOVERNMENT POLICY
What is Taiwan's official name? THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA
What group fought for control of China? NATIONALISTS, COMMUNISTS
Or Who fled to Taiwan? NATIONALIST FORCES
Tell me something from this paragraph about the Taiwan Chinese conflict.
CHINA IS FIGHTING TO BE IN CHARGE OF IT, POPULATED BY

² "Constitution of the Republic of China" (1947), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=A0000001>. "Constitution of the Republic of China" (1947), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=A0000001>.

³ Fang-Yu Chen et al., "The Taiwanese See Themselves as Taiwanese, Not as Chinese - The Washington Post," *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/01/02/yes-taiwan-wants-one-china-but-which-china-does-it-want/>.

NATIONALISTS, CITIZENS IDENTIFY AS TAIWANESE, MIGHT BE
INVADED BY CHINA

What document formally maintains that the ROC is the rightful government
of all China? 1991 CONSTITUTION

How many years did the Chinese Civil War last? (equation) $1949-1945=4$
YEARS

What is the capital of the PRC? BEIJING

Why do you think Taiwan still maintained as late as 1991 that it was the
rightful government of China?

After the civil war ended, tensions between the two countries almost immediately surfaced. Since 1949, there have been three near-war crises over the Taiwan Straits. In 1955, China and Taiwan SCUFFLED over the DACHEN Islands off the coast of mainland China. These minor islands were controlled by Taiwan. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis resulted in China successfully gaining control over the Islands. Following nuclear threats from the United States, the China agreed to NEGOTIATE an end to the immediate fighting. In 1958, during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, China attempted an AMPHIBIOUS (relating to both land and water) landing on Taiwan's outlying island of DONGDING, which was repelled by the Taiwanese. China fired shells (explosive projectiles) from large guns at the Taiwanese island of KINMEN and Taiwan counter-shelled. The United States intervened by providing advanced weapons to Taiwanese forces and using US Navy ships to protect supply convoys from Taiwan to Kinmen. The crisis ended in a STALEMATE (draw, impasse) between Taiwan and China in which each side would alternate artillery shelling every other day. This lasted until 1979 when the United States changed its diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China.

Spell: STALEMATE NEGOTIATE SCUFFLED

During the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis China attempted what kind of
landing? AMPHIBIOUS

China attempted to land on what island? DONGDING

China fired shells at what Taiwanese island? KINMEN

In 1955, the PRC and the ROC scuffled over what? MINOR ISLANDS,
DACHEN ISLANDS

How did the US intervene in the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis? PROVIDED ADVANCED WEAPONS TO TAIWAN, US NAVY SHIPS PROTECTED SUPPLY CONVOYS

I defined stalemate as _____. DRAW, IMPASSE

What is a common synonym for scuffle? FIGHT, STRUGGLE, TUSSLE, BRAWL, GRAPPLE, CLASH, SCRIMMAGE, SCRAP, EXCHANGE (COME TO) BLOWS

What year did the first Taiwan Strait Crisis occur? 1955

What do you think was the purpose of China and Taiwan shelling each other every other day?

But the United States' decision in 1979 to switch its official recognition of "China" from the Republic of China (or Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China (or China) had perhaps the biggest impact on the current heated state of affairs between China and Taiwan. Recognition of the PRC was finalized under US President JIMMY CARTER, although RAPPROCHEMENT (or reconciliation) had been occurring between the United States and PRC previously, most notably with President Richard NIXON's visit to the mainland in 1972. The thaw in relations between the US and PRC was a reaction to US competition with the Soviet Union.

Spell: THAW AFFAIRS COMPETITION

What president finalized the change in recognition? (full name) JIMMY CARTER

The word I defined as reconciliation was what? RAPPROCHEMENT

The US switched its official recognition of China from Taiwan to the _____. PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, PRC

A notable example of the rapprochement was when _____. RICHARD NIXON VISITED MAINLAND CHINA

What year did Nixon visit the mainland? 1972

What important American event occurred on August 8, 1974? NIXON ANNOUNCED HE WAS RESIGNING

VAKTivity: Richard Nixon speech on China (1.12 min.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj83G0Vbotw>

What's your opinion of Nixon's speech?

In 1979, the United States was in the middle of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The Cold War was a ZERO-SUM COMPETITION. A zero-sum competition is one in which one participant wins totally and the other

loses totally. The DYNAMICS of the Cold War gave the United States a strong INCENTIVE to become more friendly with China because doing so divided the two largest communist states. Unlike today, China was a much weaker power than its northern neighbor and the US did not view it as a major threat. Together the United States and China were able to better balance against the Soviet Union in Asia. The desire to improve its relationship with mainland China is why the US switched official recognition of “China” from Taiwan to the People’s Republic of China.

Spell: THREAT DYNAMICS INCENTIVE

In 1979, the United States was in the middle of the what with the Soviet Union. COLD WAR

The Cold War was what kind of competition? ZERO-SUM

How did America view China in 1979? WEAKER POWER THAN USSR, NOT A MAJOR THREAT, POTENTIAL ALLY

Why did America switch official recognition to the PRC? A DESIRE TO IMPROVE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MAINLAND CHINA, TO BETTER BALANCE THE SOVIET UNION IN ASIA

What does the USSR stand for? UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

What is your opinion of the switch in official recognition within the context of the Cold War and the fear of Communism of the 1970s?

However, President Jimmy Carter faced strong political pushback for terminating the US defense treaty with Taiwan and recognizing the PRC. The move even sparked a Supreme Court case in which Senator Barry GOLDWATER challenged Carter’s ability to UNILATERALLY (something done by only one person or group) withdraw from a treaty.⁴ That same year, Congress reacted to Carter’s recognition of China by passing the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) with supermajorities in both houses. The TRA further muddled the US relationship with Taiwan. Using open-ended wording the Act emphasized continued US “commercial, cultural, and other relations” between the United States and Taiwan.⁵ It also established the American Institute in Taiwan, a non-profit organization through which the US Government could conduct relations with Taiwan. Facing a veto-proof vote

⁴ “Goldwater v. Carter,” Oyez, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1979/79-856>.

⁵ “Taiwan Relations Act” (1979), <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

and immense pressure to reinforce the US relationship with Taiwan, President Carter had little choice but to sign the Act into law despite the AMBIGUITIES (uncertainties) it created.

Spell: AMBIGUITIES UNILATERALLY PUSHBACK

Something done by only one person or group is defined as ____.

UNILATERALLY

Who challenged Carter's withdrawal from the treaty? (full name) BARRY GOLDWATER

TRA is an abbreviation for ____. TAIWAN RELATIONS ACT

President Carter faced strong pushback for what? RECOGNIZING THE PRC, TERMINATING THE US DEFENSE TREATY WITH TAIWAN

The TRA emphasized what kind of relations? COMMERCIAL, CULTURAL, OTHER

Why did President Carter sign the TRA? NO CHOICE, VETO-PROOF VOTE, IMMENSE PRESSURE

What was the name of Jimmy Carter's VP? WALTER MONDALE

Why does China value being officially recognized by the US?

This switch in official recognition marked the beginning of the mutual ambiguities complicating tensions today. As part of US-PRC NORMALIZATION not only did the US switch its formal relations to the PRC and recognize Taiwan as part of China, but the PRC also accepted that the United States would maintain independent economic and cultural relations with Taiwan. The US created CONFUSION over what the status quo actually is. This "STRATEGIC ambiguity"⁶ has helped to prevent armed conflict over Taiwan in modern times, but it also increased the risk of MISCALCULATION by China or Taiwan in a way that would not have been the case had the US solely recognized the PRC in 1979 or not switched its recognition at all.

Spell: NORMALIZATION STRATEGIC SWITCH

The US created what over the status quo? CONFUSION

As part of US-PRC Normalization, the US switched ____ to the PRC.

FORMAL RELATIONS

What did China do as part of US-PRC normalization? ACCEPTED THAT THE US WOULD MAINTAIN INDEPENDENT ECONOMIC AND

⁶ S. Philip Hsu, "Reappraising the Debate and Practice of US Strategic Ambiguity/Clarity in Cross-Strait Relations," *The Pacific Review* 23, no. 2 (May 12, 2010): 139–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512741003624468>.

CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

A result of Strategic Ambiguity is ____. PREVENTING ARMED CONFLICT, INCREASED THE RISK OF MISCALCULATION BY CHINA OR TAIWAN

What's your opinion of strategic ambiguity?

The US recognition of the PRC in 1979 eliminated its EXPLICIT commitment to come to the ROC's defense EMBODIED in their mutual defense treaty. Prior to TRA passing in 1979, the US demonstrated twice that it was committed to defending Taiwan despite the lack of any specific ASSURANCES (promises) of coming to Taiwan's aid. However, in the 1980s, China was focused more on the former Soviet Union and improving its relationship with the United States than it was on invading Taiwan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the mutual threat that had brought the United States and China together no longer existed. The absence of the USSR allowed China to pivot to other priorities.

Spell: EXPLICIT

EMBODIED

COLLAPSE

The US demonstrated twice that it was committed to defending Taiwan despite the lack of any specific ____.

ASSURANCES

What year did the USSR collapse? 1991

In the 80s, what was something China focused on? THE FORMER USSR, IMPROVING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US

Why did the collapse of the USSR change China's priorities? MUTUAL THREAT DISAPPEARED, CHINA COULD PIVOT

Who was elected the final president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1991? BORIS YELTSIN

Why was the US so concerned about the USSR?

In 1996, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis erupted when China began conducting missile tests in the Taiwan Strait. This was extremely PROVOCATIVE (incendiary, inflaming), and tensions in the area rose quickly. The US signaled that it was prepared to defend Taiwan by moving its Pacific carrier group, comprised of an aircraft carrier, cruisers, destroyers, jet fighters, and other aircraft, closer to Taiwan as well as moving a second carrier group into the area. The US also increased arms sales to Taiwan.

Spell: TENSIONS

DEFEND

CARRIER

What year did the 3rd Taiwan Strait Crisis occur? 1996

What word means incendiary or inflaming? PROVOCATIVE

What did China do in the Taiwan Strait to cause the third Taiwan Strait Crisis? BEGAN CONDUCTING MISSILE TESTS, MISSILE TESTS

Name a way the US responded in the 3rd Taiwan Strait Crisis. MOVED ITS PACIFIC CARRIER GROUP CLOSER, MOVED IN A SECOND CARRIER GROUP, INCREASED ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN

Name something in the carrier group. AIRCRAFT CARRIER, CRUISERS, DESTROYERS, JET FIGHTERS, OTHER AIRCRAFT

So where do things stand in 2022? Unsurprisingly it's still complicated. Since the 1950s, the United States, China, and Taiwan have successfully avoided a major conflict over the fate of the island of Taiwan. But the absence of a conflict also had costs, namely that Taiwan's autonomy remains UNRESOLVED. That unresolved status has risks, which have increased as China's military capabilities increase and as the economies of all three countries have become more ENMESHED (entangled) with each other and the global system. And China continues to act aggressively toward Taiwan. Recently they flew fighter jets into the island's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ).⁷ And China continues to assert a claim to thrice claimed UNINHABITED islands in South China Sea.

Spell: UNINHABITED

UNRESOLVED

ECONOMIES

The economies of the three countries have become more entangled or ____ with each other? ENMESHED

ADIZ is the abbreviation for what? AIR DEFENSE IDENTIFICATION ZONE

VAKTivity: CHINA JAPAN ISLAND DISPUTE EXPLAINED - BBC NEWS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_3eMzowrjl (37 sec.)

Dispute In the East China Sea Case Study | Model Diplomacy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLM5P9kiobg> (watch 1-2.00)

How would you resolve the conflict over the islands?

⁷ Thomas Shattuck, "Assessing One Year of PLA Air Incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ - Foreign Policy Research Institute," Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 20, 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/10/assessing-one-year-of-pla-air-incursions-into-taiwans-adiz/>.

Official US policy requires the issue of governance over Taiwan to be resolved politically.⁸ This is becoming less and less realistic. It is more likely to be resolved through conflict, or for China to accept Taiwan's independence and Taiwan to CEDE (renounce, give up) its claim to the mainland. The US policy of strategic ambiguity postponed the conflict over Taiwan, but it didn't resolve the issue of Taiwan's SOVEREIGNTY (rule, authority). And the effectiveness of the ambiguity strategy diminishes as China grows more powerful and the threat of US RETALIATION or intervention becomes more acceptable. Today the threats China faces are largely of a DETERRENT nature. Taiwan has altered the calculus of an invasion by increasing the costs to Chinese forces by building up its military forces. While Taiwan's defenses could not alone prevent a Chinese conquest of the island many Chinese forces would be lost in the attack and some of the Chinese mainland would be vulnerable to counterattack by Taiwan's navy and air force. And although it is unclear if the US would actually militarily support Taiwan if it was invaded by China, the possibility of it deters China.

Spell: DIMINISHES INVADED SOVEREIGNTY

Official US policy requires the issue of governance over Taiwan to be resolved what? POLITICALLY

Today the threats China faces are largely of a what nature? DETERRENT
Taiwan altered the calculus of an invasion by building up its _____. MILITARY FORCES

Some of the Chinese mainland would be vulnerable to counterattack by Taiwan's _____. NAVY AND AIR FORCE

But how is governance most likely to be resolved? THROUGH CONFLICT, FOR CHINA TO ACCEPT TAIWAN'S INDEPENDENCE AND BY TAIWAN CEDING ITS CLAIM TO THE MAINLAND

The effectiveness of strategic ambiguity diminishes as the threat of US what becomes more acceptable. RETALIATION, INTERVENTION

The former USSR and the US deterred each other from attacking with nuclear weapons other through a strategy of what? MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION (MAD)

⁸ "US Relations with Taiwan - United States Department of State," August 31, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/>.

Any military conflict over Taiwan between PRC (China) and the ROC would be DEVASTATING. The island of Taiwan is home to 24 million people⁹ and the FUJIAN District of China across the Strait which would be vulnerable to counterstrikes is home to 41 million people.¹⁰ There would also be serious worldwide economic consequences of an invasion since Taiwan provides much of the world's advanced MICROCHIPS. Microchips are made from SEMICONDUCTORS (material with partial electrical conductivity) and are used in electronics, such as computers, cell phones, and microwaves.¹¹ The production of microchips would be IMPAIRED or stopped during a conflict and severely complicated in the long term if China were to successfully invade Taiwan.

Spell: MICROCHIPS COUNTERSTRIKES DEVASTATING

What district in China is vulnerable to counterstrikes? FUJIAN

The Fujian district is home to how many people? 41 MILLION

How many more people live in the Fujian district than in all of Taiwan?
(equation) $41 - 24 = 17$ MILLION

There would be serious worldwide economic consequences of an invasion because Taiwan provides much of the world's advanced what?

MICROCHIPS

Microchips are made from _____. SEMICONDUCTORS

I said that microchips were used in what? ELECTRONICS, COMPUTERS, CELL PHONES, MICROWAVES

If China invades Taiwan how would that affect the production of microchips? IMPAIR IT, STOP IT, SEVERELY COMPLICATE IT LONG TERM

If the United States came to the aid of Taiwan (ROC) a potential war could be even more devastating because 1.) The United States has greater military capability than Taiwan and could strike areas throughout China if it chose to; 2.) The economic consequences are broader with the US involved given the US-China trade relationship's impact on the global economy; and 3.) both the United States and China are NUCLEAR

⁹ "Taiwan Population 2021 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)," accessed December 20, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population>.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Hays, "FUJIAN PROVINCE | Facts and Details," Facts and Details, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://factsanddetails.com/china/cat15/sub96/item467.html>.

¹¹ Yang Jie, Stephanie Yang, and Asa Fitch, "The World Relies on One Chip Maker in Taiwan, Leaving Everyone Vulnerable - WSJ," *Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-world-relies-on-one-chip-maker-in-taiwan-leaving-everyone-vulnerable-11624075400>.

powers.¹² A conflict over Taiwan would also ESCALATE tensions throughout Southeast Asia. It is likely that Japan, the PHILIPPINES, VIETNAM, and other countries would see a PRC invasion of Taiwan as aggressive. In each of the previous three Taiwan Strait crises the US policy of strategic DIPLOMACY, along with the policies of China and Taiwan, have been able to prevent major conflict between the three actors. The policy, unfortunately, has also produced high risks of miscalculation and misperception. Hopefully, Taiwan and China will be able to negotiate a peaceful resolution to their conflict.

Spell: NUCLEAR NEGOTIATE DIPLOMACY

Both the US and China are what kind of powers? NUCLEAR

A conflict over Taiwan would also _____ tensions in Southeast Asia.

ESCALATE

The lesson stated that hopefully Taiwan and China will be able to negotiate a peaceful _____ to their conflict. RESOLUTION

One of the countries mentioned in the lesson that would see a Chinese invasion of Taiwan as aggressive is _____. UNITED STATES, JAPAN, PHILIPPINES, VIETNAM

The US' policy of strategic diplomacy has prevented major conflict but also produced high risks of what? MISCALCULATION, MISPERCEPTION

What is the capital of Japan? TOKYO

The Japanese system of government is a what? CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

How likely do you think it is for China to invade Taiwan and why?

Creative Writing: What is the best outcome of the Taiwan-China conflict in your opinion?

Creative Writing: What do you think the US can do to de-escalate tensions between China and Taiwan?

Post lesson enrichment:

Email link to parents: VAKTivity: Why China is building islands in the South China Sea (7.25 min.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luTPMHc7zHY>

Visit this link: CNN video and article:

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/09/politics/taiwan-invasion-war-game-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

¹² Robert Jervis, "The Theory of the Nuclear Revolution," in *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 1989), 19–22.

This lesson was adapted from a paper and used with permission Quist, Tristen. *Taiwan Strait Tensions*, 2021.

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