

other, and the question of their future relationship left to future generations.

This state of affairs pits American values against American interests. During the Cold War, the US viewed Taiwan as a crucial ally in the fight against Communism. When American policymakers became aware of the deep rift between Beijing and Moscow in the 1960s, they decided to reach out to China as a way of isolating the Soviet Union. In 1979, the US de-recognized Taiwan in order to secure diplomatic relations with the PRC. While the original rationale for closer US-China ties was strategic, China's value to the US has not diminished with the end of the Cold War; instead, the two countries have become deeply economically interdependent. That reality makes American policymakers loath to antagonize Beijing and gives the US strong pressure to minimize its interactions with Taiwan.

Acceding to Beijing's demands regarding Taiwan would ease tensions between the US and the PRC, but American officials are reluctant to do so for reasons of interest and principle.

Strategically, the US benefits from a web of security relationships. Since World War II, alliances around the world have nurtured a relatively peaceful and prosperous international environment and supported US leadership. But, as China's power increases, America's Asian friends and allies are becoming uneasy. They wonder whether Washington is willing and able to protect them against a strong China. Reducing American support for Taiwan—including arms sales—would be read in other capitals (including Tokyo, Seoul, Manila, and Hanoi) as evidence of America's declining resolve and capability.

These strategic concerns probably could be managed, but difficult issues of principle remain. Taiwan is a long-standing American friend; it has

done nothing to cause Washington to abandon the relationship. On the contrary, Taiwan has remade itself into the kind of nation American leaders encourage.

The Taiwan that was close to the US during the Cold War was a single-party authoritarian state with a managed economy, but in the 1980s and '90s, Taiwan transformed itself both politically and economically to become a liberal democracy and free trader. Those changes proved that democratization is possible, including in culturally Chinese societies, without sacrificing prosperity, growth, or social order. For the US to turn its back on Taiwan now would be to repudiate decades of policy and rhetoric committing Washington to promoting democracy.

Substantively, the Taiwan issue is important because it is a primary source of tension between the world's leading powers. It also is an excellent pedagogical vehicle for exploring the tension between interests and values in US foreign policy. ■

SUGGESTED READING

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A Unique Trilateral Relationship *The US, the PRC, and Taiwan since 1949*

By Zhiqun Zhu



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The US was an ally of China—the Republic of China (ROC)—during World War II. After WWII, the Kuomintang (KMT) that ruled the ROC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) engaged in a bloody civil war. With the Communist victory imminent, the KMT government retreated to Taiwan. In October 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established on the mainland.

During and after WWII, the US became disenchanted with the corrupt and inefficient KMT. As the Communist forces swept across the Chinese mainland, it appeared to be just a matter of time before Taiwan would be absorbed, and the US was prepared to abandon Taiwan. The US rediscovered Taiwan's strategic value when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. Soon afterward, the US Seventh Fleet was dispatched to the Taiwan Strait, essentially blocking any PRC attempt to take over Taiwan by force. The US and the ROC also signed a mutual defense treaty in 1954.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the US and the ROC maintained diplomatic ties, although secret talks between the US and the PRC were held intermittently. In a 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article, presidential candidate Richard Nixon argued that "We simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations." In July 1971, Dr. Henry Kissinger, the president's national security advisor, secretly visited Beijing and met with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. The visit paved the way for Nixon's groundbreaking travel to China the following February and the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué based on the One China Policy. In July 1971, the PRC replaced the ROC to become the sole representative of China at the United Nations.

On January 1, 1979, the US and the PRC signed the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations. Meanwhile, the US de-recognized the ROC. The third communiqué, also known as the August 17 Communiqué, was issued between Washington and Beijing in 1982, in which both sides reaffirmed the statements about Taiwan in previous

For the PRC, Taiwan brings back bitter memories of the Century of Humiliation (roughly 1839–1949), when Western powers colonized and dominated China.

communiqués. Although no definitive conclusions were reached on the issue of arms sales to Taiwan, the US declared its intent to gradually decrease them.

In April 1979, US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to regulate US-Taiwan relations in the absence of diplomatic ties. The act stipulates that the US will “consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States.” The three US-PRC joint communiqués and the TRA still guide US policies toward China and Taiwan today.

Great changes have taken place in the US-PRC-Taiwan relations in the past sixty years, especially in the past two decades. While the PRC was plunged into chaos as a result of Mao’s political campaigns and the Cultural Revolution, Taiwan took off economically, becoming one of the four dynamic “little dragons” of East Asia. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek ruled Taiwan with an iron hand. When he died in 1975, his son Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded him. The younger Chiang lifted the martial law and permitted the formation of opposition parties. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which favors formal separation of Taiwan from China, was officially founded in 1986. After achieving the economic miracle, Taiwan moved steadily toward democratization, holding its first direct presidential election in 1996. The PRC launched missile tests to intimidate and

influence Taiwanese voters, creating a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, with the US dispatching two aircraft carrier groups to the region.

When the DPP was in power from 2000 to 2008, it introduced policies to de-Sinicize Taiwan in an attempt to assert Taiwan’s independent and separate status. In defining relations with the PRC, President Chen Shui-bian claimed that Taiwan and China were “one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait,” prompting President George W. Bush to warn Taiwan that it could not unilaterally change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

The KMT returned to power in 2008 with the election of Ma Ying-jeou. Ma was re-elected in 2012. Ma rectified some of the DPP’s provocative policies toward China, and cross-strait relations have greatly improved since 2008. Direct flights between Taiwan and China have become regular, and residents of Taiwan and China can visit each other freely now. Most significantly, the two sides signed a historic preferential trade agreement, the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), in 2010. The two economies have become highly interdependent and mutually beneficial.

Politically, however, the two sides remain far apart. The Taiwanese identity has been on the rise. In the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, the US “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,” which reflected the reality then. Today, the majority in Taiwan consider themselves Taiwanese, not Chinese. Very few people in Taiwan prefer unification with China.

The US position on future Taiwan-China relations has been ambiguous. The US has repeatedly affirmed its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question. From a realist perspective, many believe the US does not wish to see unification between China and Taiwan, which will give added power and influence to Beijing. Since 1979, the US has maintained a robust relationship with Taiwan. Some call US-Taiwan relations “officially unofficial, unofficially official.”

For the PRC, Taiwan brings back bitter memories of the Century of Humiliation (roughly 1839–1949), when Western powers colonized and dominated China. After Meiji Japan defeated the Qing dynasty in the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War, Taiwan became a colony in Japan’s colonial empire from 1895–1945. Taiwan was returned to the ROC when Japan surrendered in 1945. US intervention in the early 1950s perpetuated the separation of Taiwan from China. For the PRC, Taiwan independence is simply not an option. Realizing the vast gap between the two sides, especially in political development, the PRC seems to understand that the time is not ripe for unification. Its current strategy focuses on promoting economic, cultural, and social exchanges to prevent Taiwan from moving further away.

Taiwanese society is highly divided on cross-Taiwan Strait relations. Some argue that the ROC has always been an independent state since its 1911 founding by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. De-recognition by the US and the UN does not change this fact. These people suggest that because it is already independent, there is no need for Taiwan to declare formal independence. Others believe that China and Taiwan are two separate countries. The number of people who believe that China and Taiwan are one country and should be unified is dwindling. Taiwan’s polarized politics and society make future cross-strait relations highly unpredictable.

US arms sales to Taiwan remain a major issue of contention in the US-PRC-Taiwan relationship. The PRC has steadfastly opposed weapons sales to Taiwan, accusing the US of violating the August 17 Communiqué. However, Taiwan needs advanced weapons to defend itself, especially when the PRC’s People’s Liberation Army quickly modernizes. The US considers arms sales to Taiwan an important measure to maintain stability in East Asia as well as a boost to Taiwanese confidence when negotiating with China. In the foreseeable future, there will be no easy solution to the Taiwan issue. The US remains a critical actor that can help maintain peace across the Taiwan Strait. ■



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