

**A questão de Taiwan no contexto das relações Sino-  
Americanas**

**The Taiwan issue in the context of Sino-American relations**

**La cuestión de Taiwán en el contexto de las relaciones sino-  
estadounidenses**

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**Resumo:** O objetivo deste artigo é discutir o papel e a influência dos Estados Unidos no processo histórico iniciado com a fuga de Chiang Kai-Check para a ilha chinesa de Taiwan, após a derrota das forças nacionalistas do Kuomintang na guerra civil que resultou na Proclamação da República Popular da China em 1949. Desde então, Taiwan permanece separada da China, muito em função do apoio militar dos Estados Unidos à ilha. Manter Taiwan separada da China é parte importante da estratégia dos Estados Unidos para manter-se como poder dominante no Leste da Ásia. Para a República Popular da China, recuperar o controle sobre a ilha é um objetivo histórico que visa reunificar o país, que foi retalhado pelas potências imperialistas ocidentais entre segunda metade do século 19 e a primeira metade do século 20. Enquanto Taiwan não retornar ao controle de Pequim, a China permanecerá um país dividido.

**Palavras-chave:** China, Taiwan, Estados Unidos da América.

**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to discuss the role and influence of the United States in the historical process that began with the flight of Chiang Kai-Check to the Chinese

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island of Taiwan, after the defeat of the nationalist Kuomintang forces in the civil war that resulted in the Proclamation of the Republic People's Republic of China in 1949. Since then, Taiwan has remained separate from China, largely due to the United States' military support for the island. Keeping Taiwan separate from China is an important part of the United States' strategy to remain the dominant power in East Asia. For the People's Republic of China, regaining control over the island is a historic objective that aims to reunite the country, which was torn apart by Western imperialist powers in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. As long as Taiwan does not return to control from Beijing, China will remain a divided country.

**Keywords:** China, Taiwan, United States of America.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo es discutir el papel e influencia de Estados Unidos en el proceso histórico que se inició con la huida de Chiang Kai-Chek a la isla china de Taiwán, tras la derrota de las fuerzas nacionalistas del Kuomintang en la guerra civil que resultó en la Proclamación de la República Popular China en 1949. Desde entonces, Taiwán ha permanecido separada de China, en gran parte debido al apoyo militar de Estados Unidos a la isla. Mantener a Taiwán separada de China es una parte importante de la estrategia de Estados Unidos para seguir siendo la potencia dominante en el este de Asia. Para la República Popular China, recuperar el control sobre la isla es un objetivo histórico que pretende reunificar el país, que fue desgarrado por las potencias imperialistas occidentales en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y la primera mitad del XX. Como Taiwán no recupera el control de Beijing, China seguirá siendo un país dividido.

**Palabras clave:** China, Taiwán, Estados Unidos de América.

## Introduction

The relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China have a long history, interspersed with periods of rapprochement and conflict. During World War II, China was an important ally of the United States in the Pacific War and also relied on American support to expel the Japanese invaders who had occupied the country since 1937.

With the victory of the communists at the end of the civil war in 1949 and the Proclamation of the People's Republic of China, the North Americans allied themselves with the defeated forces of Chiang Kai-Shek, who took refuge on the island of Taiwan. Chiang Kai-Shek took to the island, in addition to the top brass of his government, around 500,000 Chinese, including soldiers and civilians.

While the People's Republic of China was being proclaimed in mainland China, Chiang Kai-Chek and his party, the Kuomintang, transferred the seat of government of the Republic of China, created in 1912, to Taiwan and continued to claim representation of China

in international organizations created under the tutelage of the United States at the end of World War II. To this day, travel documents issued by Taiwan bear the inscription “Republic of China”.

Implicit in this attitude was the understanding that there is only one China. While the People's Republic of China claimed for itself the legitimate representation of the Chinese nation, Chiang Kai-shek's supporters claimed for the government defeated in the civil war – the Republic of China – the right to continue to represent the Chinese people internationally in the hope that one day, with the support of the United States, they would defeat the forces under the command of the Chinese Communist Party, return to the mainland and reassume government of the country.

In 1945, at the San Francisco Conference, China, represented by Chiang Kai-Chek and the Kuomintang, was the first country to sign the United Nations Charter, which gave rise to the UN. The Republic of China, led by Chiang Kai-Chek and based in Taiwan, after the defeat in the civil war in 1949, began to represent the Chinese nation both in the UN and in its Security Council.

This situation continued until 1972, when, in a historic vote, the UN understood that Chiang Kai-Chek and his government based in Taiwan did not represent the Chinese people, thus transferring China's representation in that organization to the People's Republic of China, based in Beijing. The Chiang Kai-Chek's representatives were expelled from the organization and Chinese embassies throughout the world began to be run by diplomats sent by Beijing.

This dispute over China's right to representation in international institutions was finally resolved, albeit belatedly, when the UN recognized the People's Republic of China, headquartered in Beijing, as the sole and legitimate representative of the Chinese people. This did not, however, prevent Chiang Kai-Chek's nationalist forces, who had taken refuge in Taiwan, from continuing to claim this right. It was on the basis of this claim that the 1992 Consensus was established in 1992, according to which both sides recognize and accept that there is “One China” even though each side feels entitled to represent it.

In other words, although each side claimed the right to represent the country, both sides agreed that there is only one China, of which both the mainland and the island of Taiwan are part. It is based on this history and this understanding that China is demanding the return of Taiwan to the control of its central government.

This, however, changed when a separatist movement began to emerge in Taiwan that rejected the One China Principle and advocated the thesis of “Two Chinas” or “One China and Taiwan.” The social base of this separatist movement was formed by ethnic Chinese and

their descendants who had already been living in Taiwan before the Kuomintang supporters moved to the island in 1949.

Good afternoon, these Chinese were born and raised in Taiwan during the period when the island was under Japanese rule, starting in 1895, when China was defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War and was forced to hand over Taiwan to the Japanese. After Japan's surrender in World War II in 1945, the island was returned to China. However, this group and their descendants feel little identification with socialist mainland China and closer to Japan, which occupied the island for about 50 years.

This group of Chinese born on the island during the Japanese occupation period gave rise in 1986 to the Democratic People's Party (DPP), which has since competed for local power with the Kuomintang until, on May 20, 2016; it became the ruling party in Taiwan, controlling both the local government and the Legislative Yuan. It was not until the 2023 elections that the Legislative Yuan returned to the control of the Kuomintang and its leftist ally, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), both advocates of the one-China principle. The local government, however, remains in the hands of the separatist DPP.

Since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) took control of power in Taiwan in 2016, with the election of Tsai Ing-wen, re-elected in 2020 and succeeded in 2024 by Lai Ching-te, who was her vice-president between 2020 and 2023, the efforts of the People's Republic of China to promote the peaceful reunification of the two sides of the strait have encountered increasing difficulties.

This has been helped by the change in position of the United States, which, despite formally still defending the principle of one China, has been taking actions that contradict this commitment in practice. In its strategy of wearing down and isolating China, the United States is using the rebel province of Taiwan as a battering ram to strike the Asian giant at its most sensitive point, which is the defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The aim of this article is to discuss the role and influence of the United States in the historical process described above, which resulted in the current configuration and, above all, what interests lead successive US governments, regardless of the party in the White House, to hinder the reunification of China and encourage the separatist movement in Taiwan.

In Part II, we describe how the United States became involved in the Taiwan issue and what led to it. In Part III, we discuss China's break with the Soviet Union and the process of rapprochement with the United States in the context of the Cold War. In Part IV, we discuss how China's integration into the globalized economy has strengthened economic ties with Taiwan. In Part V, we show how the so-called "Taiwan Charter" has been used by the United

States to pressure China in order to delay its development. In Part VI, by way of conclusion, we analyze the current situation of the Sino-American conflict, with the Taiwan issue as its most explosive element.

### **Taiwan, an unsinkable aircraft carrier**

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government has been fighting to reunify its territory and bring back to the Chinese nation those territories that, for one reason or another, were separated from the motherland. With the recovery of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, after 155 years of British rule, and over Macau, after four hundred years of Portuguese colonization, the question of Taiwan still remains.

Taiwan has been part of China for centuries, although it has also been occupied by foreign powers for some time. In the 16th century, the Portuguese arrived on the island and named it “Formosa”. After a brief period of Spanish rule, it was partially colonized by the Dutch in the 17th century before being occupied by the Chinese Empire at the end of the Ming dynasty (Spence, 1995, p. 70). The warrior Zheng Chengong, who expelled the Dutch from the island in 1662, has gone down in Western history as Coxinga, and is still revered today as a national hero of China.

During the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, when China was defeated, Taiwan was occupied by Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The treaty established the independence of Korea, which until then had been a kingdom under the suzerainty of the Empire of China, and resulted in the cession of Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands and the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan, along with war reparations (Spence, 1995, p. 229).

After Japan's defeat at the end of World War II, Taiwan returned to Chinese control. From the point of view of history and international law, there is therefore no doubt that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China. Despite this, Taiwan remains formally separated from China, thanks in particular to military support from the United States. Until it is reintegrated into the Chinese nation, relations between the two sides of the Strait will remain an open wound in the history of China, which will continue to be a divided country.

In May 1950, after the defeat of the Kuomintang forces in the civil war that led to the creation of the People's Republic of China, the nationalist forces of General Chiang Kai-shek took refuge on the island, and there established the headquarters of the Republic of China.

The most critical moment of this period was the Korean War, when Chinese and American troops clashed on the Korean Peninsula. China's involvement in the Korean War was for two reasons. First, in solidarity with Kim Il-Sung, the grandfather of the current North Korean leader, who was fighting for the unification of the country under a socialist government after the United States and the Soviet Union arbitrarily divided the country at the 38th Parallel without consulting the Korean people. Second, to prevent the United States from occupying the entire Korean peninsula by establishing a puppet government in a country with a 1,416-kilometer land border with China.

In fact, both the occupation of the Korean Peninsula and control over Taiwan were part of the same move by the United States to contain and threaten China, which was seen at the time as an ally of the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War and a threat to the hegemonic claims of the United States in the Pacific. John Foster Dulles (1888-1959), as an advisor to President Harry Truman, helped design a plan to take advantage of the Korean War and seize Taiwan from China by force. In 1954, he was instrumental in the signing of the United States-Taiwan Joint Defense Treaty, which was an attempt to legitimize the American occupation and make Taiwan a permanent American military base (Deng, v. III, 1995, p. 383).

In an interview with American journalist Mike Wallace, from the American network CBS TV, in September 1986, Deng Xiaoping stated:

There are three obstacles in Sino-Soviet relations, and one obstacle in Sino-US relations. This is the Taiwan issue, or the reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. In the United States, people say that the US government takes the position of “non-involvement” on the issue of China’s reunification, that is, the Taiwan issue. This is not true. The fact is that the United States has been involved all along. In the 1950s, MacArthur and Dulles saw Taiwan as an unsinkable American aircraft carrier in Asia and the Pacific. The Taiwan issue was therefore the most important point in the negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States (Deng, v. III, 1995, p. 172, our translation).

It is important to remember that since the end of World War II, the United States has held almost absolute military and maritime control of the so-called “Pacific Rim” or “Pacific Circle”. Important elements of this domain are the first and second chain of islands that separate the Pacific Ocean from the China Sea, preventing the Chinese navy from free access to the Pacific. This first chain of islands includes Japan, including the island of Okinawa, where the United States maintains a military base, and the island of Taiwan, which is heavily armed by the United States. Further south are the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. All of these countries and island regions that make up this first chain of islands, including Taiwan,

are allies of the United States. A possible reunification of China with the reincorporation of Taiwan under Beijing's control would represent a breach in this first line of islands, leaving the way open for the Chinese navy to access the Pacific Ocean directly, without having to pass through the choke points controlled by the United States both north and south of Taiwan. To the west, to access the Indian Ocean, Chinese ships must pass through the Strait of Malacca, between Indonesia and Malaysia, which is also controlled by the United States. In other words, even though it currently has the most powerful navy in the world, with more than 370 ships and submarines (RICE, 2024, p.4), China is surrounded by the United States on all sides. For this reason, US control over the island of Taiwan is of strategic importance to the hegemonic ambitions of the United States in Asia.

### **The pendulum swings, but not that much**

In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union broke away from China. In 1969, a series of armed border clashes occurred between the Soviet Union (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), caused by ideological and geopolitical differences. China refused to submit to Soviet imperialism and become a satellite country of the USSR. In the same period, the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) threatened to turn the Cold War into a hot war between the United States and the USSR. Around the same time, Mao Zedong formulated the Three Worlds Theory, according to which international relations comprised three political-economic worlds: the First World, the superpowers, at the time represented by the United States and the Soviet Union; the Second World, the allies of the superpowers; and the Third World, the nations of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which China was a part.

Mao Zedong then proposed that China should ally itself with one part of the First World, the United States, to defeat the other part, the USSR, which, at that time, was the most imminent threat to China. The United States, in turn, saw China as a potential ally to defeat its arch-enemy in the Cold War, the Soviet Union.

It was in this context that the seemingly improbable happened. In 1971, when the US and China had no official ties, then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made clandestine visits to Beijing to arrange a trip by then US President Richard Nixon the following year, paving the way for the regularization of Sino-American relations that occurred in 1979, at the end of the Carter administration.

When, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979, at the end of the Carter administration, bilateral relations were officially resumed, the United States announced that it was severing diplomatic relations

with Taiwan, denouncing the United States-Taiwan Joint Defense Treaty and withdrawing American troops from the island.

But in March of the same year, the U.S. Congress passed the War Powers and Taiwan Relations Act, which went into effect on April 10, 1979 (United States of America, 1979). The act declared that the United States' decision to reestablish relations with the People's Republic of China was based on the expectation that Taiwan's future would be determined by peaceful means. It further stated that the United States would consider any attempt to determine Taiwan's future by other means a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and a major concern to the Americans, who would "provide Taiwan with defensive weapons" and "maintain the ability of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that might threaten the security, economic and social system of the people of Taiwan." Relations between Washington and Taiwan are still marked by this act.

The terms of the Act treat Taiwan as a "country," violating the principles agreed upon between the United States and China and the commitment made when diplomatic relations were reestablished (Deng, v. II, 1995, p. 431-432).

Despite the greater complexity that the agenda of discussions between China and the United States has gained over time, which today involves numerous issues of global importance such as trade, technology, security, finance, climate change, energy and food security, and terrorism, among others, the Taiwan issue continues to be the most sensitive and complicated point in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The reading the minutes of the debates in the Committee on International Relations of the United States House of Representatives, during a public hearing held on April 21, 2004 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Act, revealed, for example, how divided the American political establishment still remained on the issue and, ultimately, on the political stance that the United States should take towards China (United States of America, 2004).

It was for no other reason that the China Daily newspaper published, on January 27, 2017, a scathing editorial regarding the provocations of the new American president, Donald Trump, in relation to the Taiwan issue:

Taiwan has been off-limits in China-US diplomacy, thanks to the understanding that it is a potentially lethal Pandora's box, and that opening it up could undermine the firmly held and hard-won gains that govern the bilateral relationship. If Trump is determined to use this ruse upon taking office, a period of fierce and damaging exchanges will be inevitable, as Beijing will have no choice but to take off the gloves. It would be good if, after his inauguration, Trump could demonstrate more of a governing style. But Beijing should not count on the fact that by raising the stakes he is merely bluffing ahead of the inauguration; instead,



it should be prepared in case he continues to back this gamble. It may be costly. But it will be a worthy price to pay to make the next US president aware of the special sensitivity and serious consequences of his Taiwan gamble (CHINA DAILY, 2017, our translation).

China, for its part, has spared no effort over the years to promote the peaceful reunification of Taiwan, based on the “one China” principle. The strengthening of economic relations between the two sides of the strait has facilitated this process of rapprochement, and brought into the picture other actors, in addition to the government, interested in normalizing relations. While this makes the game more complex, on the other hand it has increased the ranks of those advocating a peaceful solution to the issue.

The stance of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang, which agrees with the “one China” principle, also known as the “1992 Consensus”, and opposes Taiwan’s independence, also contributes to the prospect of a peaceful solution.

Relations between the United States and China regarding Taiwan are guided, to this day, by the “Shanghai Communiqué” of 1972, according to which “the United States recognizes that all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait affirm that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China” (Spence, 1995, P. 591) and by two other communiqués, in 1979 and 1982. Sino-American relations are underpinned by these three joint communiqués. According to the “U.S.-China Joint Communiqué” of August 17, 1982, the U.S. government stated its intention to gradually reduce arms sales to Taiwan while China committed itself to seeking peaceful solutions to disputes with the island (United States of America, 1982). Washington's relations with the island, in turn, are guided by the “Taiwan Relations Act” of 1979, and relations between mainland China and Taiwan are guided by the so-called “1992 Consensus”, by which both sides equally recognize that there is only one China.

## **Reaching the world through the continent**

The period from the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and China in 1979 to the Obama administration (2009–2017) was characterized by the United States' efforts to bring China into its sphere of influence. It was also the period in which the process of productive globalization reached its peak, with dozens of American companies opening factories in China, either to bypass tariff and non-tariff barriers and access the newly opened Chinese market, or to transfer labor-intensive activities to China, particularly the

assembly of electronic equipment, with the aim of reducing costs and recovering profit margins.

There was a presumption among American foreign policy makers that China's opening to a market economy and its engagement with the West via insertion into U.S.-led global supply chains would ultimately lead to political change in China, namely the end of the Chinese Communist Party's monopoly on power. To them, a market economy and multiparty electoral democracy were two sides of the same coin, one necessarily leading to the other.

During this period, the Taiwan issue took a back seat, especially because Taiwan and mainland China fit perfectly into the new international division of labor brought about by globalization led by large American corporations. For Taiwan, the strategy of selling to the world through China was convenient. High-value electronic components such as semiconductors, hard drives, processing and memory units, liquid crystal displays and other components were produced in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan and sent for assembly in China. From there, electronic products and other finished products were exported to the world with the "Made in China" stamp, filled with components made in Taiwan and other trading partners of China in Asia. At the same time that China presented recurring trade deficits with its Asian partners, it accumulated surpluses with the West, namely the United States.

During this period, according to Jin (2012):

The two sides have established consultation mechanisms between the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits and the Cross-Straits Exchange Foundation. The two organizations have broken the blockade established since 1999, resumed consultations based on the 1992 Consensus, and signed sixteen cooperation agreements covering transportation, trade and economic cooperation, people-to-people contacts, food security, mutual legal assistance, agriculture and fishery, and nuclear energy safety, forming and implementing alternating meetings on each side. In addition, the Cross-Straits Economy, Trade and Culture Forum have become an important initiative to promote exchanges between the National Party of China and the Communist Party of China (JIN, C., 2012, p. 176-177, our translation).

In April 2009, the "Agreement on Cross-Strait Financial Cooperation" was signed, aiming to deepen financial cooperation between the two sides. The "Framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation" between the two sides has been instrumental in that since 2003, mainland China has been Taiwan's largest source of trade surplus and its main export market. The Kuomintang even established the strategy of "reaching out to the world through the mainland". Since 2008, the two sides have taken other initiatives to increase cross-strait exchanges. One of them is to realize the "three links" of mail, transportation and trade. The "Agreement on Cross-Strait Air Transport", the "Agreement on Cross-Strait Maritime

Transport” and the “Agreement on Cross-Strait Postal Services” were signed (JIN, C., 2012, p. 175-180, our translation).

### **The “Taiwan Charter” Returns to the table**

Contrary to what US foreign policymakers had imagined, the policy of engagement with China did not bring the expected result, that is, the adoption by China of Western values and institutions, as had previously occurred with Japan and South Korea. Not only did the Chinese Communist Party remain firmly in political control of the country, it also established a successful strategy to transform China from a country previously known for producing cheap imitations of more sophisticated products made in the West, into an innovative country and a world power in science and technology.

As The Economist noted, “If there is one thing the Chinese Communist Party and US security hawks agree on, it is that innovation is the secret to geopolitical, economic and military superiority” (THE ECONOMIST, 2024). Still according to the Economist,

The reshaping of Chinese science has been achieved by focusing on three areas: money, equipment and people. In real terms, China’s spending on research and development (R&D) has grown 16-fold since 2000. According to the latest OECD data, in 2021, China still trailed the United States in overall R&D spending, spending \$668 billion, compared with \$806 billion for the United States at purchasing power parity”. (The Economist, 2024)

When it comes to the workforce, “Building the workforce has been a priority. Between 2000 and 2019, more than 6 million Chinese students left the country to study abroad, according to China’s Ministry of Education” (The Economist, 2024). Thanks to the government’s generous talent repatriation schemes, an increasing number of Chinese scientists trained abroad are returning to China, bringing their newly acquired skills and knowledge with them.

According to the Economist, the Chinese government has offered researchers under the age of 40 one-off bonuses of up to 500,000 yuan (equivalent to roughly \$150,000 in purchasing power parity) and grants of up to 3 million yuan to get their labs up and running back home (The Economist, 2024).

The results of this effort to elevate China to higher levels of global value chains were not long in coming. Chinese brands of cars, smartphones, computers, televisions and household appliances, previously unknown or considered to be of low quality, began to conquer increasing shares of the global market and became demanded by more demanding consumers around the world seeking high quality and fair prices.

Sectors previously considered the exclusive domain of advanced economies, such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, space exploration, semiconductor production, and telecommunications, have begun to coexist with Chinese companies that compete shoulder to shoulder with their American and European rivals. Chinese companies such as Huawei have dominated the global market for telecommunications equipment and 5G Internet. Chinese companies have dominated the global market for the production of electric car batteries and equipment for generating solar and wind energy. It is estimated that Chinese car companies will soon dominate at least 33% of the global electric car market (Fagundes, 2024)

The United States is alarmed by China's advances and a new "Sputnik moment"<sup>2</sup> sounded for the Americans. But instead of using Chinese competition as an incentive to stay ahead in the sectors they dominated and regain dominance in sectors that were being left behind, they preferred to create all kinds of difficulties so that Chinese companies could have access to technology and components produced in the West. They prohibited American companies from selling more advanced semiconductors to Chinese companies. They also prohibited companies from other countries from selling any technological product that uses American technology.

In this new context, the "Taiwan Charter" was once again put on the table, both as a way of trying to draw China into an armed conflict with the island that would be highly damaging to the Chinese economy and destabilizing to China's relations with the rest of the world, and to prevent an eventual unification from placing ultra-advanced semiconductor production technologies by TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company) in the hands of mainland China, which could give China a definitive advantage in cutting-edge technological sectors, namely Artificial Intelligence.

As the aforementioned Economist report reported, "China has already educated 2.5 times as many top AI researchers at the undergraduate level as the United States. And by 2025, Chinese universities are expected to produce almost twice as many PhD graduates in science and technology as the United States".

## Final Considerations

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase "Sputnik moment" was coined to mark the shock the United States suffered when the Soviet Union launched the first satellite into space in 1957. In the years following the launch of Sputnik, the United States quickly surpassed the Soviet Union in satellite and space technology. NASA was created in 1958 and conducted the first hypersonic test vehicle flight the following year. By 1960, the United States had three times as many satellites orbiting the Earth as the USSR. Cf. <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/sputnik-foi-alerta-para-os-eua-mas-missil-hipersonico-chines-e-desafio-maior/>.

To date, Taiwan has been off-limits in US-China diplomacy, based on the understanding that it is a potentially lethal Pandora's box, and that opening it could lead to the loss of the firmly held and hard-won gains that have governed the bilateral relationship between the two powers until recently. Under the War Powers and Taiwan Relations Acts (United States of America, 1973), the US president has no legal authority to use military force to defend Taiwan without express authorization from Congress. Thus, a so-called "strategic ambiguity" has prevailed, whereby the US refuses to say whether it would defend Taiwan from attack by China. The policy is intended to discourage Taipei from declaring independence.

With the deterioration of bilateral relations between the United States and China, the "Taiwan letter" has once again been put on the table by the Americans, and there are many voices in the United States proposing that the consensus established by the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué be abandoned and that the United States should discard the policy of strategic ambiguity in favor of an explicit commitment to Taiwan's military defense.

In February 2021, Republican senators introduced a bill to the United States Congress called the "Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act" (United States of America, 2021), which according to the United States Congress website

"authorizes the President of the United States to use the Armed Forces to defend Taiwan against a direct attack by the Chinese military, a seizure of Taiwanese territory by China, or a threat that endangers the lives of civilians in Taiwan or members of the Taiwanese military. The project also directs the Department of Defense to convene an annual regional security dialogue with Taiwan and other partners to enhance U.S. security relations with Western Pacific countries."

In an article published in the Washington Post, entitled "Congress Must Untie Biden's Hands on Taiwan", Democratic Representative from Virginia, Elaine Luria, a 20-year Navy veteran and vice chairwoman of the House Armed Services Committee, stated that "without the president's ability to react immediately, any delay would prevent the United States from responding at a lower level of conflict to repel an invasion and de-escalate the situation" (Luria, E. 2021), thus making an eventual Chinese invasion of the island a accomplished fact.

In an article published in the Wall Street Journal on October 21, 2021, John Bolton, who served as national security adviser to former President Donald Trump between 2018 and 2019, proposed that the United States abandon the terms of the Shanghai Communiqué and recognize that Taiwan is a self-governing sovereign country and not a disputed Chinese territory. In the article, Bolton states that "The 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, the foundational declaration of current U.S. - China relations, is effectively dead" (Bolton, 2021).

In the same article, Bolton states that the recognition of Taiwan as an independent country by the United States may not be enough to prevent China from taking the province by force and therefore proposes the formation of an “East Asian Quad” to ensure the military defense of the island. According to him,

One step would be to form an East Asian Quad consisting of Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and the United States, complementing the existing Japan-India-Australia-United States Quad. Japan should welcome this development. Its decision-makers increasingly understand that a Chinese attack on Taiwan is an attack on Japan. Both are part of the “first island chain” separating the mainland from the wider Pacific, and their mutual security is inextricable (BOLTON, 2021).

Bolton also highlights the importance of Taiwan to the United States:

Few Americans appreciate how critical Taiwan is as an economic partner, especially its semiconductor manufacturing industry and its extensive trade ties throughout the Indo-Pacific, all of which could support strengthened political-military ties. Economic issues are important to regional and European countries, which may be less willing to engage in military action (Bolton, 2021).

In a long article published in the November/December 2021 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Taiwan's then leader, Tsai Ing-Wen, even without advocating the island's independence, seeks to present it as a bastion of Western democracy in East Asia. According to her,

Vibrantly democratic and Western, but influenced by Chinese civilization and shaped by Asian traditions, Taiwan, by its very existence and continued prosperity, represents both an affront to the narrative and an obstacle to the regional ambitions of the Chinese Communist Party (Tsai Ing-Wen, 2021).

To justify his argument, he says that a supposed collective identity has emerged in Taiwan, as if the island's destiny concerned only the island's 23 million inhabitants and not the whole of China with its 1.4 billion inhabitants, to which Taiwan has always belonged.

To further complicate matters, President Biden, when asked on October 20, 2021, on the “CNN Town Hall” TV program whether the US military would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, stated that: “Yes, we are committed to doing that”.

This was interpreted by the American and international press as a statement that Washington intends to abandon the policy of strategic ambiguity in favor of an explicit military guarantee for the island. According to the *Washington Post*, “With those five words, the US president initially appeared to have changed the American policy of 'strategic ambiguity' towards Taiwan” (TAYLOR, 2021), according to which the US refuses to say whether it would defend Taiwan from a Chinese attack.

Given the international repercussions of Biden's statement, the White House itself tried to downplay the president's remarks. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, during a press

conference on October 22, 2021, stated that "The president was not announcing any change in our policy, nor did he make a decision to change our policy." "Our defense relationship with Taiwan is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act" (Taylor, 2021).

A few days later, on October 26, 2021, Antony Blinken, the United States Secretary of State, stated that "That is why we encourage all UN Member States to join us in supporting Taiwan's robust and meaningful participation throughout the UN system and the international community, consistent with our 'one China' policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Communiqués, and the Six Assurances" (United States of America (2021a). This is, of course, a highly ambiguous statement, since supporting "robust and meaningful participation by Taiwan throughout the UN system" effectively means denying the "one China" principle recognized by the United States in the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 and in the other two communiqués of 1979 and 1982.

The Taiwan's leader, on the same Friday, October 22, 2021, avoided stating that a possible change in the United States' position could encourage the island to declare independence. According to Reuters, she said that "Taiwan's position remains the same, that it will not give in to pressure or 'move forward rashly' when it gains support" (Reuters, 2021).

In fact, the position of Taiwan's current leaders has been to seek a kind of de facto independence without declaring the island's independence, so as not to provoke Beijing. Commenting on the Taiwanese leader's speech at the celebration of the Republic of China National Day, which is celebrated on the island on October 10, in which she outlined the "four commitments" that she said should serve as common ground for all Taiwanese, regardless of political affiliation, an editorial in the Taipei Times newspaper stated that

Tsai set the tone by embracing the Republic of China (ROC) and then juxtaposing it against the People's Republic of China (PRC) to clearly demonstrate the reality that Taiwan is an independent and sovereign nation. Following this logic, there is no need for Taiwan to declare independence or establish a "Republic of Taiwan" earlier (Tzou Jiing-Wen, 2021).

China has responded to Biden's statement. On the same Friday, October 22, 2021, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said: "We urge the US to earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the stipulations of the three China-US joint communiqués, be prudent in its words and actions on the Taiwan issue, and avoid sending wrong signals to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces, so as not to seriously harm China-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" (Taylor, 2021).

Regaining Taiwan by force is certainly not China's first option, but neither will it passively accept any attempt by the island to declare independence. The English magazine *The Economist* stated that

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, the country's national day, 38 Chinese aircraft, including fighters and bombers, flew toward Taiwan. They entered the island's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), a buffer zone where intrusions often trigger military alerts. It was the highest daily number of the year. Over the next three days, China scrambled another 111 planes. In response, Taiwan scrambled jets, broadcast warnings and tracked the Chinese aircraft with missile systems. The island's defense minister, Chiu Kuo Cheng, called it "the most difficult situation I have ever seen in my more than 40 years of military service" (*The Economist*, 2021).

The United States is aware that China will never accept the island's independence and is "playing the Taiwan card" with an eye to broader objectives, namely its military dominance in the Pacific. In a 2018 article in the American magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Professor Daniel Linch of the University of Southern California recalls that "In 2016, Bolton urged Washington to play the 'Taiwan card', going so far as to recommend recognizing Taiwan's statehood in order to coerce Beijing into withdrawing from the South China Sea and dismantling its military bases there" (Linch, 2018). Taiwan's separatist forces, for their part, are playing along because they know that their chances of becoming independent from China without US military support are zero. The problem is that they also know the risks they run in the event of a military confrontation with mainland China.

The United States cannot "declare" Taiwan independent; the initiative would have to come from the island, obviously with the guarantees offered by the Americans. Until now, the United States' policy of strategic ambiguity has prevented Taiwan from taking this initiative. A possible change in the United States' position could alter this precarious balance. The question is whether the Taiwanese government would be willing to bear the consequences.

Apparently, the strategy of the current Taiwanese leadership is to claim that the Republic of China (ROC) is already a sovereign state and, therefore, there would be no need to declare independence. The issue would be simply to guarantee Taiwan's defense against a possible Chinese invasion, and to this end they count on the support of the United States and its allies in the region. Through this strategy, they intend to transform the "two Chinas" solution into a *fait accompli*. In this way, they avoid the alternative of "one China, one Taiwan," which would require the island to formally declare its independence, which would certainly lead to war. The point is that China will not passively accept the Taiwanese separatist leadership's strategy of winning a war without waging one. China will certainly do its best to promote peaceful reunification, but if it concludes that such a path is impossible, it



will not hesitate to resort to other means. The question is how long China will accept Taiwan's game. Judging by President Xi Jinping's statements, that time is running out.

The separatist positions of the current leader of Taiwan, Lai Ching-te, are well known. At a seminar held on April 3, 2018, when he was already serving as vice-leader of the Taiwan government, he declared himself “a hard-working politician for Taiwan independence”. When asked about the meaning of this description of himself, he stated, according to the newspaper Taiwan News (2018), that there were three basic beliefs behind the position: the first being that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country and therefore does not need to declare Taiwan independence, a position that coincides with that of the previous leader; second, that only the country's 23 million inhabitants have the right to decide the future of Taiwan, ignoring that the island is an inalienable part of Chinese territory and therefore in the interests of the 1.4 billion Chinese people and not just the inhabitants of the island; third, that building Taiwan and making it stronger and more attractive to the people is a practical approach to Taiwan independence.

Addressing supporters, Lai Ching-te was quoted as saying by the New York Times that “This election is a choice between Zhongnanhai and the White House,” referring to the Chinese Communist Party headquarters in Beijing. “When we can go to the White House — when the Taiwanese president can enter the White House — we will have achieved the political goal we are pursuing” (Chang Chien, Buckley, 2023).

The United States should refrain from any official relations with Taiwanese representatives, either because of the agreements established between the two countries or because Taiwan is an internal problem for China. However, this is not what has been happening, particularly since 2016, when then President Trump decided to put the “Taiwan letter” on the table as a way of blackmailing China, in the trade war that began in 2018.

Therefore, there is a game of convenience between Taiwan's separatist forces and the United States government, where the former try to rely on the United States to advance their separatist purposes and the United States uses these separatist forces to provoke China and try to perpetuate its military dominance in the Pacific area and blackmail China on other issues.

The fact that the DPP, which has pro-independence tendencies in Taiwan, won the election for the province's leader for the third time in a row does not mean, however, that the majority of Taiwanese voters wanted the DPP to continue governing the island. Quite the contrary, polls indicated and the results proved that at least 60% of voters wanted the DPP out of power. According to the Global Times,

DPP's Lai and his running mate Hsiao Bi-khim won more than 40 percent of the total votes in the Jan. 13 election, while opposition

Kuomintang (KMT) candidate Hou Yu-ih and his running mate Jaw Shaw-kong won 33.49 percent of the vote. Third-party candidate Ko Wen-je and his running mate Wu Hsin-ying of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) received 26.45% of the vote, according to media reports (Global Times, 2024).

The fact is, therefore, that 60% of the island's electorate, as previous surveys had already indicated, did not want the DPP to continue leading the local government, which only did not happen because the two opposition parties were unable to reach a common platform. Both the Kuomintang, a nationalist party, and the center-left TPP are against the separatist theses and repudiate the provocations of the DPP leaders, which shows that the majority of Taiwan's electorate wants the issue of reunification to be resolved peacefully, as proposed by the Chinese government.

The truth is that as the strategic rivalry between the United States and China deepens, Taiwan becomes an increasingly important card in this game. Maintaining some level of control over Taiwan is important for the United States to prevent China from freely accessing the Pacific Ocean, since the island of Taiwan, with Japan to the north and the Philippines to the south, both allies of the United States, is part of the first chain of islands that separates the South China Sea from the Pacific Ocean.

If China regains control of the island, it will have direct access to the Pacific, which is a concern for the United States, both because China currently has the most powerful navy in the world and because naval power has once again become increasingly important in the struggle for global power. China's naval fleet, which includes aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates and submarines, is slightly larger than that of the United States, almost double that of Russia and larger than that of the United Kingdom, France, South Korea and Japan combined.

As stated by the magazine *The Economist*,

The oceans are once again important in geopolitics. In the Middle East, the Houthi rebel group is threatening shipping in the Red Sea, disrupting global trade. On January 12, the United States and Britain launched strikes on more than 60 Houthi targets in Yemen. The allies' strikes are an attempt to reassert freedom of navigation in a crucial artery of global trade, but also to dramatically expand the geographic scope of the Middle East conflict. Taiwan is on the brink of an election that could shape its future. A fight over the island would involve an intense Sino-American naval war that would extend far beyond the Pacific. And in Europe, the war in Ukraine could trigger a maritime dispute over the Black Sea and Crimea. The sea power is back (*The Economist*, 2024a).

Add to this an important economic variable. The Taiwanese company TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company) is today the world's leading producer of the most

advanced semiconductors and memory chips, below eight nanometers, vital for the high-tech sector, including cell phones, supercomputers, weapons and, especially, artificial intelligence.

As Laura Tyson, former chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under Bill Clinton, stated in an article published on the Project Syndicate website, “The U.S. economy is dangerously dependent on advanced semiconductors produced by a single company (TSMC) in a single location (Taiwan), which is fraught with geopolitical risks” (Tyson and Zysman, 2023). In 2002, the United States tried, in vain, to convince TSMC to transfer the production of its most advanced chips to American territory by offering billion-dollar subsidies, but without success.

The situation has changed since the election of the new local leader. According to the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post, the latest US achievement was to convince the world’s largest semiconductor manufacturer, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), to start production of its most advanced chips in the United States. TSMC’s new commitment means that it intends to start producing its latest 2-nanometer chips, and more advanced ones in the future, at a new factory to be built in Phoenix, Arizona. To do so, it has received a \$6.6 billion grant from the US government under the umbrella of the Chips Act (Lo, 2024).

However, as Lord Keynes stated, there is a certain distance between the glass and the lips. According to ZEESHAN (2024),

However, four years later, the factory has yet to begin sales. Cultural differences and harsh working conditions have created tensions between American workers and the company’s Taiwanese leadership, significantly delaying production. Rigorous work schedules and harsh conditions make manufacturing jobs relatively unattractive to American workers. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, more than 620,000 manufacturing jobs remained unfilled as of January.

The fact is that the Taiwan issue has moved from being a long-term issue to being resolved to the agenda, both because President Xi Jinping has already made it clear that he intends to fully reunify the country, which puts a horizon for resolving the issue by the middle of the next decade at the latest, and because the island's separatist forces are increasingly assertive about their independence intentions, and because the United States has shown no signs of intending to change its course of confrontation with China, whether on the economic or geopolitical level. "The unification of Taiwan with mainland China 'will certainly be realized,'" declared Chinese President Xi Jinping in a speech in Beijing on December 26, 2023 to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Mao Tse-tung's birth (Nikkei Asia, Value. 2023).

No one should doubt this. China is alert and does not intend to fall into the traps of the United States and provoke a fratricidal struggle between Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. But, on the other hand, it will not passively accept a provocative act by separatist forces, supported by the United States. The separatist forces know this and, apparently, are not willing to pay to see it. They prefer another tactic: without declaring Taiwan independent from China, to behave as if it already were, counting on the United States to maintain the status quo. Recent visits by US government officials to Taiwan and Taiwanese leaders being received in the United States with the status of representatives of an independent country are part of this tactic. It remains to be seen how long the People's Republic of China will accept this type of maneuver to prevent the definitive return of Taiwan to its control.

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