
THE US-TAIWAN-CHINA RELATIONS: MAINTAINING PEACE THROUGH TAIWAN RELATIONS ACT

Sigit and Aurelia V.T. Ngambut

University of Indonesia; Christian University of Indonesia

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between US-Taiwan-China relations through the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) using a historical approach and secondary data to analyse the topic. The clarity of Taiwan's status as an independent country or a province of China is a controversial matter which has been frequently debated by both China and Taiwan until today. Although Taiwan has been returned to China after Japan's defeat in World War II and has been legally recognized as one of China's provinces through the San Francisco Agreement, Taiwanese Nationalists who are influenced by liberalism still demand the establishment of Taiwan as an independent state. As a sovereign state, China has the power to achieve the "One-China Principle" through methods ranging from soft power to hard intervention. The United States, who have openly supported China, simultaneously continue to establish close relations with Taiwan, beginning with the TRA in 1979. The TRA has become an important factor in complicating matters between China and Taiwan providing both security, and opportunities for Taiwan to conduct arms trade with the US. This paper contends that as long as the US lends its support to Taiwan as a strategy to curb the spread of the Chinese communism and maintain US influence in the Asia-Pacific, integration of China and Taiwan will be difficult to realize.

Keywords: *Taiwan, China, US, Taiwan Relations Act, and Arms Sales.*

Introduction

Taiwan's status as an independent country rather than as one of the provinces in China is a controversial matter. Although Taiwan has been recognized as part of China by the United Nations (UN), Taiwan, which adheres to democratic ideology, claims to be an independent country that is different from China and its communist

ideology.¹ The United States, is a country that embraces liberalism with the aim of internationalizing democracy and freedom for all people. The US has established non-diplomatic and informal relations with Taiwan, supported by the existence of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) since 1979, which regulates the continuation of US-Taiwan relations after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Through the TRA, the US provides Taiwan with protection under the US security umbrella. The US seems to declare that those who threaten Taiwan must face the United States. This threat extends to China, which encourages the integration of Taiwan into itself and challenges its existence as an autonomous territory. If Taiwan is part of China, the TRA can threaten the mainland's sovereignty as an independent country that has full rights over Taiwan. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the impact of the TRA on the US-Taiwan-China relations by posing the following question: does the TRA assure security for Taiwan?

In the first part of this paper, a brief history of the TRA will be explained. The next section will explain current US-Taiwan-China relations. Finally, an analysis of the implications of TRA on future relations between US-Taiwan-China will be explored. This paper argues that the US' support of Taiwan through the TRA can be viewed as a pragmatic policy which concerns the American strategy to curb the spread of Chinese communism to maintain its influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the paper contends that the US's role obstructs the integration of China and Taiwan.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the reasoning behind America's involvement in China and Taiwan, this paper uses Henri Kissinger's concept of *triangular diplomacy*, which he developed during the Vietnam War in 1955-1975. It refers to the American foreign policy that exploited the ongoing rivalry between the Soviet Union and China to strengthen US hegemony and diplomatic interest.² After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the Soviet Union, and China, two communist countries, became the object of "US containment." This term, originally coined by George Kennan, refers to the halting of the Soviet Union's power expansion wherever it seemed likely to spread.³ Meanwhile, Soviet Union policy in the Asia-Pacific during the Cold War Era during 1947-1991 was designed not only to counter the US policy of containment, but also to compete for influence with China.⁴

1 Lindsay Maizland and Samuel Parmer, China-Taiwan Relations, Council on Foreign Relation, last modified January 22, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations>.

2 Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004): 42-45.

3 *Ibid.*, 34.

4 *Ibid.*, 115.

Through triangular diplomacy the US avoids taking sides and maintains good relations with both the Soviet Union and China to promote their vision of an international order. Within this international order, all major powers agree to act with restraint and continue the status quo by not resorting to violence either directly or indirectly. This is referred to by Kissinger as *global equilibrium*.⁵ Kissinger's idea of *global equilibrium* equates to neorealists' concept of *balance of power*, which refers to the general concept of one or more states' power being used to balance other states. Alternatively, it can refer to the process by which counter balancing coalitions have repeatedly formed in history to prevent one state from conquering an entire region.⁶

Brief History

China vs Taiwan and US Involvement

In 1885, under Qing dynasty leadership from 1644 to 1911 CE, Taiwan became China's twenty-second province. However, during the last decades of the Qing dynasty, China experienced economic difficulties and political chaos. This caused the loss of its territorial control over its Eastern seaboard to foreign powers. At the end of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, under the Shimonoseki treaty, Taiwan was ceded to Japan, which retained control of it until the end of World War II in 1945.⁷ After the defeat of Japan in World War II, Taiwan was restored to Chinese control due to a pledge made by world leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek at the Cairo Conference in 1943, which was later adhered to by the Soviet Union. Hence, from 1945, Taiwan became a province of China once again.⁸ The conflict between Nationalists and Communists in China reached its peak during the civil war of the late 1940s. From their bases in Northern China, the Communists, led by Mao Zedong, gradually expanded their control to the whole mainland, successfully claiming the land as the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. On the other hand, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, known as ROC, fled to Taiwan in late 1949. From the Communist perspective, Taiwan remained the last issue that needed to be settled in order to complete their victory over the Nationalists. They confidently expected that their forces would accomplish this goal in 1950, but the involvement of the US in Taiwan frustrated the Chinese. The US intervention in the Taiwan conflict in 1950 arose from the outbreak of the Korean War. The US had not set out to deliberately intervene in the Chinese Civil

5 Ibid., 96.

6 Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon C. Peveho U.S.e, *International Relations Tenth Edition* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2014): 52.

7 Gary Sheu, "No, Taiwan's Status Is Not Uncertain," *The Diplomat*, August 08, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/no-taiwans-statU.S.-is-not-uncertain>.

8 Winberg Chai, "Missile Envy: New Tensions in China-US-Taiwan Relations," *Asian Affairs* 34, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 39.

War. However, with the onset of the Korean War in June 1950, President Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to prevent Communist forces from attacking the Nationalists in Taiwan. The US administration viewed the Korean War in Cold War terms and saw North Korea as part of the Communist bloc that launched an attack on South Korea, an anti-communist state. The actions taken in Taiwan were part of a regional and global containment strategy to prevent any further communist expansion. By deploying its forces in the Taiwan Strait, the US had effectively intervened in the Chinese Civil War. China believed that the US was using Taiwan as part of a strategy to encircle and weaken the mainland. Conversely, the US viewed China's aggressive intentions as part of its expansionist design policy. The US' defense link with Taiwan was part of its system of alliances in the Asia-Pacific that held China's containment as a primary objective. A Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan was signed in 1954, and, for the next three decades, the US treated Taiwan as having separated from China, viewing the mainland as an illegitimate governing force that threatened the US' position in the policy landscape.⁹

The Enactment of TRA

Under the terms of the Shanghai Communiqué of February 1972, the US began to normalize its diplomatic relations with China. The US acknowledged the 'One-China Principle' which states that Taiwan is a part of China. Essentially, the US extended diplomatic recognition to the PRC, with both governments opening liaison offices in their respective capitals. Taiwan remained a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) until 1971, when it chose to voluntarily exit the council rather than face a vote of expulsion. In 1972, China assumed Taiwan's UNSC seat and by 1978, an agreement to establish full diplomatic relations between the US and China was set to take effect. This event marked the end of formal diplomatic relations between the US and Taiwan and its previous Mutual Defense Treaty.¹⁰

Instead, the US-Taiwan defense link continued on a different basis.¹¹ Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) on March 29, 1979 to provide a framework for a new US-Taiwan relationship, signed into law by President Carter on April 10, 1979.¹² The TRA provided the continuation of extensive commercial links, with defense support to maintain Taiwan's ability to defend itself.¹³ In other words, the TRA

9 Derek McDougall, *Asia-Pacific in World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007): 164-165.

10 McDougall, *Asia-Pacific in World Politics*, 166.

11 Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, The United States and Taiwan's Defense Transformation, *Brookings*, February 16, 2010, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-united-states-and-taiwans-defense-transformation>.

12 Steven M. Goldstein and Randall Schrive, "An Uncertain Relationship: The United States, Taiwan and the Taiwan Relations Act", *Cambridge University Press*, no. 165 (2001): 147-172.

13 McDougall, *Asia-Pacific in World Politics*.

provided Taiwan with defensive capability, and enabled the US to maintain its capacity to oppose any force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, social and economic systems of Taiwan.¹⁴ The TRA makes it clear that any threat to Taiwan would be considered a threat to the security of the entire Western Pacific. Section 2(b) (4) of the TRA states: “Any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, [is] a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States.” Section 2(b) (6) also asserts that it is US policy to maintain the capability “to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”¹⁵

U.S.-Taiwan Relations Today

Threat from China

China has always maintained a single, consistent policy towards Taiwan, regarding the island as a province of China. However, according to China’s Defense White Paper, Taiwan refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus which embodies the ‘One-China Principle’. Instead, Taiwan furthers down the path of separatism by increasing efforts to sever the connection with the mainland in favor of gradual independence, pushing for *de jure* independence, intensifying hostility and confrontation, and borrowing the strength of foreign influence.¹⁶ The presence of the US in Taiwan can be explained by a democratization process. According to Immanuel Kant’s democratic peace theory, although democratic states fight wars against authoritarian states, democracies almost never fight each other, as they tend to be capitalist states whose trade relations create strong interdependence. War would be costly, disrupting trade, and citizens of democratic societies (whose support is necessary for wars to be waged) may simply not see the citizens of other democracies as enemies.¹⁷ This is precisely why Taiwan, as a fellow democracy, receives greater support from the US. The US’ view of international order is not only confined to balance of power considerations, it also puts a premium upon domestic stability in the form of democratic institutions within states.

There are, of course, several more reasons behind the US’ presence in Taiwan. Through the TRA, the US’ position in relation to Taiwan can be characterized as a form of strategic ambiguity. The US acts as a security guarantor for Taiwan, but at the same time, does not encourage any attempts by Taiwan to change the status

14 Winberg Chai, “Missile Envy,” 40.

15 Jaw-ling Joanne Chang, “Lessons from the Taiwan Relations Act,” *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 44, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 64-65.

16 “China’s National Defense,” Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, last modified July 2019, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2019-07/24/content_4846452.htm.

17 Goldstein, *International Relations*, 95.

quo from a province of China to an independent country.¹⁸ For China, Taiwan's unification and incorporation into the Motherland evokes a sense of justice from a past, where the existence of Taiwan as a separate administrative authority represents an injustice. China considers intervention by any foreign power as an interference in its internal affairs that is paramount to injustice and humiliation. If it acts as a *de facto* independent state, China fears that Taiwan could indirectly encourage separatist tendencies in other regions of the mainland. If it declares independence, Taiwan could set a dangerous precedent. Under these circumstances, China's existing minority problems are likely to intensify, as secessionist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang for example, could be further encouraged. Thus, *de jure* independent Taiwan could become a serious threat to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Taiwan issue is also a challenge to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its ideologies. If it turned out that the CCP were incapable of controlling its territory, confidence in the Party would be undermined.¹⁹

While China has been publicly and formally willing to reject the use of force to settle other regional issues, such as the Spratly islands dispute, this is not the case for Taiwan. Indeed, China has been doing everything in its power to make credible its threat to use force in order to stop Taiwan from declaring independence.²⁰ To show that it is decisive in defending its 'One-China' policy, Beijing took a crucial step that codified its resolution to dissuade Taiwan from any possibility of formal secession. On March 2005, the National People's Congress passed the anti-secession law, which gave China the right to "employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."²¹ The menacing tone of China's legislation, accompanied by more than 1,200 ballistic and cruise missiles poised just across the Taiwan Strait, has been an explicit warning to Taiwan that China was ready to take it back by force, should its leaders challenge the status quo in the Strait.²² Considering the huge gap between Taiwan and China in terms of overall national power and military strength, there is little Taiwan can do to protect itself.²³ While China's military budget has skyrocketed, Taiwan's defense outlays have remained flat. Defense spending as a percentage of GDP hovers close to 2 percent — despite pledges to sustain an investment in defense of at least 3 percent. Compounding problems include a plan to shift to an all-volunteer force — meaning that a larger share of military resources must be allocated to cover personnel costs. Despite deep cuts in force levels, the implementation of the program has been

18 Mau Kuei Michael Chang, "Taiwan's Nationalistic Politics and Its Difficult 'StatU.S. Quo'", *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, no. 21 (2005): 91-124.

19 Dario Kuntić, "The Ominous Triangle: China-Taiwan the United States relationship," *CIRR* 21, no. 72 (2015): 247-248.

20 David C. Kang. *China: Identity, Sovereignty, and Taiwan within China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 93.

21 Kuntić, "The Ominous Triangle," 262.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

delayed due to an inability to attract recruits. Furthermore, morale is low among the armed forces and much of Taiwan's military equipment is getting old and obsolete.²⁴ Thus, as a protectionist measure, Taiwan needs to tread carefully and nurture its informal alliance with the US as a guarantor of its survival.

US-Taiwan Arms Sales

The TRA contains explicit references to the continuation of the sales of US arms to Taiwan. It is a source of tension in the US-China relationship. Even after US-China diplomatic relations were normalized in 1979, the US insisted on selling weapons to Taiwan for the following three reasons. First, the US arms sales to Taiwan would give more confidence in Taiwan's defense capability against the PRC. AS a result, Taiwan does not need seek radical solutions, such as nuclear options that would contradict American interests.²⁵ Second, the continuation of US arms sales to Taiwan could reduce suspicion and doubt from other allies in the region about US' reliability in keeping its defense commitments.²⁶ Third, if Taiwan remained strong militarily, the PRC would be less likely to launch an attack on the island.²⁷

In the US-China Joint Communiqué on Arms Sales to Taiwan in 1982, the US agreed to gradually reduce its sales of arms to Taiwan and promised that future arms sales would not exceed, either in qualitative or quantitative terms, those of recent years.²⁸ However, the record of US arms sales since suggests that the communiqué has a limited constraining effect on American behavior. This limited constraining effect can be seen in the chart below, which displays the number of Taiwan arms sales as reported to Congress from 1990 to August 2019 for foreign Military Sales (FMS) in US dollars. This data was taken from the US-Taiwan Business Council, which is based in the Washington, District of Columbia.²⁹

24 Shelley Rigger, Dennis V. Hickey, and Peter Chow, *U.S.-Taiwan Relations: Prospects for Security and Economic Ties* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2017): 10-11.

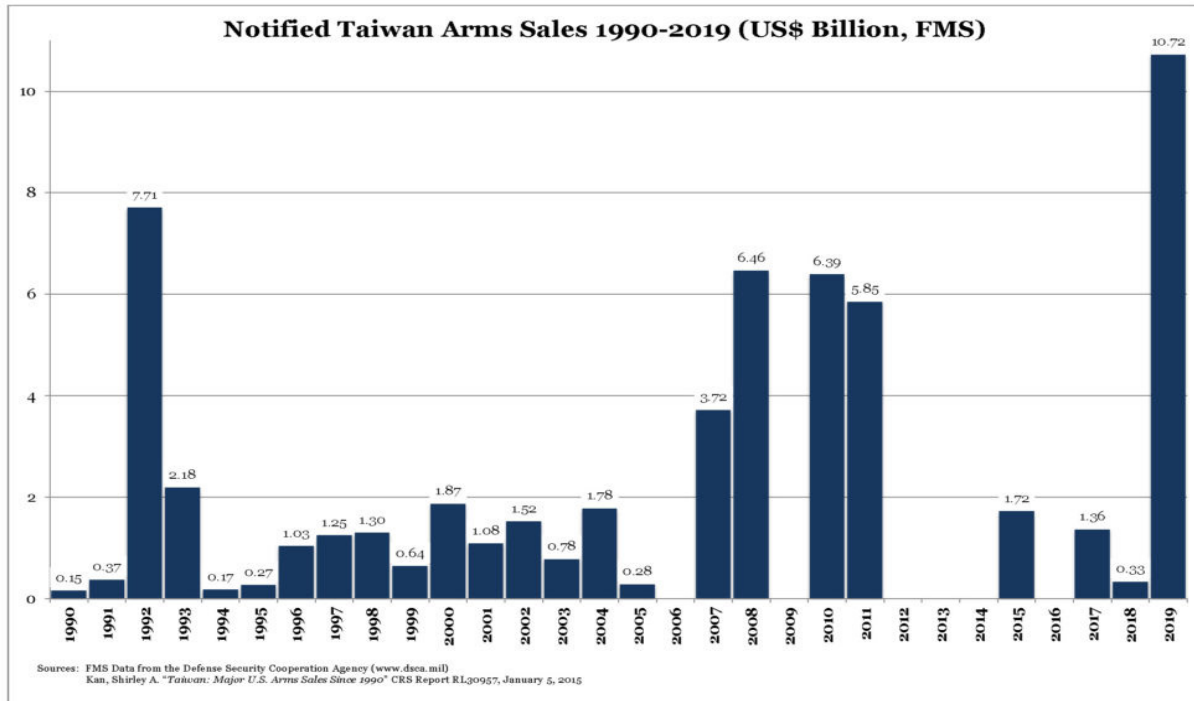
25 Chang, "Lessons from the Taiwan Relations Act", 66.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 "Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America (August 17, 1982)," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, Accessed April 23, 2020, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/doc/ctc/t946664.htm>.

29 "Taiwan Arms Sales Notified to Congress, 1990-2019," U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, last modified August 21, 2019, <https://www.UStaiwandefense.com/>.



In 2015, during Obama's presidency, the highest amount of US-Taiwan arms sales reached 1.72 billion US dollars.³⁰ During Trump's administration, beginning from 2017, the US-Taiwan arms sales reached 1.36 billion US dollars.³¹ There is a decrease of 0.33 billion US dollars in 2018, but sales increase exponentially in 2019 to 10.72 billion US dollars.³² This chart shows that although the US has agreed to obey the 1982 communiqué, it does not guarantee that it will reduce or stop its arms sales to Taiwan. There is possibility for the US to continue its arms sales to Taiwan for a long time. From China's perspective, the presence of the US in Taiwan is a form of intervention in China's sovereignty over Taiwan. Because of China, the US has to adopt a cautious approach to any arms deals or high-level exchanges with Taiwan. Although China has the military capability to unify Taiwan and the mainland, the presence of the US consistently provides security to Taiwan and has emerged as an obstacle to China's integration.³³ It is not just an obstacle for integration, but the US' arms sales to Taiwan also threatens to undermine China's sovereignty and national interests. If the tension between the two countries continues, US-China bilateral relations could be negatively impacted.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 "Taiwan Arms Sales Notified to Congress, 1990-2019."

33 Deng Yuwen, "Is China planning to take Taiwan by force in 2020?" *South China Morning Post*, January 03, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2126541/china-planning-take-taiwan-force-2020>.

Taiwan Under Tsai Ing-wen's Administration

Since Deng Xiaoping, Chinese leaders have realized that the US plays an essential role in China and Taiwan relations. Today, Xi Jinping diverts from the political heritage of his predecessors, developing a new strategy, which emphasizes that the Taiwan issue should not interfere with US-China bilateral relations. Xi has been trying to isolate the Taiwan issue from the US-China bilateral relationship while developing his rhetoric of a “new type of great-power relationship.” Xi’s stance has excluded mentions of the Taiwan issue in his published discussions, communications, and joint statements related to the United States.³⁴ Since Taiwan is of great value for China, the Middle Kingdom will not allow Taiwan to become a bargaining chip while it is works to develop a new type of relationship between major powers. Xi’s objective is to isolate the Taiwan issue from the US-China bilateral relationship, and cut any US involvement in cross-strait relations, or at least verify that there is no direct US involvement.³⁵

Under Xi’s administration, “Peaceful Reunification” and “One Country, Two Systems” have become China’s guiding principles to resolve the Taiwan matter and the optimal way to achieve national reunification.³⁶ This formulation has consistently been rejected across the political spectrum in Taiwan, and although Xi seeks to soften the impact of such policies by proclaiming that China would consider Taiwan’s history and circumstances, negative reactions from Taiwanese people still prevail. Taiwan maintains that, unlike Hong Kong, it is not a colony. With US aid in developing defense capability and a fully-developed central government, Taiwan has no incentive to downgrade itself from an effectively independent polity to a local or regional government of the PRC.³⁷ In the beginning of the 1980s, Taiwanese citizens began to discover and promote what scholars call “Taiwan subjectivity.” Taiwan subjectivity refers to the fact that Taiwan does not exist solely as the object of others’ intentions and desires, but as the subject of its own history with a legitimate claim to self-government.³⁸ Subjectivity is not the same as Taiwanese independence because it does not prescribe any particular relationship with Beijing, but rather insists that the people of Taiwan have a right to decide for themselves what that relationship will be. As China’s political and military strength increases, Taiwan’s subjectivity and autonomy faces many challenges. Taiwan has a limited freedom to act; they need to choose between a close relationship with China, which puts them at risk of falling under the country’s influence, or decide to drift further away from China which could

34 Jing Huang, *Xi Jinping's Taiwan Policy: Boxing Taiwan with the One-China Framework, within Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace* (California: University of California Press, 2017): 245.

35 *Ibid.*, 245.

36 Alan D. Romberg, “Cross-Strait Relations: Portrayals of Consistency Calm on the Surface, Paddling Like Hell Underneath,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 45 (Fall, 2014): 6.

37 Romberg, “Cross-Strait Relations,” 6.

38 Rigger, Hickey and Chow, *U.S.-Taiwan Relations*, 2.

lead to provocation of military responses and economic sanctions.³⁹

Taiwan's responses and alignment to China has differed depending on its leadership. Under President Chen Shui-bian from 2000 to 2008, Taiwan leaned away from China, but under President Ma Ying-Jeou from 2008 to May 2016, Taiwan has steered toward the Middle Kingdom. The current Democratic Progressive Party President and Taiwan's first female President, President Tsai Ing-wen, has been re-elected for a second term in January 2020. She straddles a stable balance between protecting the subjectivity of Taiwan and avoiding confrontation with China. Her administration has not accepted the preconditions to China's 1992 Consensus for good relations, but has instead based her policy on avoiding confrontation and provocation, while disallowing Beijing to dictate the terms of the relationship.⁴⁰

Since Tsai's election, Beijing has gradually taken different measures to convince Taipei to return to the 1992 Consensus. On June 2016, Beijing suspended official communication with the Taiwanese government and reduced mainland tourism to Taiwan, igniting protests by the tourism industry. The Chinese administration also locked out Taiwan from the 39th assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization.⁴¹ Since then, Beijing has begun to slowly accede Taipei's remaining diplomatic allies to switch their alliance to Beijing. Consequently, São Tomé and Príncipe dropped Taiwan on December 2016 while also convincing states like Nigeria to downgrade their relationship to unofficial relations.⁴²

Triangle Relation Between Xi Jinping's and Donald Trump's Administrations

Today, the disagreement on which government is legitimate still undermines China-Taiwan cross-strait relations in Xi Jinping's administration. Xi's policy towards Taiwan continues to follow the fundamental approach adopted by the previous Hu Jintao administration. It prioritizes prevention of Taiwan's *de jure* independence over promotion of reunification. Xi also emphasizes the strengthening of the "One-China" principle strategic framework in China-Taiwan relations, hoping that it will push Taiwan towards eventual reunification. This has been incorporated into his grand goals for China as expressed in his "Chinese Dream." Although Taiwanese people seem to identify less with mainland China nationally and politically, Taiwan has been drawn into China's economic orbit while its international status, in terms of both legitimacy and influence, continues to decline. Therefore, Taiwan recognizes the increasing difficulty in moving away from mainland China's influence both economically and politically. The dilemma faced by Taiwan is that it will either be drawn into China's orbit or be marginalized in international affairs as well as in regional economic integration efforts. Taiwan has little choice but to accept the fact

39 Rigger, Hickey and Chow, *U.S.-Taiwan Relations*, 2.

40 *Ibid.*, 2-3.

41 *Ibid.*, 14.

42 *Ibid.*

that it will have greater interdependence with the mainland.⁴³

Greater economic interaction between China and Taiwan plays an important role in China's Taiwan policy. China is Taiwan's largest trading partner and also the island's number one destination for foreign direct investment.⁴⁴ China hopes that the benefits of economic cooperation will lead to negotiations with Taiwan on the future status of Taiwan and eventually end with reunification.⁴⁵ For the central Chinese government, using Taiwanese investors to achieve unification is the ultimate goal. China has always hoped that Taiwan's investment in China would lead the way for reunification and disincentivize independence.⁴⁶ PRC officials have explicitly stated that economic interaction with Taiwan is intended to promote unification.

Conversely, US involvement also has an important role in determining the resolution of the conflict. The issue will be hard to solve without a cooperative relationship between the US and China. Trump's administration has been approving arms deals with Taiwan at a faster rate than under Obama's and Bush's administrations, and has also shifted its foreign policy from not provoking China, to challenging the mainland government and focusing on Taiwan's defenses.⁴⁷ China under Xi's administration has repeatedly warned the US against seeking closer military ties with Taiwan, and has protested against every arms deal they have made. Every US-Taiwan exchange has been seen as a violation of the "One-China Principle" but Trump, who views China as a strategic competitor instead of a partner, continues to develop closer ties with the island and helps to boost its defenses as part of his national security strategy in dealing with China.⁴⁸

On May 2018, Trump agreed to issue the marketing license required for US manufacturers to sell to Taiwan the technology it needs to build eight submarines. This was previously approved by President George W. Bush, but has been stalled since 2001. A month after the agreement, hundreds of US arms dealers and former US military officials travelled to Taiwan for the first-ever defense industry forum jointly held by the US-Taiwan Business Council and Taiwan Defense Industry Development Association in the southern city of Kaohsiung.⁴⁹ Since July 2018, at least four US warships risked escalating tensions in the South China Sea, challenging China's military expansion in the Indo-Pacific, by passing through the Taiwan Strait during

43 Huang, "Xi Jinping's Taiwan Policy," 239-240.

44 "The World Factbook: Taiwan," Central Intelligence Agency, last modified March 16, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tw.html>.

45 Kuntić, "The Ominous Triangle," 250.

46 Ibid.

47 Lawrence Chung, "US, Taiwan military ties closer than ever as Donald Trump challenges Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2170449/U.S.-taiwan-military-ties-closer-ever-donald-trump-challenges>.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

freedom of navigation operations.⁵⁰ On July 7 and again on October 22, when the US Navy vessels were still in transit, Taiwan's military issued a statement about the destroyers' movements in the Taiwan Strait.⁵¹ Other than the competition between the US and China, US skepticism towards China encourages close US-Taiwan relations. Though the current American administration is reconciliatory and pragmatic, the US is still highly skeptical about China's intention to develop its military. The US has been particularly concerned about the lack of transparency in China's military programs.⁵² The Pentagon's annual reports on Chinese military power have constantly pointed out that China's emergence as a global military power poses serious threats to US interests.⁵³ The US Department of Defense was alarmed by China's investment in disruptive military technologies designed for nuclear, space, and cyber warfare. If accurate, those military developments would come with serious impacts on the balance of power in the region and beyond.⁵⁴ Washington has also noted that the long-range projection capabilities developed by the People's Liberation Army, PLA, has reinforced China's claims over disputed territories.⁵⁵ China is the second economic power in the world behind the US, and third in military and global firepower, behind the US and Russia.⁵⁶ Consequently, it is only logical for the US to build strong relations with Taiwan to defend its influence in the Asia-Pacific.

Conclusion

The involvement of the US with Taiwan through the TRA cannot be avoided since both countries share the same ideology. The TRA was adopted by the US to protect Taiwan from China's expansion, but it has become controversial due to China's claims over the region. Besides its intentions to maintain Taiwan's defenses, US involvement in Taiwan can be seen as an intervention to hinder the development of China in the Asia-Pacific. Although it can provide security for Taiwan, the TRA is also a form of US strategic ambiguity that justifies their situational policies for their own interest in the Asia-Pacific.

As long as the US continues to involve itself in Taiwanese security matters through the TRA, especially with its arms sales implications, it will be hard for China to unify Taiwan. In the end, the triangular relationship between US-Taiwan-China

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Francis Yi-hua Kan, "Cross-Taiwan Strait Relations after President Ma's Inauguration," *38th Taiwan-U.S. Conference on Contemporary China* (July 14–15, 2009): 21.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Global Firepower, "2019 Military Strength Ranking," last modified 2019, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

raises a dilemma. The option to end the arms sales to Taiwan will remove a major irritant in the US-China relationship and would increase trust and cooperation in bilateral relations. It could also lower the risk of armed conflict in East Asia. However, there is no guarantee that cutting security ties with Taiwan will transform the US-China relationship since their interests clash on many other issues, such as North Korea, maritime disputes in East Asia, and economic issues. The reputation of the US in the region is also at stake. Walking away from a commitment to Taiwan will send a troubling signal to other US allies, such as Japan and South Korea. Meanwhile, the reunification of China and Taiwan threatens US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.

The TRA creates a complex problem that is hard to resolve. This paper argues that the TRA needs to be reviewed in order to create a win-win solution for all parties. The US-China governments must review the points in the TRA which allow for US intervention. However, the Chinese government first needs to embrace Taiwan by promoting a peaceful approach rather than an aggressive approach. There is no denying that firm action is needed to maintain China's sovereignty over Taiwan. However, the important point to be considered is that any kind of aggressive approach only increases Taiwan's dependency on the US security umbrella. Thus, it will be hard for China to halt US intervention. For now, the only offer that can be given to Taiwan to resolve this matter is the "One Country Two Systems" policy even though it will not be easy to achieve since all parties have their own interests. Moreover, the "One Country Two Systems" policy is not effective when used as a long-term permanent policy, as in the case of Hong Kong. It may not be the most lucrative offer because of the unequal power distribution between China and Taiwan. However, it could reduce the possibility of China's invasion by force and Taiwan's independence. In the end, "One Country Two Systems" creates a conducive environment for all parties and its effects within the Asia-Pacific region.