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THE NATURE OF CHINA AND TAIWAN CONFLICTING RELATIONS

Resume

The relations between China and Taiwan are widely considered “as one of the most sensitive issues,” especially nowadays, in the era of U.S.-China strategic competition. For China, Taiwan’s reunification is one of the key security issues. Within the scope of *the new geopolitical dynamics in the existing world order, the goal of this paper is to address questions regarding China’s-Taiwan policy as well as the U.S.-Taiwan policy, providing a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the nature of China and Taiwan tense relations. Starting from the premise that the changing policies related to China, Taiwan and the U.S., are related with the emerging global power shift, as well as with the redefinition of national interests of all the parties involved, by using qualitative data analysis, in this paper we will try to rethink how do changes in U.S.-China relationship and U.S.-Taiwan partnership may be primary triggers of the Taiwan Strait conflict scenario.*

Keywords: China, Taiwan, cross-Strait relations, Xi Jinping, the U.S.-China rivalry, Asia Pacific, Indo-Pacific, global power shift

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INTRODUCTION

After the closure of the Cold War, nowadays the Taiwan's crisis can be regarded as the most relevant issue in the Asia-Pacific. One of the China's most important foreign policy goals is definitely oriented towards the cross-Strait unification or reunification between the mainland of China and Taiwan. Nonetheless, to understand the complex and controversial relationship between Taiwan and the mainland, it's necessary to describe ambiguity and vagueness of Taiwan's position in the realm of history and international law. Additionally, even though China and Taiwan are the two parties directly involved in the cross-Strait relations, Sino-American competition based on contradictory geopolitical objectives and sharp ideological divisions has imposed itself as a pivotal variable in this inherently triangular relationship (Hsieh 2020, 189). With that said, we will try to give the overall interpretation of historical Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan and the background of relationships within U.S.-China and U.S.-Taiwan policy.

Although in 1386 Pescadore Islands (Penghu) located in the Taiwan Strait were considered part of China, Taiwan, nonetheless, wasn't part of the Chinese Empire. During the 16th and 17th century, Spain, Japan and Dutch tried to take control over Taiwan. However, under the followers of the mainland Ming dynasty in 1661 China managed to establish its sovereignty over Taiwan. The mainland Qing dynasty captured Taiwan in 1683 and China continued exercising sovereignty by governing Taiwan from Beijing, until integrating the island as a Chinese province in 1887 (Charney and Prescott 2000, 453-455).

To exploit the resources and secure their trading interests, from 1830s Western powers started to exerted pressure over China. In that sense, because of the China's prohibition of the import and use of opium, and its unwillingness to open more ports than Canton to trade, British initiated the 1840-1842 Anglo-Chinese war, also known as the Opium War. Furthermore, after the Anglo-French invasion of Guangzhou (Canton), in 1858 China signed the Treaties of Tientsin, permitting simultaneously approach to the ports of Tamsui and Taiwan-fu to UK, the U.S., Second French and Russian Empire, testifying in that way its sovereignty over the island. The massacre of some Ryukyu castaways in 1874 generated a confrontation between China and Japan, which led to Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), when Taiwan and the Pescadore Islands were given up to Japan by Treaty of Shimonoseki. During the time of Japanese colonial

rule, the revolutionary league led by the nationalist Kuomintang, who was allied with the U.S. and the UK, and oriented towards the overthrow of the Qing Empire, founded in 1912 a political party of the Republic of China (ROC). After Japan's loss in the Second World War, by San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, and by the multilateral Treaty of Peace signed by the Republic of China and Japan in 1952, Japan gave up its claim to Taiwan and the Pescadore Islands. However, the Taiwanese sovereignty remained an ambiguous issue after 1951.

From 1928-1949 most of China, and consequently Taiwan, were governed by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and the **Nationalist Party**, or **Kuomintang**. The corrupted and overall dictatorial regime of Chiang, based on "nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood," was inherently opposed to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As a result, in 1928 erupted the Chinese Civil War and China was divided internally. Bearing in mind the fact that during the 1940s the ROC acted as the Chinese government, it was logical that in 1943, by the non-binding Cairo Declaration, and later the Potsdam Proclamation, the allied powers had given back Taiwan to the ROC.¹ Moreover, after Japan's defeat in 1945, the ROC regime ruled by the KMT party started exerting jurisdiction over Taiwan, declaring "Taiwan Province, Republic of China," and the Treaty of Shimonoseki as one of the "Unequal Treaties" enforced during "China's Century of Humiliation." Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the regime of the ROC was unstable and denoted as the "Warlord Era 1916-1928," or period when rule of the country relied upon opposing military cliques and various secessionist regional groups, emerged after the overthrow of the Qing Empire.² Precisely in that period, as leading and opposing political parties rose the KMT allied with the U.S., and the CCP allied with the Soviets. The Chinese Civil War, also known as the Chinese Communist Revolution, which was fought between the KMT and the CCP, was temporarily stopped after the Second Sino-Japanese war when the CCP defeated the KMT on the mainland (1949). Then, under Chiang's Kai-shek leadership, the Nationalists retreated their soldiers and citizens to Taiwan and established their capital in Taipei.

¹ The ROC was representing China in 1945 at the United Nations, as well as at the Security Council.

² The late Qing reforms (1850–1864) didn't originate unified, national military force. Due to that, regional armies and militias guided by provincial leaders characterized military-civil authority (McCord 1993, 29, 39, 44).

Having gained control of mainland China in 1949, Mao Zedong and the CCP established the People's Republic of China (PRC), but the ROC had de facto maintained control over Taiwan and other peripheral islands. So, at the beginning of the 1950's, the ROC and the PRC stated its sovereignty over China and, therefore, over Taiwan as a part of the mainland. Consequently, the process of bringing Taiwan and China each under the rule of a different government resulted in establishment of the concept of "Two Chinas." Despite the fact that China was the first country to explore and invade Taiwan and that by 1894 and maybe even earlier in the 1660s China had asserted its sovereignty over the islands, it is difficult to resolve the question of Taiwanese independence after the Second World War.

This vagueness of Taiwan's status is rooted in international law. As an example, the Cairo Declaration (1943) promulgated by China, the UK and the U.S., stated in explicit terms that Chinese territories seized by Japan, like adjacent Manchuria, Taiwan, and the Pescadores, should be reintegrated into China or given back to the ROC as the only legitimate Chinese regime at that time. However, although the Cairo Declaration officially suspended the sovereignty of Japan based on the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, the document by itself wasn't legally binding instrument per se. In the same way, the Potsdam Proclamation (1945) issued by the U.S., the UK and China, wasn't a treaty that could formally settle the issue of sovereignty over the islands. On the contrary, even though the multilateral Treaty of Peace signed by Allied Powers with Japan (1951) was legally binding and thus effectively transferred Japanese sovereignty over Taiwan and the Pescadores, China wasn't included in the Treaty, neither through the ROC nor the PRC. Hence, there wasn't any legal entity to inherit Taiwan and again the issue of sovereignty over Taiwan remained unresolved (Charney and Prescott 2000, 458-459).

Nonetheless, rejecting "Two Chinas" concept and replacing it with the "One China" as the only one acceptable, and with the aim to officially acknowledge China's legitimate sovereignty over Taiwan, the PRC started a diplomatic fight with the ROC. By assuming the position in the UN in 1971, the PRC fulfilled its goal and expelled the ROC from that position.³ After its loss in the Chinese civil war (1946-1949), the ROC government fled to Taiwan where the Nationalists stayed in power

³ In certain way this was awkward because the ROC still ruled Taiwan but didn't enjoy the membership in the UN which had become one of the essential conditions of statehood. Despite its limited recognition as a sovereign state, but due to its previous

throughout the 1990s, exercising practically all legislative, executive and judicial power. Till the closure of the 20th century Taiwan had already experienced several important cycles of economic, cultural and socio-political transformations. Simultaneously, Taiwan's insistence on maintaining its sovereign status had deepened division between Taiwan and mainland China. Besides, this situation significantly aggravated due to the half-century of Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945) during which were established social and economic preconditions for the development of a distinctly Taiwanese national sentiment.

However, in 1945 the Taiwan independence movement wasn't still active, so the KMT was initially welcomed. Nonetheless, by inaugurating a military regime oriented towards the systematic exploitation of the natives, the KMT rule resulted much more dictatorial than the Japanese. Thus, the Chinese Nationalist regime provoked growing dissatisfaction among the native population. Furthermore, the KMT refusal to recognize Taiwan as an equal part of the Chinese nation provoked the bloody revolt in 1947 which resulted in the extermination of the clandestine communist movement in the early 1950s and émigré regime. Being unable to identify with the mainlanders, the majority of disillusioned populace developed "cultural nationalism," favoring the establishment of an independent Formosan state over the re-imposition of Chinese national government (Meisner 1963, 97-99, 102-103).

Overall, distinctive nature of interpretations based in the realm of an international legal analysis of the peace treaties after World War II caused in 1951 disagreement between the Allied powers about the legitimate role of the PRC or the ROC as Chinese control of Taiwan. In this context, the U.S. President Truman affirmed that by the Cairo and the Potsdam declaration, Taiwan was given to Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the Korean War (1950-1953), Truman stressed an international aspect of Taiwan's issue, and thus the necessity of "the restoration of security in the Pacific before the determination of the future status of Formosa" (Charny and Prescott 2000, 458-459, 461). Anyhow, after the withdrawal of Taipei in 1971 from the UN, among many countries that had cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, in 1979 the U.S. also restrained official relationship with Taipei in favor of Beijing. Previously, the U.S. President Jimmy Carter had accepted the PRC's demands like "the termination of formal diplomatic relations with

legitimate government of China, the ROC managed to maintain high level of is unofficial recognition.

the ROC, the abrogation of the 1954 US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty and removal of all U.S. troops from Taiwan” (Van Vranken Hickey 2015, 253). Nonetheless, with the aim to “unofficially” maintain the relations with Taipei, in 1979 the Carter Administration proposed to Congress the Taiwan Enabling Act (TEA) which was afterwards signed into law. Briefly, the TEA defines U.S. policy on Taiwan based on the promotion of economic, political, and cultural cooperation and security alliance.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the ROC’s transition to a Multi-party system was followed by political liberalization and thus democratization, which enabled the independence-oriented parties to gain majority control over Taiwan and the growth of Taiwan’s national identity.⁴ Moreover, the KMT government experienced gradational shift from “militarism to developmentalism, and “Taiwan became a major international export platform, first for labor-intensive commodities like footwear, textiles and toys, and later for technology-intensive computers and machinery” (Ho 2010, 3-4). In this light, dissidents from the KMT secretly funded in 1986 the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Being the first legal opposition party, DPP became the governing party in the 1990s. With the Chen Shui-bian’s victory in 2000, the Nationalists’ representative, Lien Chan was defeated. Although in 2001 compared with the DPP the Nationalist Party lost both its legislative primacy as well as its plurality of seats, in 2004 the Nationalists recovered their legislative control, and in 2008 they defeated the DPP. To overcome Taiwan’s deeply entrenched differences with China, in next legislative elections the party outlined the so-called policy of Three Nots based on the principles of “not unification, not independence and not military confrontation.” However, despite growing economic and intensifying cultural ties in cross-Strait relations at the beginning of the 21st century, the central political dispute over China-Taiwan relations remains. In short, for China, the ROC ceased existing in 1949, namely when the PRC was proclaimed, and Taiwan has never gained the sovereignty. In other words, the concept of “One China” for Beijing relates to the PRC, while for Taipei it relates to the ROC (Chi, 2009). Bearing in mind China’s brisk military progress, as well as its refusal to renounce the use

⁴ The son of Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek, President Chiang Ching-Kuo in 1987 abolished martial law under which was banned the formation of political parties, except the KMT. Moreover, the abolition of the martial law enabled reunion of family members from the mainland with the ones from the island, as well as the cultural and economic cooperation.

of military intervention to “reunify” Taiwan, the Taiwan issue can be a potential source of armed conflict. Moreover, the cross-Strait relations transcend China and Taiwan because the U.S. also has its crucial role in this inherently triangular relationship due to the changing dynamics of U.S.-China relations.

THE FEATURES OF CHINA’S POLICY TOWARD TAIWAN

From the time of the peace treaties till today, if not *de jure*, the PRC *de facto* has exercised governmental control over historical China. Nonetheless, if not the *de jure*, we can distinguish *de facto* the governing authority of the PRC in Beijing, and the ROC’s governing authority on Taiwan, although with the support of the U.S. In fact, having developed economic and legislative self-rule despite Beijing, the government on Taiwan has imposed itself as an autonomous. Thus, since 1949 Taiwan have been ruled independently as a *de facto* separate state from mainland China.

Considering the island as its province, Beijing has always been determined to “unify” Taiwan with the mainland. Hence, during the 1950s there were two Strait crises or armed conflicts between the PRC and the ROC. Although China intended to annex Taiwan immediately after the closure of the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War (1950) and the U.S.-Taiwan mutual defense treaty (1954) made “One China” policy impossible. Besides, the atmosphere of the early Cold War aggravated the U.S. policy towards East Asia, and consequently the cross-Strait relations. Hence, with the outbreak of the Korean War, the American administration changed its initial policy of military nonintervention concerning Taiwan. To stop further escalation of the Korean conflict and show support for the Nationalists, the U.S. President Harry Truman dispatched the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan along with the economic aid. Moreover, due to the strategic geographical location of Taiwan, located between continental and maritime Asia, the U.S. perceived Taiwanese territory as suitable for the expansion of communism in the region, and although the U.S. administration didn’t officially

favor Taiwan against China, this rather intervention represented a radical change in American foreign policy, hence Washington directly intervened in the Taiwan Strait for the first time. Although the Chinese communists were frustrated by the American policy, instead to Taiwan they dispatched their troops to the northeast border with Korea. Shortly after the inauguration of President Dwight Eisenhower in 1953 and the end of the Korean War, the U.S. withdrew the naval blockade of Taiwan and changed its strategy of containment by converting Taiwan into a U.S. ally in the Cold War.

The control over some thirty offshore islands just off the central coast of the mainland, generated the first Taiwan Strait crisis (1954–1955). Although Jinmen (Quemoy), Mazu (Matsu), Dachen (Tachen), and several other clusters of small offshore islands were under the control of the Nationalists, legally they were part of Chinese territory. When the Nationalists fled from the mainland to Taiwan in 1949, they maintained control of the offshore islands to use them as “staging areas.” Although Jinmen, Mazu, and other islands were far from Taiwan, hence of debatable strategic value for its defense, since 1949 the control over the offshore islands occasionally caused clashes between the Communists and Nationalists.

By the start of the 1954 crisis, encouraged with the U.S. help, Chiang Kai-shek had made of the offshore islands strategic outposts. To prepare for the future invasion of the mainland, the Nationalists built fortifications and sent their soldiers to the islands. Only in Jinmen there were more than fifty thousand Nationalist soldiers. At the same time, the U.S. was explicitly against the Chinese Communists (Chang, 1988: 98-100). By supporting Taiwan with economic and military aids, the U.S. became Taiwan’s “security guarantor.” The conclusion of the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty in the middle of crisis enabled the development of Taiwan’s economy and defense.⁵ In cooperation with the U.S. on joint intelligence gathering and use of military aviation equipped with photo-reconnaissance missions over the mainland, the offshore

⁵ The Mutual Defense Treaty also contained a secret agreement from Chiang Kai-shek not to take offensive actions against the mainland without explicit U.S. consent. This shed new light on the cross-strait policy on Taiwan.

islands in Chinese vicinity like Jinmen and Mazu were transformed by the government in Taipei into fortifications for more than 100.000 soldiers (Wang 2013, 95).⁶

Before occupying the neighboring Dachen islands, in September 1954 the Communists started shelling Jinmen and Matsu. In spite of the U.S. opposition to any vindictive activities of the Communists, the outbreak of the Crisis for Mao was also the possibility to “liberate Taiwan” by unifying the Chinese people against foreign powers, so he commanded the bombing. After the Formosa Resolution in 1955, Chinese stopped bombing Jinmen and Matsu. Although between 1956 and 1957 Mao opted for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, the Nationalists troops stayed on the islands and in 1958 tension increased again in the Taiwan Straits. Challenged by the American interference in China’s affairs with Taiwan and motivated by his plan for the Great Leap Forward, in 1958 Mao again initiated the bombing of Jinmen and Mazu, as well as the second Taiwan Strait crisis. In response, the President Eisenhower sent U.S. forces and a large naval contingent to the Taiwan. To strengthen the allegiance of the U.S. to the defense of Taiwan, Eisenhower didn’t mind the escalation of conflict in Sino-U.S. relations, and publicly even threatened to use nuclear weapons if the Communists launched a major assault (Huei 2019). Lastly, after the conciliatory gesture of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (Chou Enlai) who stated that “the Chinese people are friendly to the American people” China opted for a diplomacy instead of war and the bombing of Jinmen and Mazu soon terminated (Chang 1988, 117).⁷

In the early 1970s, China tried to improve relationship with the U.S. by practicing Ping Pong Diplomacy (Eckstein 1993). In that context, for Deng Xiaoping, also known as the “architect of modern China,” the development of cross-Strait economic ties with Taiwan as a “natural economic partner” was the best way for “peaceful

⁶ In the upcoming years, the U.S. started more explicitly to support the Nationalists government in Taiwan. For example, with the aim of preventing the spread of communism in the Asia-Pacific region, in 1954 the U.S. and its allies like France, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines, created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).

⁷ In response to Washington’s threats, in 1955 China launched its own nuclear program (Chang 1988, 121-122).

reunification” under the framework “One Country, Two Systems.” In that context, for Deng Xiaoping, also known as the “architect of modern China,” the development of cross-Strait economic ties with Taiwan as a “natural economic partner” was the best way for “peaceful reunification” under the framework “One Country, Two Systems.” At the same time, Deng Xiaoping didn’t exclude the use of force from Beijing’s options (Blackwill and Zelikow 2012, 25).

With the aim of developing diplomatic ties between China and the U.S., in 1972 President Richard Nixon was the first U.S. president who went to Beijing and met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. On that occasion it was signed the Shanghai Communiqué by which the U.S. expressed its preparedness for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, confirming the “One China” principle, as well as the U.S. willingness to withdraw its forces and military installations from Taiwan. The stabilization of U.S.-China diplomatic relations was formally confirmed in 1978 by their second joint communiqué. Although the U.S. acknowledged the “One China” principle and the PRC’s government, it also acknowledged its disposition to “unofficially” maintain other relations with Taipei through the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). In that sense, despite the annulment of the 1954 U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty, the American administration signed in 1979 the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) that provided both countries with “unofficial” consulate offices, Taiwan with its “defensive capability” based on arms sales determined by the American Congress in security crisis of any kind, but without any commitment of the U.S. to Taiwan’s defense. Hence, this protective alliance was inherently based on the principle of “strategic ambiguity” instead on the prior Nixon’s concept of “constructive ambiguity.”

To mitigate rising Sino-U.S. tensions generated by the TRA, the U.S. and China endorsed another joint communiqué in 1982. Despite U.S. promise to limit arms sales to Taiwan, the American government has continued to provide Taiwan with weapons and military services.⁸ Even though the KMT and the CCP came to

⁸ Since 1979, American military aid to Taiwan has enlarged notably. In the 1990s,

“the 1992 Consensus” by confirming there was “One China,” both parties have differently interpreted its content.⁹ For the first time in 1995 the White House granted an entry visa to the Taiwan’s President Lee Teng-hui, which Beijing interpreted as a major provocation. So, before Taiwan’s first presidential election in 1996, cross-Strait relations deteriorated significantly and China launched missiles towards Taiwan. As a response to this, the U.S. sent its aircraft carrier groups through the Taiwan Strait. However, the cross-Strait relations shift occurred in 2004, when for the first time Beijing officially set as its priority to block Taiwan’s *de jure* independence (PRC Embassy in the United States, 2004). This policy was reinforced in 2005 by the Anti-Secession Law, which approved China’s use of “non-peaceful means” in case of radicalization of Taiwan’s separatist movement and absence of other means. However, in that moment any further movement towards Taiwan’s independence didn’t actually align with the Chinese or American interests, so equally the Bush and Obama administrations adopted the principle of “peaceful resolution”, but not necessarily reunification, while China’s efforts shifted from “proreunification” to “anti-independence.” This contemporary consent regarding the Taiwan issue enabled improvement of relations between Taiwan and Beijing since 2008. After the electoral victory of the Taiwan’s President Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT’s regained power over the Taiwan government. Relying on “the 1992 Consensus,” the KMT committed not to put more pressure on Taiwanese independence. Reciprocally, China promised to abstain from the intimidation or use of military force. This context enabled stability of cross-Strait relations and the establishment of the “three links,” or introduction of direct flights, postal and shipping services to the Taiwan Strait, and consequently of economic, social, and political cooperation among Taiwan and

the U.S. and Taiwan have already held meetings in order to manage and coordinate *national security issues*.

⁹ For the PRC, “the 1992 Consensus” means that “the two sides of the Strait belong to one China, and therefore both sides will jointly seek national reunification,” while for the KMT it means “one China” with the ROC as the leading party.

mainland China.¹⁰ Additionally, the Ma Ying-jeou's administration promoted a "diplomatic truce," so conflicts between China and Taiwan over international recognition significantly diminished.

When in 2012 Xi Jinping took up the post of president, China's focus was on economic prosperity and promotion of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative.¹¹ Trying not to challenge U.S. supremacy, but also accomplish the reunification goal, Xi Jinping maintained the policy of the status quo regarding Taiwan. With this background, Xi Jinping's policy continued "the approach of six proposals for peaceful development" of Taiwan issue adopted by Hu Jintao and prioritized the impediment of Taiwan's de jure independence instead the reunification.¹² Nonetheless, in 2013 Xi Jinping emphasized that a political solution to cross-Strait relations could not be postponed forever and thus stressed the prevalence of the strategic framework of the "one-China principle" in cross-Strait relations.¹³ In comparison with his earlier talks on the Taiwan issue, Xi Jinping again in 2014 emphasized the relevance of political trust between the mainland and the island based on "peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and overall interest of the Chinese nation." Likewise, he stressed the reunification model of "One Country, Two Systems" under which "no secessionist act would be tolerated." Furthermore, while striving to form a "new type of great-power relationship," Xi insisted on dissociating the issue of Taiwan's reunification from the Sino-American relationship (Huang 2017, 244-245).

With the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment, President Ma Ying-jeou's popularity eroded. So, after the loss of the KMT in 2014, the DPP (more pro-independence party) won the presidential election in 2016. After DPP's candidate Tsai Ing-wen election victory, the relatively harmonious PRC policy toward Taiwan changed

¹⁰ After the Chinese Civil War in 1949 or almost 60 years, direct transport and communication links between the two sides were established again.

¹¹ By the late 2000s, China became the second largest economy in the world.

¹² While Deng's policy was rooted in a "goal-fulfilling and national-interest oriented doctrine", Hu Jintao's strategy was "go global" and oriented towards "soft power diplomacy."

¹³ Xi's vision of national aggrandizement, presented in his "Chinese Dream," incorporates the "reunification" of the Taiwan Strait with the motherland.

significantly. Tsai insisted that “the two sides of the strait were two sovereign states” and she rejected “the 1992 Consensus.” While claiming to support “the status quo”, Tsai firmly advocated the “de-Chinaization” process, openly influencing the party members to “resist pressure from China” (Strong 2016). In response to Tsai’s separatist policy, China decided to cut official ties with Taiwan. To restrain the evolving trend of “national self-determination” and increasing secessionist sentiment pushed by the Tsai’s leadership, and simultaneously conserve the socio-economic cooperation between China and Taiwan and win over the Taiwanese, Beijing has adopted various accommodative approaches covering a wide political spectrum. Because of Tsai’s non-compliance with the “One-China” principle, China has adopted a “dual track Taiwan policy framework featuring ‘selective engagement.’” The “selective engagement policy” adopted by Beijing comprehends “a combination of containment and engagement measures,” which includes “a set of complementary dual-track approaches from two dimensions.” These dimensions refer to “confrontational measures in security, political and diplomatic fields,” with embracing “approaches on economic, social and cultural affairs,” as well as to “a combination of punitive measures against the Taiwan independence activists, with accommodative approaches to all the other politically non-pro-independence forces” (Qiang 2020, 535-536).

To secure China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and the reunification of Taiwan, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has never abstained from the use of force as an option. Therefore, the PLA underwent a comprehensive military reform in 2015, and in recent years has turned to modern military technology, employing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) to deter the interests of the U.S. in the West Pacific region.¹⁴ In support of

¹⁴ Opposing the Taiwan’s secessionist forces, the PLA has increased its military pressure on Taipei. For example, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) made for the first time in 2016 circling patrols around Taiwan. After that, for several times in 2017 and 2018 more complex aircraft formations of the PLA have organized “island encircling exercises.” In response, in 2017 Taipei adopted a new military strategy, and in 2018 under the Trump presidency the U.S. has issued licenses to sell its submarine technology and permit Taiwan to produce its own “diesel-electric submarines”, or “an offensive weapon. Moreover, In 2019, Tsai publicly suggested that Tokyo should share military intelligence with Taipei and the need for establishing security dialogue between Taiwan

“One-China” principle, after Tsai’s inauguration Beijing has also initiated its political and diplomatic struggle. In the period from 2009 to 2016 Taiwan participated in the World Health Assembly (WHA), and in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 2013. Nonetheless, since the DPP rejected the “One China” principle, influenced by Beijing, those international organizations stopped sending invitations to Taipei. Likewise, because of Beijing’s opposition, Taiwan’s international presence has been limited in various UN agencies and international NGOs. To isolate Taiwan internationally, China has also influenced many states to cut off their diplomatic relations with Taipei. As a result, Taiwan’s diplomatic allies have declined to 14 countries (Fukuda 2023). In the same manner, Beijing has cut off all official relations and contacts with Taiwan and coerced multinational companies, including airlines and hotel chains, to express their compliance with the “One-China” policy by referring to “Taiwan as a Chinese province.” In contrast to this, Beijing has preserved economic, social and cultural cooperation with Taiwan as the counterweight “for the turbulent cross-Strait relations.” In that sense, by promoting the principle of “cooperation for mutual benefits” during his speech in 2019, President Xi emphasized the need for equal treatment of Taiwanese compatriots (Qiang 2020, 541-542).

Despite China’s efforts to integrate Taiwan into its national orbit, while ramping up the pressure upon the Tsai Administration, the strained cross-Strait relations have worsened. Currently, the Taiwanese generally consider Beijing strives to dominate Taiwan by putting it under pressure to acknowledge the “One country, two systems” frameworks. By manipulating public opinion, Taiwan’s political parties have influenced today’s young generation that acts as the main promoter of Taiwan’s independence movement. Because of the unstable socio-economic environment that has emerged in Hong Kong since the reunification, for the Taiwanese Hong Kong demonstrates the collapse of “one country, two systems” policy. Additionally, the Taiwan authorities have categorized the “one country, two systems” policy as “insulting” and “harmful” (Ning 2019, 128). In addition, after her victory in Taiwan’s 2020 presidential election, Tsai Ing-wen emphasized that Taiwanese people have never accepted the ‘1992 Consensus’ “because the Beijing’s definition of the ‘1992 Consensus’ is ‘one China’ and ‘one country, two systems’” (Blackwill & Zelikow 2021, 27).

and Japan with the aim of opposing the “growing military threat’ from the mainland” (Qiang 2020, 539).

Furthermore, American government has continued undermining the “One-China” policy. Besides, Taiwan’s successful response to COVID-19 has benefited its international standing, and European countries have supported Taiwan in the international field. In that context, many states have criticized China’s “authorial ideals,” and rigid political allegiance to “One-China” principle (Mitić 2022, 34). Regardless, China has focused on asserting its “One-China” policy in the Middle East, South America, Africa, and other amicable countries of the Asia-Pacific region. After a spree of “special military exercises” conducted by the PLA in the vicinity of Taiwan in August 2022 to protest the U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s stopover in Taiwan, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that in comparison with the U.S. and its few followers, a vast majority of countries had supported China’s policy toward Taiwan. Likewise, during the meeting with Secretary-general of the United Nations António Guterres, Xi Jinping reaffirmed the importance of the “One-China” principle as “China’s red line that shouldn’t be crossed” (Fukuda 2023).

Moreover, the immediate publication of China’s white paper regarding the Taiwan question during the “new era” has provoked far-reaching political implications for cross-strait relations. Specifically, the new paper determines “peaceful reunification as the first choice,” while reinforcing that if Taiwan’s military resists any China’s attempt to reunify the island, military confrontation would be unavoidable. In comparison with earlier versions (1993 and 2000), the latest white paper doesn’t include the possibility of coexistence between socialism and capitalism in post-unification reality and advocates “Xi Jinping’s thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the New Era” as prevailing ideology. In addition, for the first time, the 2022 white paper also mentions the possibility of “diplomatic space” and international participation of Taiwan. Nevertheless, the paper for the first time also states that Taiwan, if reunified with the mainland, wouldn’t be allowed to maintain its armed forces.

U.S.-TAIWAN POLICY AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF AMERICAN STRATEGY FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC

Nowadays, the Sino-American relations are closer to a historic breakdown than they have ever been before. Even though at various times the U.S. has officially stated its political neutrality on the Taiwan issue,

in accordance with its national interests, Washington has influenced political developments of its allies and its opponents. In that sense, even though during the course of Obama's presidency the stability of cross-strait ties, and the preservation of "the status quo" endured, Obama's policy was conditioned by "the strategic ambiguity framework," as part of the U.S.-Taiwan relationship from the beginning of the Cold War (Chen 2016, 758-759).

Given Taiwan's significance in Sino-American relations, in the face of China's extraordinary rise as an emerging global power, the U.S. policymakers have reappraised "the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region." In that sense, "the U.S. strategic shift toward Asia-Pacific occurred during Obama's presidency when the U. S. aimed to reaffirm its influence in Asia-Pacific, retake its economic supremacy, advance democracy and the security order in the region" (Lai 2013, 12).

Beijing's increasingly assertive foreign policy and maritime advance, especially under Xi Jinping's government, has marked China's actions regarding its maritime and territorial disputes in the East and South China Sea by increasing nationalist sentiment, militarization and thus expansionism.¹⁵ In that context, the traditional U.S.-Taiwan policy of "strategic ambiguity" has been replaced by the policy of maximum pressure. Thus, the issue of cross-strait relations, as inherently an internal Chinese problem has become a major problem in Sino-American relations. Xi Jinping's government is determined to reunite Taiwan, establish China's "sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific," and reshape the global governance order in accordance with its strategic interests (Becley & Brands 2021, 1). In that sense, even though the Taiwan issue is basically of political nature, because of its military dimension it also brings the possibility of further escalation and clash of two superpowers. At the other side, as the most economically prosperous region, the Indo-Pacific will probably determine the 21st-century world order. Therefore, the Sino-American competition is deeply conditioned by opposing geopolitical interests.

In line with this, in the framework of the new U.S. National Security Policy (NSP), China is marked as a "strategic rival that compromises American security and prosperity." Hence, try fighting China's rise and its political influence over the countries along the Indian and Pacific oceans the U.S. has adopted a relatively new maritime-related strategy which encompasses a "free and open Indo-Pacific and "a new alliance of democracies" (Hu & Meng 2020).

¹⁵ For China's maritime disputes in South China Seas see (Jevtić et al. 2018, 34).

Formally, U.S. President Donald Trump revealed the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) in 2017. The strategy comprehends “economic integration and defense cooperation” with Indo-Pacific region countries and is developed by “the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad).” The strategy’s goal is to undermine the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), maintain U.S. predominance in the region, bolster and widen the American partnership network, and sabotage China’s relationships with states bordering the Indian and Pacific ocean (Kolev 2019, 100). Striving to contain China, in 2018 the U.S. passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) into law, and following its guidance, Pentagon in 2019 published the first Indo-Pacific Strategy Report named “Preparedness, Partnership and Promoting a Networked Region” (Shicun & Colombage 2019). In 2021, Biden administration officially launched its U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy based on five primary objectives: “a free and open Indo-Pacific, building connections within and beyond the region, regional prosperity, bolstering security and, building resilience.” To restore the U.S. hegemony in the region and “Bring Back Better World (B3W),” apart from reviving Quad, the U.S. IPS also includes a “trilateral security pact between the United Kingdom and Australia,” or (AUKUS), as well as the through geo-economic initiatives participation of G7 countries (Mufassir 2022).

As stated in the policy brief based on the “American strategy for the Indo-Pacific in an age of U.S.-China competition,” China’s actions that subvert U.S. “vital interests” refer to the “use of coercion – whether in the form of gray-zone tactics, political interference, economic pressure, or military force – to weaken the U.S. alliance system in Asia, press unilateral territorial claims, and settle international disputes with disregard to international law.” In that context, Beijing erodes “democratic resilience in the region” by trying to unilaterally reunite Taiwan with the Chinese mainland (Yeo 2022).

Notably, as a strategic location near China, “Taiwan has high strategic value in implementing the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy”¹⁶. Given the context, it is understandable recent U.S. militarization of Taiwan is

¹⁶ Chinese territorial expansion is restrained by the group of its neighboring islands, referred to as the first island chain, which Taiwan is a part of along with the Philippines and a few other island chains. To restrain China’s and the Soviet Union’s maritime pretensions, in the 1940s the U.S. coined the security concept of “Island Chain Strategy.” Although China has established a solid presence by “its grey zone operations in the first island chain,” without absorbing Taiwan into the mainland, China can’t seize the first island chain (Espena & Bomping 2020).

a countermeasure to China's A2/AD system.¹⁷ Moreover, by deepening ties with Taiwan, the U.S. has secured its partnership with Taiwan's Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) (Gyu 2021, 2).¹⁸

Simply put, absorbing Taiwan into the mainland is one of the most important China's foreign policy goal. Hence, to achieve this goal, China invests one-third of its defense budget. In sum, if China reunified Taiwan, it would not only obtain access to its semiconductor industry, dozens of ships, hundreds of rocket launchers, fighter aircrafts, and billions of dollars, but could also use island as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" and control the flow of any potential conflict by projecting military power into the western Pacific, and over many of the other islands in the region, like Japan, Australia, South Korea and the Philippines, and other U.S. allies in East Asia (Beckley & Brands 2021. 4).

Under both the Trump and Biden administrations, Washington has been trying to "contain" China by supporting Taiwanese independence movement. On the other hand, to emphasize its determination to faith against "Taiwan's de jure independence," Beijing has reacted by demonstrating its readiness to go to war by developing and deploying new weapons systems and conducting military exercises near Taiwan.¹⁹ In that sense, by opposing Chinese national "core interests" and preventing Taiwan-PRC political unification, the U.S. is actually implementing "danger-zone strategy" and trying to "throw Beijing off-balance" (Beckley

¹⁷ During the Trump administration, the U.S. support for Taiwan raised significantly. Under Trump's presidency was finalized the sale of sixty-six F-16s to Taiwan, and private and public visits between the U.S. officials and the Taiwanese officials at all levels intensified, as well as the number of naval transits through the Taiwan Strait. Likewise, Trump signed the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act, facilitating the exchange of senior military officers and the 2020 Taiwan Assurance Act, promoting regular arms sales to Taiwan. The Biden administration has continued Trump's policy and has contributed to further militarization of the island by "reaffirming the 'longstanding commitments' of the United States, to 'continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability'" (Blackwill & Zelikow 2021, 19-20).

¹⁸ Taiwanese firms account for 60 percent of the global chip making industry. As semiconductors represent the most critical technology necessary for all electronics, from phones, computers, cars and fighter jets, the U.S. has strategically focused on transferring the global semiconductor supply chains away from China. In 2023, TSMC announced opening a new 5-nanometer chip plant in Arizona, and in 2024 another chip factory producing 3-nanometer chips.

¹⁹ Since the beginning of the 2000s, China has significantly modernized its force by acquiring advanced weapons ranging from cruise missiles to long-range stealth aircraft, and improving its navy.

& Brands 2021, 4). However, we must bear in mind that “Asian-Pacific security affairs rely generally upon arm foundation of formal and informal bilateral agreements, supplemented by a variety of embryonic multilateral arrangements” (Katzenstein & Okawara 2001, 15). So, even though the “historic dominance” of the U.S. in the Pacific is seemingly declining, due to the enduring alliances between Japan, Australia, India and South Korea and the U.S., “China still may not have the power to radically alter the nature of the international system in East Asia” (Wong 2021). Therefore, we consider that the “Second Cold War with China” would not only endanger the stability of the whole Asia-Pacific region, but would also lead to a new “global Cold War” (Blackwill & Zelikow 2021, 47).

CONCLUSION

In the modern age, the U.S.-China relationship remains a complicated one. All in all, the current U.S.-Taiwan relationship based on a mixture of informal and formal robust diplomatic ties, ambiguous assurances, and substantial arms sales on credit, has provoked sharp deterioration in cross-Strait relations. Therefore, apart from presenting China-Taiwan relations and theoretical nuances of the “One China” policy, this article’s findings deliver key insights providing the understanding of cross-Strait dynamics and complex triangular nature of China-Taiwan-United States relations.

The new *U.S. strategic framework for the Indo-Pacific* created during the Trump administration dominates Biden administration’s policy too.²⁰ In that sense, the actual U.S.-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific surely transcends Obama’s “rebalancing to Asia” strategy. To fight China’s global rise through Taiwan, the U.S. has undertaken military buildup in the Indo-Pacific region and more resilient security architecture based on diplomatic alliances and partnerships. Herein, Taiwan has become the issue of primary importance in Sino-American relations, and thus in international politics. Strengthening its alliances on the bases of joint interests, the U.S. will continue to pressure China. Nevertheless, a new Cold War wouldn’t be in the best interests of all countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Overall, we must be fully aware current and future events concerning the relations between China and Taiwan can be properly understood only when analyzed in the light of the U.S.-China power

²⁰ See also (Stefanović Štambuk, Popović 2022, 11).

shift. In that sense, the nature of the latest U.S.-Taiwan policy of maximum pressure should only be understood within the scope of U.S.-China rivalry. Thus, we strongly believe that future framework of cross-Strait development should rely on the “model of national modernization jointly constructed by both sides of the Strait” instead on the U.S.-China-Taiwan framework.

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ПРИРОДА КОНФЛИКТНИХ ОДНОСА КИНЕ И ТАЈВАНА

Сажетак

Односи између Кине и Тајвана сматрају се једним од најосетљивијих питања, посебно данас, у ери стратешког надметања између САД-а и Кине. За Кину је питање Тајвана једно од кључних безбедносних питања. У оквиру нове геополитичке динамике у постојећем светском поретку, циљ овог рада је да путем преиспитивања кинеско-тајванске, као и америчко-тајванске политике, пружи свеобухватан теоријски оквир за разумевање конфликтне природе кинеско-тајванског односа. Полазећи од претпоставке да су промене политике у односу на Кину, Тајван и Сједињене Америчке Државе повезане са појавом глобалне промене моћи, као и са редефинисањем националних интереса свих укључених страна, коришћењем квалитативне анализе података, у овом раду ћемо покушати да преиспитамо како промене у америчко-кинеским и америчко-тајванским односима могу да делују као примарни покретачи конфликта у Тајванском мореузу.

Кључне речи: Кина, Тајван, односи у Тајванском мореузу, Си Ђинпинг, америчко-кинеско ривалство, Азијски Пацифик, Индо-Пацифик, глобална промена моћи