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US-CHINA CONFLICT OVER TAIWAN AND THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ORDER



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



US-CHINA CONFLICT OVER TAIWAN AND THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ORDER

INTRODUCTION

Taking a quick historical glance at the issue of Taiwan, we find out that this island has experienced very complicated and instable political situation and is facing an uncertain fate. After the defeat of the Chinese Empire by Japan in the late 19th century, the island was controlled by Japanese for about half a century (1895-1945) until the end of World War II. But the current crisis in Taiwan came to existence in 1949 following the civil wars in China between the nationalist and the communists, and as the Communists won the war, the forces of ruling nationalist parties and their leaders fled to the island of Taiwan. This retreat caused China to be divided into two countries, the "People's Republic of China" under the communist rule dominating the mainland, and the "Republic of China" ruling Taiwan and its small dependent islands.

At the beginning of the Cold War, the Republic of China (Taiwan's official name) was recognized as the only legitimate government of China by many western countries. It was also one of the founding members of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council up until 1971. However, with the recognition of the People's Republic of China, China's seat in the United Nations was given to the newly recognized country. The US, as Taiwan's major supporter, interrupted its relations with Taiwan in 1979 and accepted the One China principle. The People's Republic of China has put the principle of "One China" as its most important strategy at the top of Taiwan's agenda, and has even proposed the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" in order to achieve its national interest and to convince the Taiwanese authorities. Currently, only thirteen foreign countries recognize Taiwan as an independent country, as China continues to exert diplomatic pressure on the other countries to refrain from recognizing Taiwan or any other action that would imply recognition of Taiwan as an independent country.



In view of this short historical background, the US-China conflict over Taiwan has 70-year-old history, but the new round of tensions resumed when Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States of America, entered Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, on a diplomatic trip on August 2, 2022 despite Beijing's warnings. Before this trip, the Chinese president had warned his American counterpart in a telephone conversation not to play with the fire concerning Taiwan. Nancy Pelosi is the highest US official to visit Taiwan since 1997. China considered this trip as a provocation and started military maneuvers around the island of Taiwan, following which Taiwan's Ministry of Defense said that China is preparing to attack the island of Taiwan.

Considering the impact of the escalation of tensions between US and China and its regional and international effects over Taiwan, this article deals with the following topics: What is the root cause of the conflict between China and Taiwan? Will the United States stand with Taiwan? If China attacks Taiwan, will the new world order collapse? And at the end, will Afghanistan be a field of competition or an abandoned land in this game?

THE MAIN ROOT OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHINA AND TAIWAN

Historically, the island of Taiwan has been a part of China for the past few centuries. After the end of the Spanish and Dutch occupation of the island, the Manchu emperors annexed Taiwan to their empire in 1683 and turned it into one of the provinces of China. Many Chinese immigrated to Taiwan after that. However, after China's defeat in the 1895 war against Japan, Taiwan became one of Japan's colonies. Japan controlled Taiwan until the end of World War II, but it was decided once again at the Cairo Conference in 1943 that Taiwan and other occupied areas should be returned to China. Therefore, Japan officially surrendered Taiwan to the central government of the Republic of China on October 25, 1945.

In terms of China's internal changes, when the island was occupied by Japan, there was a revolution in China against the emperor of this country in 1911, which led to his overthrow and the establishment of the "Republic of China". The Republic of China ruled the country until 1949, while in recent years, it also included the island of Taiwan. The root of the Taiwan crisis goes back to this year (1949) at the same time as the establishment of the "People's Republic of China" by Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. The Kuomintang (KMT)



nationalists, led by the overthrown leader Chiang Kai-shek, fled to the island of Taiwan, where they formed a government and named it the "Republic of China". The government of the Republic of China and the ruling National Party still believe that they are the real representatives of the mainland of China and the communist government of the People's Republic of China has no legitimacy.

A fundamental issue at the root of the conflict between China and Taiwan is the role of the US in this conflict. General Chiang Kai-shek established the government of National China after the defeat in the civil war and fleeing to this island in 1949, with the support of US. The US government guaranteed the existence of National China against Communist China. The Chinese national government claimed ownership of the whole China and with the support of the United States, it had taken over the seat of China in the United Nations. But in 1971, the then US president Richard Nixon traveled to China and the outcome of the trip was that the US reconsidered its relations with the great country of China and paved the ground for the country's membership in the United Nations and the expulsion of Taiwan. Taiwan gradually lost US's support to the point that in 1979, the United States stopped its relations with Taiwan, and shortly after, Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, announced that Taiwan is a part of China and belongs to this country. Therefore, a severe political crisis reigned over Taiwanese society and any kind of activity and trade with Taiwan was completely banned.

Currently, the role of the US in Taiwan conflict is the main reason for the escalation of tensions between China and Taiwan because it is believed that the policy of supporting Taiwan is very popular in the public discourse and among members of the two main parties in the US, where Mrs. Pelosi is also one of the senior figures. It is the Democratic Party that has long been known as a staunch critic of China's leadership. At the same time, there are also differences of opinion within Taiwan regarding Taiwan's foreign policy. The ruling Democratic Party (DPP) wants the US in its foreign policy, while the Nationalists of Taiwan (KMT) are of the opinion that the US will not help Taiwan, and for this reason, the deputy of this party decided to visit China after the visit of the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States.



WILL THE UNITED STATES STAND WITH TAIWAN?

US's policy towards Taiwan is "ambiguous" from the beginning. On one hand, it adheres to the "One China" policy, in which Taiwan is considered a part of China, and on the other hand, it emphasizes that the political and democratic structure of Taiwan and the governance of this autonomous island should not be threatened or interfered in by Beijing. At the same time, although the United States calls its relations with Taiwan "strong and informal", it promotes formal diplomatic relations through China.

In recent years, former US President Donald Trump authorized the sale of a large arms shipment to Taiwan in 2017. Only one year after that, a law was passed in the US, which aimed to strengthen Washington's relations with Taiwan. Chinese President Xi Jinping warned in 2019 that he would use force to retake Taiwan. He also warned the country to avoid "playing with the fire" in response to the sale of arms to Taiwan by the United States.

Joe Biden, the current US president, also said in October 2021 that his country is ready to defend Taiwan militarily in case of an attack by China. He further stated that China is playing with "danger" in the dispute over Taiwan. This comment by Biden was not the same as the "strategy of ambiguity", which is Washington's old policy towards Taiwan. Despite this, the White House emphasized after Joe Biden's comments that Washington's policy on Taiwan has not changed.

After these developments, the president of Taiwan spoke for the first time since 1979 about the presence of US troops on the territory of this island. The issue of Taiwan, which some people refer to as a trading card, may not be well calculated. Taiwan is China's red line, and the Americans know this, but they have always used this issue to justify their presence in the Pacific region. As a threatening component, align some countries including Japan, South Korea and Australia. While the Americans know and do not have the capacity to enter a world war, they have always had this issue as a central point in their agenda.

After Russia's attack on Ukraine and the widespread support of the United States and the West for Ukraine against Russia, the China-Taiwan conflict also received the attention of the world, and there were even rumors that after Russia's attack on Ukraine, China might also attack Taiwan while there are similarities and differences between Taiwan and Ukraine.

The similarities can be divided into three categories:



First: There is a huge gap in military power between Taiwan and China, as it is between Ukraine and Russia, and this gap is getting bigger every year.

Second: Both Ukraine and Taiwan do not have official military allies. And both have to deal with threats or attacks on their own.

Third: Since Russia and China are both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and have the right of veto, the mediation of the United Nations in this conflict cannot be trusted.

On the other hand, the differences between Ukraine and Taiwan can be categorized in the following three points:

First: The situation around Taiwan is more unstable and the country has no allies, but it has a special law since 1979 that requires the United States to provide Taiwan with military equipment that is intended to "enable Taiwan to maintain the capacity of defending self-reliance." This law serves as a form of compensation for America's reluctance to say outright that it will "defend" Taiwan if it is attacked.

Second: In response to the Russia-Ukraine war, the United States announced at the very beginning that it would not deploy its forces to defend Ukraine. But when it comes to Taiwan, the United States has adopted a policy of strategic ambiguity. It is still unclear whether the United States will intervene with military action in the crisis that threatens Taiwan. As the United States prefers to leave its position unclear on how to respond to an attack on Taiwan, China will be more thoughtful about military adventurism. This is because China's rulers must consider the possibility of US military intervention. At the same time, US ambiguity has forced Taiwan to consider the possibility of US military intervention. The United States has maintained its multi-faceted policy on China and Taiwan for several decades.

Third: The most important difference between Ukraine and Taiwan is that the latter is an independent country in the world system, while the former is not. These differences strongly suggest that it is time for the United States to revise its approach. The perspective of the United States is not a clear one, although the Americans have always used the war element in order to maintain internal cohesion, but we are at a point in international developments where the old version is no longer effective, and in the case of Ukraine, it has been proven that the United States continues and wants the war in order to break the stature of Russia and China, not at the



cost of the victory of Ukraine and Taiwan. China also acts powerfully like Russia, and America is not capable to desirably manage the war in Ukraine and Taiwan.

IF CHINA ATTACKS TAIWAN, WILL THE NEW WORLD ORDER COLLAPSE?

America has turned two cases, which are Russia's war against Ukraine and China's sovereignty over Taiwan, into two elements of disobedience to the world order. In two geographic areas, America made such a pact with two world-regional powers: "NATO's non-advance towards Eastern Europe" in 1990 with Moscow, and "One China Policy" in 1979 with Beijing. Contrary to Washington's commitment, NATO reached the gates of Russia. Now the eastern gate of Russia is completely under the control of the NATO army. The second case has also collapsed implicitly, but it has not been officially announced yet. The United States recognized the One China policy in 1979 under three official and joint declarations with Beijing and severed its relations with Taiwan. The principle of One China means that the island of Taiwan is part of the main territory of China and is under the sovereignty of Beijing. America's closeness with Beijing at that time was due to the deepening of the gap between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is why, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States abandoned its commitments to the "One China" principle and resumed its relations with Taiwan. In the latter case, China believes that Pelosi's visit to Taiwan has had a strong impact on the political foundation of US-China relations and severely violates China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but in general, the tension between China and Taiwan does not seem like a full-scale war. Observers believe that a full-scale war may not be in China's favor in the current situation, and the recent maneuvers are an internal honor-keeping maneuver to balance the country's anger over Pelosi's visit and the failure to prevent its implementation.

According to the theories of international order and taking into account the approach of New Realists to the power and structure of the international system, the competition between great powers is a permanent phenomenon, and this is in a form of balance of power (defensive realism) or gaining a hegemonic position (offensive realism) displays. Since the behavior and interests of big powers cannot be determined and controlled by institutions, therefore, the entry of China and US into the power game in Asia-Pacific has changed the nature of the game from regional to international level, and therefore the existing regional mechanisms, despite the



comprehensiveness of some of them, cannot help to settle the competition between these two powers. Secondly, the competition between these two countries casts a shadow over most of the regional political-security issues, and it is difficult to solve regional conflicts without considering the considerations of these two powers. Thirdly, the United States and China consider each other institutional and structural rivals. Institutional rival means that these two have different ideological, economic and political systems, and structural rival means that these two are competing for the first position of power in the world. Therefore, it is not possible to solve their problems easily. Fourthly, according to the above facts, it seems that in the future, the world will be divided into two poles with separate political and intellectual discourses and separate intellectual and political followers, centered on China and US, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and the balance of bipolar forces as it happened during the Cold War. It will become the main mechanism for maintaining international order and security, including in the Asia-Pacific region. In such a situation, regional and international institutions will play the same marginal role that regional and international institutions played during the Cold War.

On the other hand, China, Russia and Iran are currently pursuing the common goal of reducing the geopolitical influence of the United States. Therefore, it can be seen from the actions and reactions of the regional powers towards the tensions between China and Taiwan and the war between Russia and Ukraine that these competitions are an example of Brzezinski's (former US foreign minister) prediction about the unification of the Eastern powers.

WILL AFGHANISTAN BE A FIELD OF COMPETITION OR AN ABANDONED LAND IN THIS GAME?

The escalation of tensions over Taiwan, as an important regional issue, will not be without an impact on the situation in Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has close relations with China, and after the complete withdrawal of US and NATO forces, the closeness between China and the Taliban has increased. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan sees China as a strong neighbor that is interested in making large investments in Afghanistan. For this reason, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate issued a statement regarding the visit of Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, to Taiwan and the strained relations between China and the US, without directly referring to the US, saying that countries should refrain from provocative actions. In a tweet, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign



Affairs of the Islamic Emirate emphasized on the "One China" principle policy and asked all countries to avoid actions that are considered a violation of the national sovereignty of countries and provide the basis for further provocative actions. The Islamic Emirate has emphasized that relations between China and the United States affect the security, stability and prosperity of the region, and Afghanistan wants to resolve tensions through dialogue and appropriate solutions.

Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the position of Afghanistan in the competition between China and US, so that we can predict how Afghanistan will endure in this complex and multifaceted crisis as a nation and geography based on the national and people's interests of this country.

As can be seen from the nature of the global and regional tensions from the war in Ukraine to the tensions in Taiwan, in the current tension over Taiwan where China and US are the main actors, Afghanistan is very important in the foreign policy of these two powers. Although today, Afghanistan is important for regional and international powers in terms of its internal issues, but throughout the history of this country, it has been considered more due to its regional position. In the past, Afghanistan was important as a buffer country (the factor of non-friction between powers) and today, according to Barry Buzan, as an insulating country (the factor of competition between powers). Therefore, due to its vital role in the politics of great and regional powers, Afghanistan is receiving serious attention today as one of the effective factors in war competition.

Unfortunately, as long as this view about Afghanistan exists, permanent establishment and stability in this country will be difficult. Because the basis of the behavior of the great powers in Afghanistan is competition and not cooperation, and this competition is intensifying every day, especially since the center of gravity of the competition, namely the Asia-Pacific region and Eastern Europe, has become closer to Afghanistan. At this critical juncture, it is necessary for the Islamic Emirate to put the internal unity and cohesion and impartial international diplomacy as its priority with full intelligence and considering the interests of the Afghan people, so that Afghanistan can once again enter the field of competition in this chapter of history.



CONCLUSION

After the visit of Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States of America, to Taiwan, not only did the tensions between China and the US escalate, but with the start of Chinese military maneuvers around this island, the possibility of a Chinese military attack on Taiwan was also raised, but currently most of the analyses are based on the fact that the tension between China and Taiwan will not turn into a full-scale war, at least in the short term.

But about the future of the world order, most observers believe that whether the US likes it or not, the world is changing to multi-polarity, and provocative behavior for a regional war will be a global loss, which many believe this war will be won by China. Therefore, the US should get away with the idea of a single administration in the world because the world cannot be governed by one power. The condition of the world after the defeat of The Soviet Union was an exceptional situation, but after this there will naturally be many powers in the world.

Regarding the position of Afghanistan in this game, it can be said that although there is no written foreign policy of Afghanistan at the moment, it appears from the positions of the Islamic Emirate that it acts on the basis of the old principle of neutrality in foreign policy. Even though the current policy of the Islamic Emirate towards the United States is not a policy of tension, in order to reduce the prevention of the United States in the case of recognition by the international community. But considering the increase in tensions over Taiwan, it is worth mentioning that the Islamic Emirate should not get so close to China that it provokes the enmity of the US and once again causes revenge against the people of Afghanistan.

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