

Taiwan-China Conflict: Given the Convoluted History, What Solutions Can be Applied?

Julia Ho

juliaho2027@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the underlying causes and potential solutions to the ongoing conflict between Taiwan and China. Over the past year, tensions have remained high, contributing to international unease—particularly in the global economy. A key point of contention lies in differing perspectives: China views the issue as a domestic civil matter, while many other countries see it as an international conflict. While countries, especially the United States, hover at the edge of neutral alliance with Taiwan, they struggle to get involved without angering China. Yet the history of the Taiwanese island displays a region with a unique identity and history, giving reasons to encourage and pursue independence. Although neither side has formally declared war or taken significant military action, China has adopted an increasingly aggressive and intimidating stance. To foster a deeper understanding of both sides, this paper explores the historical context and evolution of the dispute, drawing on parallels with other global conflicts and the complex history between Taiwan and mainland China. While potential paths forward exist and will be discussed further in this paper, any proposed solution must strike a delicate balance—ensuring proactive defense without provoking China to the point of triggering a broader international crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1949 transition, the Taiwan Strait has been defined by a precarious "status quo," yet a fundamental internal shift now threatens this delicate balance. China's intensifying military, economic, and diplomatic coercion as well as growing intimidation, aimed at achieving unification has increased tension in the area. While the People's Republic of China (PRC) maintains a narrative of "peaceful reunification" based on a shared identity, this study asks: How does the emergence of a distinct Taiwanese national identity undermine China's narrative of 'peaceful reunification,' and what lessons can be drawn from similar global conflicts to navigate a path forward and possible solutions to the conflict? This paper employs a qualitative methodological approach, utilizing polling data from the Election Study Center at NCCU, the PRC Anti-Secession Law, and a comparative analysis of the Russo-Ukrainian war. To gain a complete contextual understanding of the nature of the conflict, the use of Taiwan's convoluted history is provided as evidence to display a unique experience of growth, separated from China. Additionally, this paper addresses a critical gap of the evolving public consciousness' role as a primary barrier to peaceful resolution. I argue that the consolidation of a civic-democratic Taiwanese identity has created an irreconcilable gap with the PRC's ethnic-nationalist framework, rendering traditional 20th-century

February 2026

Vol 4. No 1.

diplomatic formulas unusable. China's unwillingness to involve other nations or generate any communication around other solutions besides reunification leaves the conflict entrenched in a volatile and increasingly dangerous stalemate. Given that a diplomatic resolution appears increasingly out of reach, the most viable path forward lies in bolstering Taiwan's effective deterrence, framing the potential costs and consequences of a cross-strait conflict as an effective check against Chinese aggression.

MESSY, INVASIVE, OCCUPATION HISTORY

The island of Taiwan, which is roughly 100 miles from the coast of south-east China, has been home to various indigenous tribes for centuries. Prior to the 1600s, Taiwan was self-governing, although there was no central ruling authority. In 1622, Dutch forces landed in the P'eng-hu Islands and created a presence there. To remove the Dutch from the P'eng-hu Islands, a Chinese Official gave a trading post on Taiwan and other privileges in return. In 1626, Spanish forces established bases in Northern Taiwan and expanded their presence on the Island. However, in 1642, the Dutch ousted the Spanish forces, as well as put down a Chinese rebellion. With the assistance of the Indigenous people living in Taiwan, the Dutch claim control over the entire island. During this time, Taiwan was a colony of the Netherlands for about 40-years and was ruled by the Dutch East India Company. In China though, at this time, the Ming-dynasty was being threatened by the Manchu, the inhabitants of Manchuria. In 1644, the Manchu conquered Beijing and established the Qing dynasty. Fleeing this Manchurian conquest, Ming loyalists under Zheng Cheng-gong, or Koxinga, drove out the Dutch from Taiwan and established authority over the island. Dutch rule was overthrown by the Chinese in 1662, forcing the Dutch to fully evacuate and depart from Taiwan. After the death of a young emperor, in 1683, the Manchu in China invaded and took the island, claiming it for the Qing dynasty for two centuries. Following the defeat of the first Sino-Japanese War, Japan acquired Taiwan from the Qing government in 1895, and it became a colony. Finally, in 1945 following the Japanese defeat in WWII, Taiwan was returned to Nationalist Chinese control.¹ This convoluted history proves that Taiwan was not, for the most part, under Chinese authority, and instead China has as much right to Taiwan as the Dutch or Japanese.

GOVERNMENT

In 1911~1912, the Qing dynasty, which was weakened by internal strife and international pressures, was forced to abdicate following the Xinhai Revolution. During this period, Chinese revolutionaries overthrew the Qing Empire and established the Republic of China. The newly formed republic struggled to gain control of the country, but due to leader Sun Yat-sen and later Chiang Kai-shek, they unified much of the country. Attempting to return China to its former strength, towards the end of WWII, Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek argued for, and reunited Taiwan with China. However, soon after, from 1945 to 1949, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), vying for control of

¹ "History," *Government Portal of the Republic of China (Taiwan)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed July 16, 2025, https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content_3.php.

China after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, erupted into a civil war.² Fundamental ideological differences and political instability following the Xinhai revolution were the main reasons for the war. This was the peak of a decades-long conflict between Chiang's Nationalist forces and Mao Zedong's Communist Party. When the communists won the war in 1949, the Nationalist Kuomintang or KMT, fled to Taiwan along with 1.2 million people from China, where they ruled for many decades. They called this government, the Republic of China, a name Taiwan has kept to this day. On the other hand, during 1949 while the Nationalists were retreating, the Communist party established the People's Republic of China. Since then, the ROC (Taiwan) has continued to have effective jurisdiction over the main island of Taiwan and outlying islands, leaving Taiwan and China each under the rule of a different government. The People's Republic of China has never exercised sovereignty over Taiwan or other islands administered by the ROC (Taiwan).³ Taiwan is ruled by the ROC, which has transitioned into a liberal democracy, offering Taiwanese residents significant political freedoms and human rights. This contrasts with the authoritarian, communist political system of the PRC in mainland China. Many Taiwanese do not believe, in the case of reunification, the PRC could or would uphold democratic principles in a unified state. The idea of joining a country with a suppressing, undemocratic system lacks appeal for many Taiwanese who enjoy their democratic freedoms.⁴

ECONOMY

Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China, functions as a self-governing island in East Asia that sits off the coast of Mainland China. It is part of a string of islands so-called the “First Island Chain” which also includes parts of the Philippines and South Korea. Taiwan is also an economic powerhouse, especially in technology. Most of the world and their electronics rely on computer chips made in Taiwan, making that area a Monopoly: a single Taiwanese company - the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company or TSMC - has over half of the world's market. Taiwan is a world leader in semiconductor manufacturing, producing over 60% of the world's semiconductors and more than 90% of the most advanced ones. Taiwan is one of the world's top 20 economies in terms of GDP, with a total GDP as of 2023 being 791.6 billion USD.⁵ As of current, Taiwan's impressive GDP per capita is 34.43 thousand USD, and its GDP per capita PPP being 84.08 thousand USD.⁶ China, on the other hand, still functions and is classified as a developing country by the United Nations. While China's overall, huge GDP makes it the second-largest economy, currently at 18.74 trillion USD, its GDP per capita is at a shocking 13.3

² “China and Taiwan: A Really Simple Guide,” *BBC News*, January 8, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59900139>.

³ John C. Copper, “History of Taiwan,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 5, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Taiwan>.

⁴ Shelley Rigger, “On Prosperity, Taiwan Ranks High—but Its Future Hinges on Chinese Power Plays,” *Atlantic Council*, January 23, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/books/on-prosperity-taiwan-ranks-high-but-its-future-hinges-on-chinese-power-plays/>.

⁵ “Taiwan GDP and Economic Data,” *Global Finance Magazine*, February 19, 2025, <https://gfmag.com/country/taiwan-gdp-country-report/>.

⁶ “Taiwan Province of China,” *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*, April 2025, <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/TWN>. February 2026
Vol 4. No 1.

thousand USD. China's GDP per Capita PPP is not much better at 27.1 thousand USD.⁷ The large disparity between China's GDP and its GDP per capita illustrates the inequality of living standards in China. Especially in comparison to Taiwan, China's relative poverty is shown. Taiwan's per capita GDP is significantly higher than that of China, and in the case of reunification, this number would substantially decrease creating economic chaos and a decline in living standards for many Taiwanese.

CHINESE POLICY

Taiwan sees itself as distinct from the Chinese mainland, having its own constitution and democratic government. While Taiwan perceives themselves as independent and self-governed, China views Taiwan as a "breakaway province that will eventually be reunited."⁸ China, being powerful and wealthy, is able to pressure other countries into not recognizing Taiwan or lending support. To further support China's stance on Taiwan, only 12 countries (plus the Vatican) officially recognize Taiwan.⁹ The "one-China policy" is the diplomatic acknowledgement and agreement of China's stance that there is only one Chinese government, recognizing formal ties with China rather than the island of Taiwan. According to the agreement reached by Taiwan and China in the 1992 Consensus, it states that there is only "one China," but with different interpretations. Both Beijing and Taipei agree that Taiwan belongs to China, however, the ROC and the PRC still disagree on which is China's legitimate governing body. In this document, the implied understanding is that Taiwan will not seek independence.¹⁰ To elaborate and emphasize this stance, the PRC passed the 2005 Anti-Secession Law. A domestic legislation, this law outlines the conditions under which China may use military force against Taiwan to prevent it from declaring formal independence. The PRC legislation maintains Taiwan is part of China and that the issue of reunification is an internal matter. While the Anti-Secession Law expresses a preference for reunification under peaceful means, it "uses language that leaves the Chinese leadership with the flexibility to judge when an attack would be necessary." The law says China should use force if Taiwan secedes, if "major events" move the island toward secession or if "possibilities for peaceful reunification are completely exhausted."¹¹ China's barely concealed desire to invade and take back Taiwan, reveals a nation eager to go to war.

UNIQUE HERITAGE

⁷ "GDP per Capita (Current US\$) – China," *World Bank Open Data*, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CN>.

⁸ "What's Behind China–Taiwan Tensions?" *BBC News*, October 14, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34729538>.

⁹ BBC News, "China and Taiwan: A Really Simple Guide."

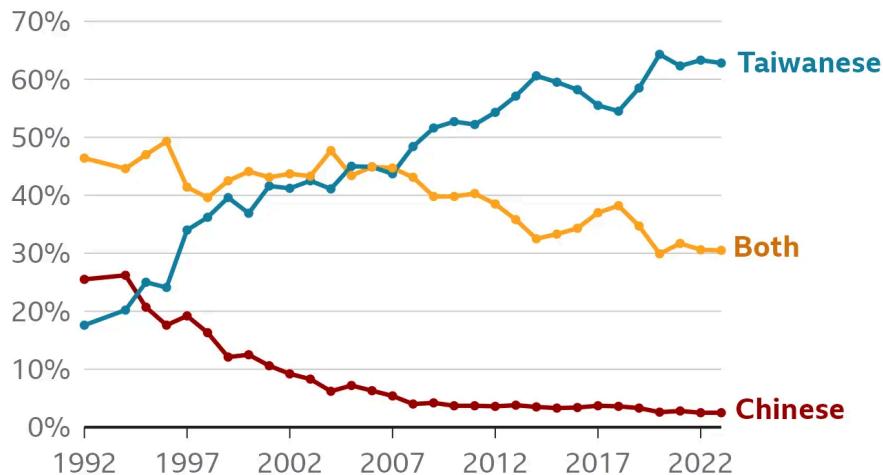
¹⁰ Eleanor Albert, *China–Taiwan Relations* (Council on Foreign Relations, December 7, 2016), <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/CFR-China-Taiwan%20Relations.pdf>.

¹¹ Philip P. Pan, "China Puts Threat to Taiwan Into Law," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2005, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2005/03/14/china-puts-threat-to-taiwan-into-law/bc826cac-0dbc-489c-91e6-b2d5e718d9ed/>.

Currently, Taiwan's population is made of four ethnic or subethnic groups: Indigenous peoples, two groups of Taiwanese—the Fukien Taiwanese and the Hakka—and Chinese who came from mainland China beginning in the mid-1940s.¹² All those who are non-Indigenous groups are of Han Chinese descent. Though almost all Taiwanese people are ethnically Chinese, they prefer to refer to themselves as Taiwanese, a national or cultural identity, distinct from ethnic origin. A survey of the people of Taiwan from 1992-2023 on cultural identity caught the shift in people identifying as Chinese, Taiwanese, or both.

How people in Taiwan identify themselves

Percentage of respondents to survey in Taiwan (1992-2023)



Source: Election Study Center, National Chengchi University

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After World War II the mainland Chinese-run government made Mandarin the official language, and it was used in the schools and in government. Nowadays, most Taiwanese mainlanders speak Mandarin Chinese, the official language of China. Though many wanted Taiwanese to replace Mandarin as the main language, this has not been deeply considered as Mandarin has the largest number of speakers of any language in the world, and Taiwan increasingly depends on trade and commercial ties with China. Because of Taiwan's unique heritage, they see themselves as apart from China. Reuniting with the larger Chinese nation would feel akin to stripping their self-identification away. As shown by the graph, most people in Taiwan think of themselves as Taiwanese, a distinct, totally separate identity from Chinese, displaying the significant decrease of willingness for a unified identity and culture. The results of this analysis indicate that as Taiwanese identity shifts from an ethnic to a civic-democratic basis, the PRC's 'One China' narrative, relying on shared ethnic heritage, loses its persuasive power.

U.S-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¹² Copper, "History of Taiwan."

¹³ "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12–2025/06)," *Election Study Center, National Chengchi University*, July 7, 2025, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>. February 2026
Vol 4. No 1.

However, though America does not acknowledge Taiwan as an official country, still following the “one-China policy,” America remains the island’s strongest ally. The United States terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan, or the Republic of China (ROC) on January 1, 1979. The US aimed to instead establish diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which claims sovereignty over Taiwan. However, this led the people of Taiwan to feel a deep sense of betrayal and distrust towards the United States. Later that year, on April 10, 1979, the US signed into Law the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to establish the framework for the unofficial relationship between the United States and Taiwan. The TRA ensures the US maintains significant relations with Taiwan, while also declaring and committing to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. It aimed to maintain strong, unofficial ties with Taiwan and ensure its security. Moreover, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to Taiwan’s security and well-being, the Six Assurances are a set of commitments made by the United States to Taiwan in 1982. While these are not official acts or a treaty, they are statements and promises of continual U.S. policy towards Taiwan. It is U.S. policy “to maintain the capacity of the United States 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.”¹⁴ Furthermore, U.S. relations with Taiwan have continued to be carried out through the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), a private corporation. (AIT Taipei is similar to U.S. embassies elsewhere.) Even more recently, the US aimed to pass the Taiwan policy act of 2022. This bill provides support to Taiwan and addresses related issues, like bolstering its defense capabilities. However, this bill did not receive a full vote in the senate, so only key provisions of the Taiwan Policy Act were taken and included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.¹⁵ However, more recently, President-elect Donald J. Trump was more equivocal about defending Taiwan. ‘In a July 2024, interview with Bloomberg Businessweek, Trump said, “Taiwan should pay us for defense.” In a September 2024, interview with a Washington Post columnist, Trump stated that the PRC would not attack Taiwan during his presidency, but predicted, “eventually they will.”’ This demonstrates the tension in the China and Taiwan cold conflict that is predicted to come to a head.

PREVIOUS MILITARY DISPUTES

This ongoing cold conflict between Taiwan and China has led to four major military confrontations in the Taiwan Strait. The Taiwan Strait is considered a “grey area,” due to the debatable, unclear legal status of the Taiwan Strait, and the ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis, occurring in 1954–55, was the result of the PRC shelling the Kinmen, Matsu, and Dachen islands, which were all under ROC control. After the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, Taiwan and China reached an implied understanding of a “median line,” also called the center line, to mediate rules of engagement and prevent

¹⁴ “*Taiwan: Background and U.S. Relations*,” Congress.gov, Library of Congress, December 26, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10275>.

¹⁵ Rupert Hammond-Chambers, “Special Commentary: The Taiwan Policy Act Flames Out,” *US-Taiwan Business Council*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.us-taiwan.org/resources/special-commentary-the-taiwan-policy-act-flames-out/>. February 2026
Vol 4. No 1.

miscalculation in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁶ The second Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred just three years later in 1958, with the PRC continuing its bombardment of Kinmen and Matsu Islands. This altercation was partially resolved after the U.S. resupplied the R.O.C. garrisons based on these islands. The third Taiwan Strait crisis took place in 1995–96, as a retaliation after ROC Pres. Lee Teng-hui, in May 1995, was granted a tourist visa and visited the US. Allowing the ROC president to visit the U.S. broke with a long-standing precedent. Furthermore, the PRC was angered that Lee, the first native-born president of the R.O.C., had challenged and rallied against the “One China” policy - for example, by calling for Taiwan to be admitted to the United Nations. Additionally, the United States showing increased support for the ROC by organizing high-level official meetings and agreeing to sell fighter jets to Taiwan, added to the conflict. The PRC responded to these perceived insults by recalling its ambassador to the US, organizing large-scale military exercises, including the simulation of an amphibious landing, and fired missiles in the water near Taiwan. The US addressed Taiwan’s concerns from China’s actions by deploying two US Navy carrier battle groups. Finally, the crisis was mitigated following the end of the Navy’s military exercises and the departure of the U.S. battle groups. The last conflict, the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis of 2022-23, was the result of U.S. Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in official capacity. During and before Pelosi’s visit, the PRC conducted military exercises and fired missiles in Taiwan’s coastal waters. Continuing the attack, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the military of the PRC, fired missiles over Taiwan, used cyber warfare to confuse the details of the attacks, dispatched large numbers of aircraft to simulate air attacks on Taiwan, and encircled the island with the deployment of naval forces. Similar acts were continued to be used by China in April 2023, when ROC Pres. Tsai Ing-wen met with U.S. Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy. While none of the Taiwan Strait crises lead into all-out war, they “highlight the fragility of the status quo in the region.”¹⁷

GROWING ASSERTIVENESS AND INTIMIDATION

Currently, the PRC continues to engage in persistent non-combat operations in the Taiwan Strait. Examples of “gray zone” actions include ‘large and increasingly complex military exercises near Taiwan; near-daily air operations in the vicinity of Taiwan, including frequent sorties across the so-called “median line,” an informal north-south line bisecting the Strait that PLA aircraft rarely crossed prior to 2022; routine naval patrols across the median line, unmanned combat aerial vehicle flights near and encircling Taiwan; and more.’ As seen in the examples of retaliation above, the PRC government often ramps up such activities following high-profile engagements between senior U.S. policymakers and Taiwan leaders.¹⁸ China continuously puts pressure on Taiwan by drawing closer to the Island with each military drill, testing Taiwan’s response. Taiwan has no means to respond to these acts with their armed forces, with the number of their total active forces being around 169,000 in comparison to China’s staggering

¹⁶ “Confrontation over Taiwan,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/confrontation-over-taiwan>.

¹⁷ Andre Munro, “Taiwan Strait Crises,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Taiwan-Strait-crises>.

¹⁸ “Taiwan: Background and U.S. Relations,” Congress.gov, Library of Congress, December 26, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10275>.

2,035,000. Increasing pressure on Taiwan, China uses propaganda and cyber-attacks to influence Taiwan elections and decisions. For example, researchers said they found credible evidence suggesting Chinese state actors were connected to much of the misleading information and pro-China propaganda spread across Taiwanese social media, surrounding the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential election.¹⁹ Later on, China's retaliation of Pelosi's visit did not just result in the Fourth Taiwanese Crisis, but data also shows that cyberattacks targeting Taiwan spiked ahead of Pelosi's visit, both in hacking attempts and in disinformation across popular social media platforms, like Facebook, YouTube, and LINE, an instant messaging app popular in Taiwan. Kitsch Yen-Fan, assistant director for the Global China Hub at the Atlantic Council, stated "Fake news on social media is a way for [China] to pave the way for their eventual operation," Kitsch said. "They want to basically sway public opinions, demoralize the public, [to] make their eventual takeover that much easier...", illustrating China's ceaseless attempts to weaken and infiltrate the Taiwanese with their opinion. Taiwanese parliament member Wang Ting-Yu revealed data from Taiwanese intelligence shows approximately 20 million cyberattacks target Taiwan each day, with China being the source of the overwhelming majority of them.²⁰ These fabricated or misleading posts play a role in a Chinese disinformation campaign intended to hurt Taiwanese morale. Designed to sow distrust and form a wedge in Taiwan and U.S. relations, the posts create doubt among Taiwanese that the U.S. would come to their aid in the event of a war. Even more recently, in May of 2025, The Chinese military conducted large-scale drills around Taiwan, as well as used propaganda images and videos against the ROC President Lai Ching-te, who has taken a stronger stance of Taiwan independence and is an advocate against Chinese reunification. One cartoon video titled "Shell" depicts Lai, whom Beijing calls a "separatist" and "troublemaker," as a "parasite" held by a pair of chopsticks over a Taiwan on fire.²¹ Though these examples of Chinese aggression towards Taiwan display a worsening conflict, most believe that an invasion is not yet in sight. According to a recent survey of around 1,200 people conducted by the Institute for National Defense and Security, research showed 61% of people think it was "unlikely or very unlikely" that China would attack Taiwan in the coming five years. However, the poll showed that these same people also see Beijing as a serious threat to the island.²²

NATIONALISM

¹⁹ Emily Feng, "Taiwan Deals with Lots of Misinformation, and It's Harder to Track Down," *NPR*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/11/1216340756/taiwan-election-disinformation-social-media-ptt>.

²⁰ Brit McCandless Farmer, "China's Cyber Assault on Taiwan," *CBS News*, June 18, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-cyber-assault-taiwan-60-minutes-2023-06-18/>.

²¹ Peter Guo, "China Holds Military Drills around Taiwan, Calling Its President a 'Parasite,'" *NBC News*, April 2, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-holds-military-drills-taiwan-calling-president-parasite-rcna198998>.

²² Yimou Lee, "Most Taiwanese Believe China Unlikely to Invade in Coming Five Years, Poll Shows," *U.S. News & World Report*, October 9, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2024-10-09/most-taiwanese-believe-china-unlikely-to-invade-in-coming-five-years-poll-shows>.

By viewing Taiwan as a “breakaway province that will eventually be under Beijing's control”, China reveals how they believe they have ownership of Taiwan. This perceived ownership is rooted from China having early interactions and exploration of Taiwan, and from ruling over Taiwan for around 200 years, before it was grudgingly given to Japan. Therefore, according to China's belief, war with Taiwan would be a civil war instead of an international war. Thus, the desire to reunite Taiwan with China, essentially stems from nationalism and a supposed possession of the Island. Although, citing nationalism as a cause to declare war or fight might seem unreasonable, there is precedent. For example, the annexation of Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia (Sudetenland) in 1938 and the invasion of Poland in 1939, was due to the Nazi Regime (The Third Reich) attempting to expand German control to territories outside the German Reich. These acts were driven by German Nationalism, specifically Adolf Hitler's ideal of racial purity, German superiority, and antisemitism. Hitler expanded Germany's territory to first, unite all people of German descent within their historical homeland, and to secondly, have sufficient *lebensraum* (“living space”), allowing Germany to acquire territory to become economically self-sufficient and militarily impregnable. After this expansion, the German masters would rule over a hierarchy of subordinate peoples and organize and exploit them.²³ This idea of expansion and war over nationalism has continued in modern times, most recently notable in the Russo-Ukrainian war, beginning in 2014, but more notably starting when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Similarly to the China-Taiwan conflict, Russia claims Ukraine's ownership, with the Russian leader, President Vladimir Putin, long questioning Ukraine's right to exist, claiming that "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia" after the communist revolution in 1917. Putin has also refused to acknowledge the Ukrainian identity, stating in a 2021 essay that "Russians and Ukrainians were one people" dating back to the late 9th Century.²⁴ Putin's imperial nationalism has additionally contributed to this conflict. Russia sees Ukraine as an integral part of a "Russian World" and seeks to reassert Russia's sphere of influence and dominance in the region.²⁵ These examples demonstrate how nationalism, when taken to an extreme or combined with aggressive ideologies and expansionist desires, can become a significant cause of conflict and invasion between nations.

POLLING DATA

A survey in 2024 by National Chengchi University in Taipei showed that over 88% of people in Taiwan support maintaining the status quo. This would be staying in the same situation, in which Taiwan operates as an effective independent country without formally declaring independence, a move that would risk war with China. This information illustrates that Taiwan would rather be independent and stay in this precarious situation that is likely to lead to conflict, before ever reuniting with China. In the beginning of the graph, the third largest percentage voted to maintain the status quo and move toward unification. In theory, unification would be an easy and quick solution relative to the other resolutions, if both parties,

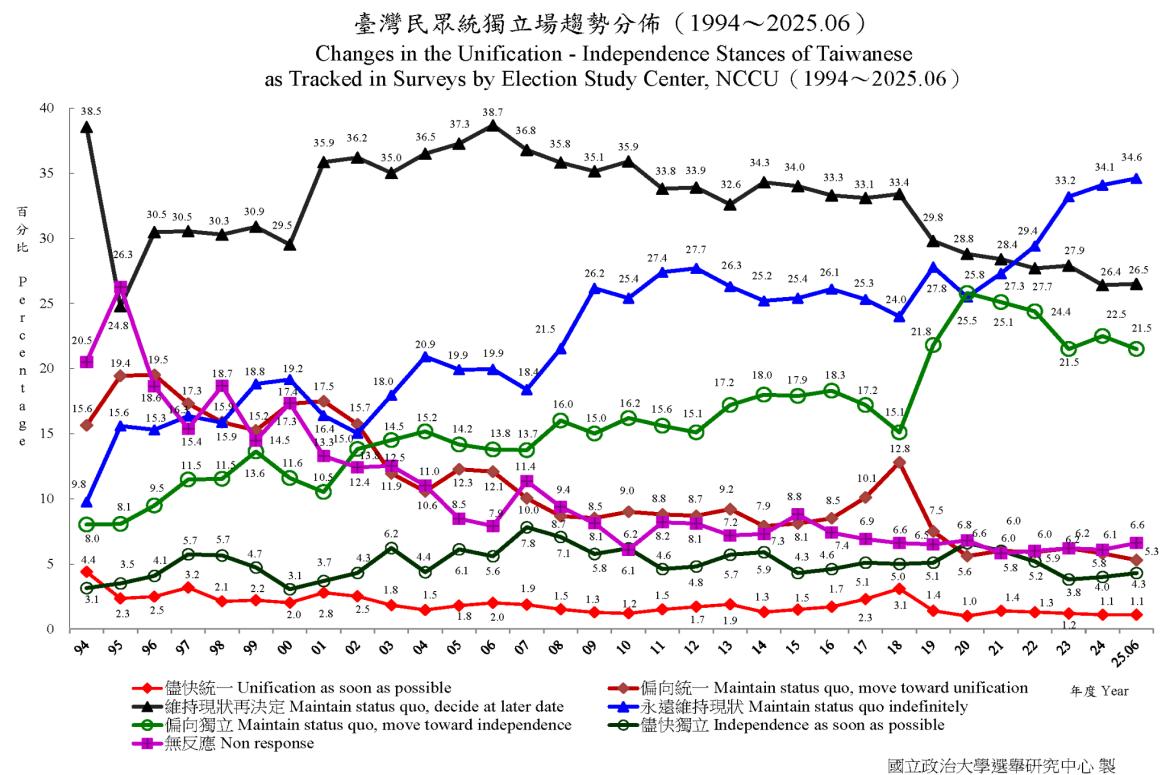
²³ The Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Nazism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 17, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nazism>.

²⁴ Paul Kirby, “Why Did Putin's Russia Invade Ukraine?” *BBC News*, August 13, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj0q964851po>.

²⁵ Angela Stent, “How the War in Ukraine Changed Russia's Global Standing,” *Brookings*, April 2, 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-the-war-in-ukraine-changed-russias-global-standing/>. February 2026

Vol 4. No 1.

the ROC and PRC consented to it. However, the percentage wanting gradual unification has significantly decreased, while the percentage of maintaining the status quo and moving toward independence has substantially grown. This change is noticeable starting after 1997, but especially from 2019 onwards. This development can be correlated to the reunification of Hong Kong with China. Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, and China has increasingly tightened their grip on the region, especially in 2019. Citizens of Hong Kong have slowly been losing their rights, as the “one country, two systems” principle and promise have been eroded. Taiwanese have been able to see what would happen to them in the case of reunification on the same “one country, two systems” principle. The case of Hong Kong and China has reduced the case for unification and illustrates why the status quo is preferred. Additionally, the percentage of people for unification as soon as possible decreased, while those in favor of immediate independence increased, having an all-time high in 2007. Yet at the same time, the number of non-responses decreased, revealing that the Taiwanese people understand they can no longer ignore the tension and instability of their situation.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Effective deterrence matters because it is the only mechanism that can maintain the "status quo" without a dynamic conflict. Using the Russo-Ukrainian war as a critical case study in the failure of deterrence, this

²⁶ “Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12–2025/06),” Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, July 7, 2025, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>. February 2026

conflict demonstrates that deterrence is not just about having weapons, but about credibility and the perception of cost. When Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia expected a quick victory. Expecting to sweep into the capital, Kyiv, in a matter of days and oust the government, Putin sent 200,000 soldiers into Ukraine in February of 2022. Vladimir Putin calculated that the cost of these sanctions was worth the perceived benefit of annexing Ukraine. He believed the West was divided and that the war would be over before a unified response could form. The reality is that this war has no end in sight and this war has been going on for more than three years. However, with increased, consistent support from NATO, Ukraine has been able to slowly hold Russia off, and in some spots push Russia back. Instead of the swift success Putin expected, Russia's bloody, unprovoked war has largely been a disaster, "So far, it has achieved little more than exposing the brutality and inadequacy of the Russian military." Additionally, though Russia has warned against supporting Ukraine, this has gone unheard, with the West pledging support for "for as long as it takes."²⁷ The cohesion of NATO has helped bolster the defense. The Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates that deterrence fails when an aggressor perceives a window for a low-cost, rapid victory. Just like in the case of Russia and Ukraine, if Beijing believes the U.S. will not intervene or that the intervention will be too slow, deterrence fails, exemplifying the importance of taking proactive action to bolster Taiwan's defenses.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Using the adverse effects and long, drawn out nature of this conflict as an example, with a strong alliance Taiwan could prove to China that an invasion would be a short-sided, foolish decision. Creating a situation where a war against Taiwan would be costly and harmful is the ultimate deterrent for Taiwan against Chinese invasion. For it to function, this alliance should include stronger military powers like the US, Japan, and Australia, but also smaller countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand, South Korea which surround China and increase the strategic uncertainty for China. This unification would not just aid Taiwan, but the rest of these smaller countries, especially South Korea and the Philippines as the first island chain against China. By promoting and supporting Taiwan, they in return are protecting themselves and creating a balance against China. By officially allying themselves, these countries show China that there would be repercussions for invading Taiwan, and that they are a united front. To emphasize this communal support between allied countries, they could create joint or shared bases in each country. Similar to the idea of having the US navy base in Taiwan, each country could send a portion of their forces to one other country and rotate through the allied countries. Or, in addition, this allegiance could have one unified army or navy command under which forces from each country can be stationed in the Pacific and could be quickly rallied or called on when needed.

Along with this idea of gaining global help to deter China from invading Taiwan, the ROC could utilize a type of global organization or sporting event that promotes neutrality or even allows discussion between the PRC and ROC to begin. It could be a significant moment of reconciliation. Though it might seem impossible, once a PRC representative is off the IOC executive board, Taiwan could try to make Taipei a

²⁷ Kirby, "Why Did Putin's Russia Invade Ukraine?"

host city of the Olympics. Also, though they have already tried, finally getting a site in Taiwan to be recognized as a UNESCO heritage site would be a big step to create awareness and show Taiwan's unique identity apart from China.

A possible solution is for America to build or construct a type of naval base in Taiwan. This action benefits the Americans, as the base would be funded by the ROC, the United States would gain an important and stronger presence in the disputed area. The US would be able to prove their commitment to Taiwan and deter China from going to war. The ROC in return, would gain an unspoken, definite ally in the case PRC ever did invade. If the PRC harms the American navy stationed in Taiwan, there is a promise the United States would get involved. However, if the Taiwanese or the United States believe this action would be too great a challenge to China's authority, the US can keep sending war ships through the Taiwanese Strait, exercising its right to international waters as a deterrent for China.

Other preventative actions can include strengthening Taiwan's defenses, continuing the "Porcupine Strategy." Aptly named, this strategy focuses on having more defenses such as low-tech and mobile anti-aircraft, anti-tank, and anti-ship weapons - essentially, porcupine quills. This protection or shielding strategy allows the smaller party, Taiwan, to have the potential to inflict enough damage, it deters actions of the larger aggressor, China.²⁸ In addition, supplying Taiwan with weapons allows them to potentially hold off a siege from China long enough for the US to get involved and send help. In some ways, this approach has already been taken in part, with the US selling billions of dollars of arms to Taiwan. US law mandates that the US provides Taiwan with the means to defend itself; by just continuing to use this strategy, the US and Taiwan can keep the status quo with China, while also persistently helping Taiwan to grow stronger.

Another approach to increase Chinese deterrence is to strengthen and emphasize the importance of the Taiwanese economy, especially the Semiconductor industry. The ROC could continue to use and reinforce their "Silicon Shield." Taiwan gains some geopolitical leverage from its dominant position in the semiconductor industry, particularly its advanced chip manufacturing capabilities. This "Silicon Shield" is an important deterrent to Chinese invasion as Taiwan is the global leading manufacturer of Semiconductor Chips, any such invasion would disrupt and potentially halt production of such chips. This could create global economic and military consequences, principally, global economic instability. Other nations could become involved with the conflict to protect their assets and access to the chips, which is the opposite of what China wants.

To increase US support and interest, Taiwan could accept American foreign investment and cut back on the exportation of semiconductor chips to certain countries; they could also strike deals with powerful American tech companies to ensure their protection. All these actions would deter China from invading because it would give the United States deeper cause to defend its business interest. Examples of this in history include when the US government has intervened to protect the wealth and investments of US

²⁸ Ken Fann and Charles Bursi, "Protecting the Porcupine: Why Taiwan Matters," *Epicenter (Harvard University)*, April 14, 2023, <https://epicenter.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/protecting-porcupine-why-taiwan-matters>. February 2026

Vol 4. No 1.

companies include examples as early as the Banana Wars and the decision to depose the elected government of Guatemala in 1954.²⁹

It is important to know that while the US is involved in the region, it remains an ocean away from Taiwan; coherent defense of Taiwan will require the participation of several countries. The creation of a similar alliance between the countries in the pacific to check the power of strong countries would benefit Taiwan. Using the success and strategies of NATO as an example - mutual defense which strengthens deterrence and defense posture, as well as promoting international cooperation, could be a solid approach to the Taiwan-Chinese conflict.

CONCLUSION

Taiwan's complex and turbulent history reveals a pattern of shifting control and relative independence, but today, its people have developed a strong national identity distinct from Mainland China. While China's push for reunification is largely driven by nationalism, the Taiwanese people embrace their democratic freedoms, robust economy, and unique cultural identity—factors that fuel their desire to remain separate. As a result, most Taiwanese prefer maintaining the current status quo: de facto independence without the escalation of war.

However, China's increasingly assertive actions have heightened tensions, reducing ambiguity in Taiwanese public opinion, as shown by recent polling data. This ongoing cold conflict is becoming more urgent and can no longer be overlooked. To preserve peace and autonomy, Taiwan must adopt a strategy of proactive deterrence—taking calculated, defensive measures that make any potential attack by China exceedingly costly and unattractive as detailed in this essay. Through careful, forward-thinking actions, Taiwan can ensure maintaining the status quo is the most stable and beneficial outcome for all parties involved.

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²⁹ John Coatsworth, "United States Interventions," *ReVista: Harvard Review*, May 15, 2005, <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/united-states-interventions/>.

February 2026

Vol 4. No 1.

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