

Forum: Disarmament and International Security Committee (GA1)

Issue: The situation in the Taiwan Strait

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Introduction

The Taiwan Strait is a small strip of the ocean separating the People's Republic of China from Chinese Taipei, and a center of geo-political tensions historically.



The Taiwan Strait separating the PRC and the ROC

The situation in the Taiwanese Strait has recently escalated, after American strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities served as a reminder of American power, acting as potential deterrence against Chinese attempts to invade Taiwan ([cnn.org](https://www.cnn.org)). The tension arises from the fact that if America was to get involved with another Middle Eastern conflict, the path for China to unite both sides of the Strait becomes clearer. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that China has a fleet of ships and military aircraft that are able to surround the island in hours. Most notably were on April 1st when China deployed 21 warships, 71 aircraft and 4 coast guard vessels around the island. US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, has issued a warning stating that war in the Taiwan Strait “could be imminent”. His warning stems from increased military risks from China and America’s motivations in the region and conflict.

Definition of Key Terms

Taiwan Strait Crisis

The term ‘Taiwan Strait Crisis’ refers to the series of historic and recent military

confrontations that have taken place in the Taiwan Strait, most notably referring to the confrontations in 1954–55, 1958, and 1995–96, as well as heightened risk of conflict in recent years.

Integrated Joint Operation

Activities, operations or organisations involving multiple elements of armed service participation in collaboration. This is referring to China and America's actions in pre-emptive preparation for the conflict that looms.

Blockade

The situation in which military ships or personnel surround a region or area to prevent the flow of goods or people in or out, leading to humanitarian concerns. This is in reference to the threat of Chinese ships blockading Taiwan.

International waters

Areas of the ocean beyond the jurisdiction of any single state. Also known as the high seas, international waters are areas where all states enjoy free navigation under maritime law. This is in reference to the Strait itself, over which China stakes claim, but the US and its allies insist on freedom of navigation in those waters.

Background Information

While none of the Taiwan Strait crises concluded in a large-scale conflict, they underscore the geopolitical maritime fragility in the region. The Taiwan Strait remains a very volatile area, and war in the international waters would have major consequences for the world order - politically and economically.

First Taiwan Strait crisis (1954-1955)

The First crisis began with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed forces of the PRC, instigating attacks at islands they deemed of being of high strategic importance to the defences of Taiwan - Quemoy (Jinmen) Island, Matsu and Dachen islands. Besides the capture of the Yijianshan Islands, the major consequence of this confrontation was the deepening of the commitment of the US-Taiwan alliance, in the form of the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and Republic of

China (Taiwan).

The Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty (1955)

This treaty authorised the US to position military assets on and around its territory for their mutual defense, and both parties agreed to develop their joint capacity to “resist armed attack and communist subversive activities” ([britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com)).

The Formosa Resolution (1955)

This resolution, signed by the US Congress almost unanimously, was pivotal US legislation concerning Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa, and a part of the wider US Cold War policies against the spread of communism, after the end of the Chinese Civil War, which ended with the democratic party, Kuomintang, retreating to Taiwan. The resolution underscored the U.S. commitment to defending Taiwan and its surrounding islands against potential Communist aggression ([ebsco.com](https://www.ebsco.com)).

Third Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996)

The Third crisis arose after the US granted ROC President Lee Teng-hui, a tourist visa, breaking a long standing precedent, even though it was in an informal capacity. Lee, a first born native President, was also at odds with the PRC due to his more forward-thinking position, challenging the ‘One China’ policy. America increased support for the ROC, through F-16 fighter jets and the organisation of high level official meetings.

The conflict in itself started with China recalling its ambassador to the US, and following that with simulation of amphibian landings and missile launches near the coast of Taiwan, as well the collection of over 100,000 soldiers in the coastal areas of Fujian. These military tests occurring in the Taiwan Strait directly threatened Taiwan and increased tensions in the area. The crisis climaxed in the March 1996 Taiwanese Presidential elections, where the reelection of Lee demonstrated a resolve against the aggressive demonstrations by the mainland ([ebsco.com](https://www.ebsco.com)). The crisis de-escalated after two warships sent by the USA in response, returned, and signaled that the USA was still an influential power in East Asia.

Fourth Taiwan Strait crisis (2022-2023)

The Fourth crisis began with a high ranking US official, Nancy Pelosi, visiting Taiwan, but this time, acting in official capacity as a US government official and not as a citizen. Beijing acted in protest by enforcing the PLA to conduct military practices and fire

missiles in Taiwan's coastal waters, highlighting the PRC's major military investments. Exacerbating the situation, the PLA fired missiles over Taiwan, used cyber attacks to misinform the Taiwanese population of the details of the attack, encircled the island with large naval forces and dispatched high numbers of aircrafts to simulate air attacks on Taiwan.

When Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen met with US spokesperson Kevin McCarthy in 2023, China launched similar attacks against the ROC, seeing that McCarthy was the senior-most US official to meet with an ROC representative. The US maintained a naval presence to monitor developments and support regional stability, while emphasizing democratic engagement.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United States of America

The US has been a significant player in the crisis, allying openly with the Republic of China, and forming multiple defense treaties with Taiwan (such as the Mutual Defense Treaty, the Taiwan Relations Act and the Formosa Resolution). This underlines them as a key player in the Taiwan Strait situation, against Communist China.

People's Republic of China

Often instigating political tensions in the area, the PRC has always had motivations to claim Taiwan under its 'One China' policy, denying its sovereignty. This claim began with the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, when the democratic party fled to Taiwan and captured it as its base when the communist party took over China. The aim is to assert greater jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait (jamestown.org).

The Republic of China, informally known as Taiwan

Trying to dis-associate with mainland China, Taiwan is actively against China's "One China" policy as a secondary goal. Its primary goal is to maintain their sovereignty and defences in the face of growing political pressures from China. Taiwan is also looking to improve and enhance international alliances to deter future aggression from China. Maintaining the status quo within the Strait and garnering international support for its security is also one of their biggest concerns as of now.

South East Asian Countries, or ASEAN

Their focus lies on attempting to maintain regional geo-political stability and economic ties, and open free trade alternatives should a blockade erupt in the Strait.

Bigger powers, such as India, Indonesia and Thailand, may prioritize deterrence and peace, but avoid strong statements or direct involvement unless their core interests are threatened, challenging the ASEAN bloc's unity and underscoring their collective responsibility to push for peace, stability and security.

Viable Solutions -

Political status

One of the biggest challenges delegates should aim to resolve is how to maintain the sovereignty and safety of the Taiwanese people without infringing on China's political status and claims to the territory, leading to escalation of the conflict. This could be done by way of introducing new methods or places to test military tactics and weapons instead of in the Strait, avoiding its use as an aggression tactic.

Military and safety risks

Another option is to further more open dialogue between Beijing and Taipei. International actors such as the US and ASEAN could help support and facilitate cooperative measures and communication between the two countries. Non-political engagement, such as joint ventures or maritime safety, can help rebuild trust while sidestepping sovereignty disputes. This falls under the military and safety risks of the conflict, and how delegates might work to resolve that aspect of the situation.

Regional and international stability

Lastly, major focus should fall on how to ensure safe military de-escalation, from both parties, if military escalation becomes unavoidable. This includes the impact of the conflict occurring on international waters, and broader implications for stability, trade and diplomatic relations - addressing the regional and international aspect of the issue.

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