



STATE OF THE GAME

BUILDING PACAF'S COMPETITIVE MINDSET

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THE U.S. PERSPECTIVE: TAIWAN AND CHINA

The U.S. Department of State outlines the U.S. government policy regarding Taiwan.

The United States and Taiwan enjoy a robust unofficial relationship. The 1979 U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqué switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. In the Joint Communiqué, the United States recognized the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole legal government of China, acknowledging the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China, but not explicitly recognizing the PRC's claim over Taiwan. The Joint Communiqué also stated that the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) is responsible for implementing U.S. policy toward Taiwan.

Maintaining strong relations with Taiwan is a major U.S. goal, in line with the U.S. desire to further peace and stability in Asia. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act provides the legal basis for the unofficial relationship between the United States and Taiwan, and enshrines the U.S. commitment to assist Taiwan in maintaining its defensive capability. The United States insists on the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait differences, opposes unilateral changes to the status quo by either side, and encourages both sides to continue their constructive dialogue on the basis of dignity and respect.

[U.S. Relations With Taiwan](#)
August 31, 2018



A BRIEF HISTORY:

- 1683:** China's Qing Dynasty annexes Taiwan.
- 1895:** China cedes Taiwan to Japan.
- 1912:** The Chinese Kuomintang overthrow the Qing Dynasty to form the Republic of China (ROC).
- 1949:** The Chinese Communists push the ROC government to Taiwan. The ROC retains United Nations (UN) and Western recognition as the legitimate government of China.
- 1952:** Japan renounces all claims to Taiwan.
- 1971:** The People's Republic of China (PRC) replaces the ROC at the UN.
- 1979:** U.S. gives the PRC diplomatic recognition.
- 1996:** Taiwan holds its first presidential election.

A TRAJECTORY OF CRISIS: THE PRC AND TAIWAN

Taiwan's complex history sets the stage for continued controversy over the status of the island. Even after changing official recognition to the PRC, the U.S., under the guidance of the Taiwan Relations Act, supports Taiwan's ability to defend itself. As China's capabilities and saber-rattling continue to increase, the Taiwan Strait remains a dangerous flashpoint that could lead to full-scale military conflict between the U.S. and China.

First Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1954

The PRC bombards the strategic islands of Jinmen and Matsu in the Taiwan Strait. The bombardment ends in 1955, when the PRC signaled its desire to negotiate with the U.S.

Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1958

The PRC resumes bombardment of Jinmen and Matsu. The two sides eventually come to an arrangement in which they shell each other's garrisons on alternate days. This continues for 20 years until the PRC and the U.S. normalize relations.

U.S. Switches Diplomatic Recognition, 1979

The Carter administration follows through on Nixon's negotiations with the PRC by switching official diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, largely in an effort to create dilemmas for the Soviet Union. Following this change, Congress passes the Taiwan Relations Act to ensure that the U.S. remains legally obligated to provide for Taiwan's defense.

Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, 1996

The PRC conducts a series of missile tests and live fire exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan, with some missiles landing in major sea lanes and one flying directly over Taipei. The U.S. dispatches two carrier groups to the vicinity of Taiwan to monitor the situation. Many scholars believe that this intervention, along with U.S. dominance in the first Gulf War, prompted China's decades-long military modernization program.

Compete or Obsolete, 2035

In 2017, Xi Jinping revises previous [modernization goals](#) to designate 2035 as the benchmark for China's military to basically complete modernization, with a further goal of becoming a world-class military by mid-century. Leveraging reverse-engineered foreign acquisitions and a robust industrial espionage program to spring forward, the PRC has made significant technical improvements; however, training and proficiency continue to lag behind western standards in key areas.

Why It Matters: As China steps up its shows of force around Taiwan in 2021 and Taiwan [vows to defend itself](#) "to the very last day", PACAF Airmen must be ready to respond with an innovative mindset, superior technology, and training focused on [readiness](#). The PRC is determined to evolve and we must do the same. We must compete — or risk becoming obsolete.

