



The Bottom Line

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TAIWAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA

Summary

Under President Xi Jinping, China has increased military and economic pressure on Taiwan and tried to isolate the country diplomatically in an effort to counter what they suspect are moves toward Taiwan's independence.

Background

China regards Taiwan as a breakaway province which it has vowed to retake, by force if necessary. But Taiwan's leaders say it is clearly much more than a province, arguing that it is a sovereign state. Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (ROC) government fled mainland China to Taiwan in 1949 after being driven out by the Communist troops of Mao Zedong. Chiang Kai-shek held China's seat on the United Nations Security Council and was recognized by many Western nations as the only Chinese leader. But in 1971, the UN switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing and the ROC government was forced out. Relations between China and Taiwan started improving in the 1980s. China put forward a formula, known as "one country, two systems", under which Taiwan would be given significant autonomy if it accepted Chinese reunification. Since then, the number of countries that recognize the ROC government diplomatically has fallen drastically to about 15.

Current Status

Economically, Taiwan is dependent on Beijing. But for its security and for international political support, it relies on Washington. The island is in a precarious position. Beijing claims the self-governing island as part of its territory and threatens to annex it. Even though Taiwan has its own government, democratic elections, and army, most governments around the world don't recognize it as a country. Taiwan has no interest in being ruled by communist China. "Taiwan and the United States' shared values of democracy, freedom, and a market economy are an important basis for the vigorous development of the Taiwan-U.S. partnership," Joanne Ou, spokeswoman for Taiwan's foreign ministry, said.

In January 2016, Tsai Ing-wen defeated the Kuomintang (KMT) party (the party of Chiang Kai-shek) candidate Eric Chu. She leads the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which leans towards eventual official independence from China. Under President Tsai Ing-wen, the democratic island has chosen to align more closely with the United States, its most important unofficial ally and supplier of arms. President Donald Trump's administration has taken unprecedented measures to boost U.S. support for Taiwan. In 2020, Ms. Tsai won a second term, drawing criticism from Beijing. By that time, Hong Kong had seen months of unrest with protesters demonstrating against the mainland's increasing influence—a trend that had many in Taiwan worried Beijing would next set its eyes on Taiwan.

Although Democratic and Republican administrations have favored a cautious approach to cross-strait relations in recent decades, President Trump shattered diplomatic norms, increased travel and exchanges with Taiwanese officials, and elevated the island's international profile in ways that have drawn praise from the DPP and saber-rattling from Beijing under President Xi Jinping.

Impact

In recent weeks, the U.S. has announced a new economic dialogue with Taiwan and sent two high-ranking officials to the island—the most senior U.S. officials to visit Taiwan in 40 years. But it has stopped short of expressing support for Taiwan's de facto sovereignty, which would be a red line for Beijing. Chinese officials say Washington needs to stop all forms of official contact with Taiwan and respect the one-China principle to avoid serious damage to China-U.S. relations, as well as damage to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

RESOURCES:

[What's Behind the China-Taiwan Divide?](#) (BBC News)
[Taiwan Stuck Between U.S. and China's Battle for Supremacy](#) (NBC)
[U.S. and Taiwan are Drawing Closer, Irritating China](#) (CNBC)
[Taiwan Frets How Biden Admin Would Deal with China](#) (Post)