



Key Judgements

China is committed to its rejuvenation while Taiwan is committed to its sovereignty.

- China is the first economic potential in the world with strong alliances and long-term projects that have grand projections for the coming decades¹. At the same time, China has been pushing to increase their independence with technology to achieve their totalitarian global system and consolidate their power around the world². The technology that the Chinese Communist Party is developing encompasses all sectors, from the TikTok³ app to cyberattacks. In this context, China is looking to focus on space, cyber, and electronic warfare⁴. There is a strategic importance of Taiwan, whose microchip production is under constant threat from China⁵. The Chinese government is increasing their military actions against Taiwan⁶, though the island is maintaining its position⁷.

The United States is committed to maintaining peace through the status quo.

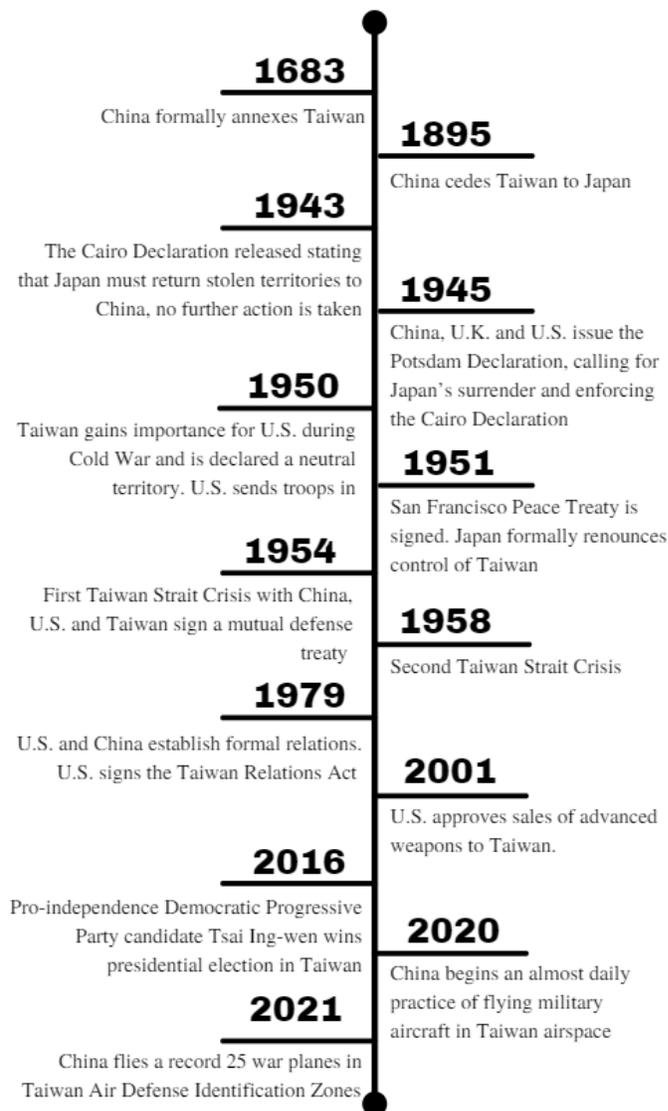
- The United States boasts a decades old commitment to support Taiwan, however as a result the territory finds itself in the middle of escalating tensions between Washington and Beijing.

It is most probable to assume that China will not invade Taiwan in 2021.

- Though there is an increasing potential for escalation of the conflict by means of attack from China, the more likely prospect is that China will maintain or increase pressure through means that will not provoke a large-scale retaliation.

Historical Background

The U.S. has been a significant ally and trade partner to Taiwan for decades and remains invested in the status of the nation as sovereign from China. In the 1950's during the Cold War, the U.S. realized Taiwan's strategic importance, both as an economic partner and as a tool against the Chinese Communist Party. As such, America began to insert itself in Taiwan's affairs to a much greater extent. Taiwan, like most of Asia, had developed an export-led economy. The United States at the same time was developing an import-led economy, signifying a mutually beneficial trade deal between the two nations. As a result, the United States has been key in Taiwan's process



of free markets since they developed the technology necessary to predict what will be the demand and then take the risk to buy the goods from Taiwan⁸. Taiwan and the U.S. signed a mutual defense treaty in 1954 in which the U.S. pledged to aid Taiwan if it is attacked by China. This serves as a precursor to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979. The TRA consolidated the allyship between the U.S. and Taiwan and has served for decades as a guide for American policy towards Taiwan and influenced policy with China⁹. The U.S. made clear its goals of deterring aggression from China, promoting the economic freedom of

Taiwan, and protecting the human rights of the Taiwanese people through the TRA. The U.S. has continued its relationship with Taiwan, ensuring that it is defended consistently throughout administrations.

For decades now, China has been growing silently into the global hegemon through a process of scientific and technological advancement and widespread industrialization that is quickly surpassing that of Europe and America. The pandemic has highlighted China's economic strength in that it has been an exception to the world recession.

Taiwan before Significant U.S. Involvement

In 1683, China's Qing Dynasty unified and annexed the area to become Taiwan from aboriginal kingdoms and Chinese and European settlements. The region remained in China's command for just over 200 years until China was forced to cede it to Japan in 1895 following their loss in the First Sino-Japanese War. During WWII, China demanded the territory back from Japan as a post-war settlement and occupied the territory with their troops. The Allies supported the demand through the 1943 Cairo Declaration; However, it was not enforced. The Potsdam Declaration was jointly issued in 1945 by the Republic of China, the U.K., and the U.S. in which they call for Japan's surrender and carry out the Cairo Declaration. In 1951, Japan claimed to have formally renounced control of the territory in the San Francisco Peace Treaty, however it never specified to which country it was returned. Since then, the governing rights of the territory have been disputed. China and Taiwan have since had a strained relationship as evidenced by the first and second Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1954 and 1958, respectively. Both events involved disputes over the islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

National Key Players

Tsai Ing-Wen

Tsai Ing-Wen is the current president and first female president of Taiwan since 2016¹⁰. She is affiliated with the pro-separationist Democratic Progressive Party. On April 15, 2021, Tsai Ing-Wen reflected to the US emissary that Taiwan is disposed to keep working with the United State to dissuade "adventurous maneuvers and provocations" from current military pressure by

China. Tsai thanked Biden's administration for its compromise to maintain the peace and stability in the cross-strait region. She emphasized that Beijing's actions around Taiwan have been altering the equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific region alternating the regional order.

Jaushieh Joseph Wu

Wu is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs and a part of the Democratic Progressive Party. During a briefing on Wednesday, April 7, 2021, Wu responded to a question about China's pressure by commenting that China is sending mixed signals to Taiwan. Nonetheless, Wu declared: "We will fight a war if we need to fight a war, and if we need to defend ourselves to the very last day, then we will defend ourselves to the very last day¹¹."

Johnny Chiang Chi-chen

Chi-chen is leader of Taiwan's main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT). Despite the KMT being the anti-separatist party, on March 2, 2021 he declared to Reuters saying that they are not rushing to meet the Chinese President Xi Jinping, and that a proposal to accept communist rule had "no market" in Taiwan¹².

International Key Players

Several major global powers have great political, economic, and military influence on Taiwan.

China has significant interests in the island and considers itself to be the true governing body of the territory. The CCP has expressed great desire for reunification and has called the action inevitable for the "great rejuvenation" of China.¹³ Xi Jinping, China's President, warned that in regard to Taiwan, "foreign interference is intolerable" and that the Chinese government "reserves the option of taking all necessary measures" when deterring any foreign interference¹⁴. There is also interest in China deterring the spread of pro-democracy and anti-Beijing movements from Taiwan to other Chinese territories like Hong Kong¹⁵.

The United States is an important ally that provides economic and military support to Taiwan, as well as sharing its political objectives. The U.S. has made it clear that it will continue supporting Taiwan's fight for independence as an effort to spread democracy. The Biden Administration has affirmed that its commitment to Taiwan is "rock solid" and has given strong indication that these ties will continue to be strengthened¹⁶.

Japan has a key position due to its geographical location and role as a previous colonizer. Aside from the imperial and historical ties with Taiwan, Japan still maintains diplomatic and economic ties as well. However, Japan balances along a thin line with its foreign policy with Taiwan and China, maintaining a strong but cautious relationship. Japan is Taiwan's second largest trading partner and hopes to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, however it will not risk its position with its own largest trade partner, China¹⁷. As such, Japan does not discuss its role in defense nor will it sell any heavy artillery to Taiwan¹⁸. A maritime distance of a mere 224 km separates Taiwan from Japan's westernmost island, Yonaguni. Only a little over 2000 km separates the capitals two island nations. Japan has also allowed for 55,600 U.S. military personnel to be stationed on its islands¹⁹.

The United Nations does not extend membership to Taiwan though Taiwan does wish to participate. For decades, Taiwan has submitted bids for UN membership, however, membership is reserved only for sovereign states. Taiwan's disputed status, along with China's great influence in the organization, has led to Taiwan's lack of representation²⁰

Significance of Conflict

The significance of this conflict is at a global scale as the Taiwan Strait is one of the most likely areas for conflict between two large nuclear powers²¹. According to David Lampton, director of China studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, prior to the attack

ONI: China Already Has More Battle Force Ships than U.S. Navy

Table 2. Numbers of Chinese and U.S. Navy Battle Force Ships, 2000-2030
Figures for Chinese ships taken from ONI information paper of February 2020

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Ballistic missile submarines	1	1	3	4	4	6	8
Nuclear-powered attack submarines	5	4	5	6	7	10	13
Diesel attack submarines	56	56	48	53	55	55	55
Aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers	19	25	25	26	43	55	65
Frigates, corvettes	38	43	50	74	102	120	135
Total China navy battle force ships, including types not shown above	110	220	220	255	360	400	425
Total U.S. Navy battle force ships	318	282	288	271	297	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>

Source: Table prepared by CRS. Source for China's navy: Unclassified ONI information paper prepared for Senate Armed Services Committee, subject "UPDATED China: Naval Construction Trends vis-à-vis U.S. Navy Shipbuilding Plans, 2020-2030," February 2020, 4 pp. Provided by Senate Armed Services Committee to CRS and CBO on March 4, 2020, and used in this CRS report with the committee's permission. Figures are for end of calendar year. Source for figures for U.S. Navy: U.S. Navy data; figures are for end of fiscal year.

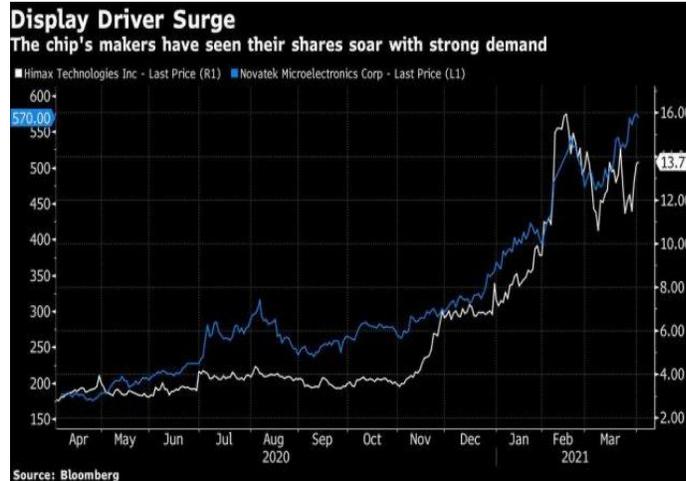
Note: n/a means not available.

on 911, the next probable place where there would be a conflict with two big nuclear powers would be the Taiwan Strait²². Kurt Campbell, in an interview for Frontline, was asked about the implications of the conflict for America. He answered that it is not only a problem for America, but for the world as well. He asserted that this is a

global issue and that in the next few years, a great number of international dilemmas would be associated with the Taiwan strait²³.

Economic:

The production that Taiwan has is one of the most important necessities for all the corporations around the world; it is nothing more and nothing less than the creation of semiconductors (microchips). The world is depending more each day on these semiconductors²⁴. As COVID-19 serves as an accelerator to the implementation of a new global system where everything will be digitized, these semiconductors are a principal necessity²⁵. All the new technology in the global digital transformation needs these semiconductors as a base, including phones, screens, computers and, more essentially, for all new military technology. With this significant demand, Taiwan is expected to have an economic growth this fiscal year of 2021 with a 4.64% expansion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)²⁶. China realizes the importance of the



semiconductors and has been trying to infiltrate Taiwan to obtain the information to produce them as well²⁷. One of the actions that Beijing is accused of committing is hiring engineers from TSMC²⁸ to hack companies, in addition to infiltrating employees and attacking with computer viruses.

Political:

Xi Jinping and the CPP have been investing immense political capital in the cross-strait issue.

- Taiwan represents a strategic space for China and for its reputation. It is needed to realize the doctrine of the CCP for its promised reunification and rejuvenation of the “Great China” by 2049²⁹.
- The island is in a strategic position between the Philippine Sea and both the South & East Chinese Seas, making it an indispensable location for trade and defense. China acknowledges that Taiwan’s security deal with the US limits its pursuit of hegemony around its own waters by threat of confrontation with the US. The Island can control part of the seas where the US and its allies (Japan and South Korea) are locating naval ships, foreign troops, and weapons in the seas³⁰.

Religion

Religion is an important facet in Taiwan since they have been experiencing increasing strong religious Chinese Confucius youth movements³¹. This is a threat for China due to the friction felt in its territories like Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang. If China allows this growing movement, they may see more problems, for example increasing votes in alternative political

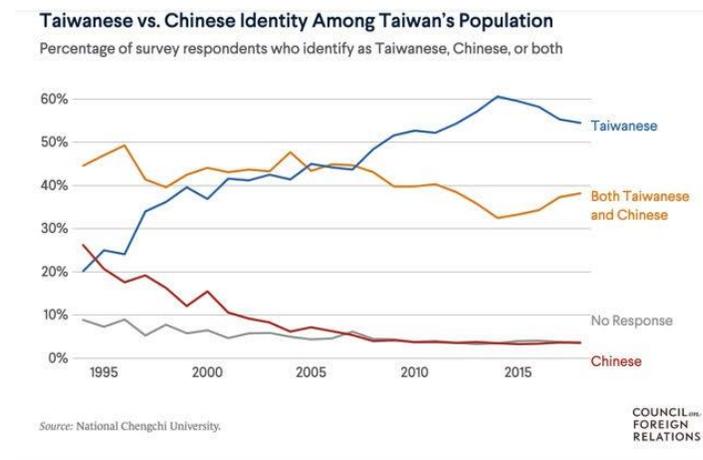
parties as was the case in Taiwan. There is even a risk with Taiwan's example spreading to Mainland China.

In context

The CCP wants to establish and grow the idea where the PRC matters. The CCP is trying to gain time to help their candidates and win the elections, spreading the idea of nationalism. On this issue, Taiwan is the target; developing this front with Taiwan will be very strategic for China. Taiwan is one of the important pieces to make China great again.

Current State

Taiwan's increasing sentiments towards independence threaten China's "one country, two systems" principle which continues to place strain on their relationship and could lead to an attack on the island from China's government. The status of the situation is that each nation



is increasingly rooted in their position without clear dialogue. This is a serious time for the diplomacy of the United States. The current situation is a challenge to maintain and improve the diplomatic relations between the US and China.

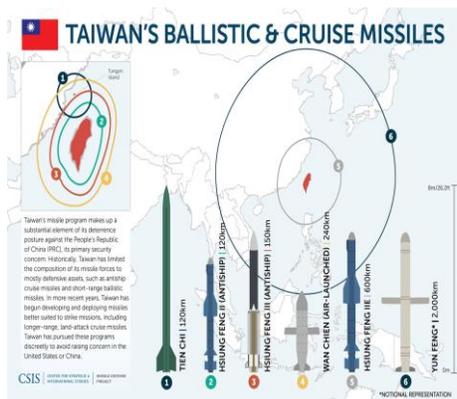
Cyber-attacks from China remain a relevant threat and source of concern for both the US and Taiwan as demonstrated by the Biden Administration's cyber policy vision³². In August of 2020, Taiwan accused China of obtaining citizens' personal data and government information by hacking over ten government agencies and 6,000 email accounts³³. In that same month, a two-year long espionage program on seven semiconductor vendors in Taiwan was discovered and is

suspected to have been done by Chinese state hackers to gain information on source code, software development kits, and chip designs³⁴. Other potential attacks include ransomware, which is malware that blocks usage of devices until a sum of money is paid³⁵.

China has been publicly flying aircraft over Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ) since September of 2020. According to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, Chinese military planes flying through the ADIZ, generally the southwest corner, are an almost daily occurrence. They have identified Chinese aircraft 18 times so far in April, 18 times in March, 17 times in February, 27 times in January, 19 times in December, 22 times in November, and 22 times in October³⁶.

On October 26, 2020, the US Department of State approved a \$2.37 billion deal with Taiwan of defensive arms. The sale included 100 land-based harpoon missile systems, 400 ANTI-SHIP missiles, and 25 radar vehicles. Beijing responded with sanctions for US arms dealers³⁷.

Chinese and American officials met in Alaska over a two-day period of March 18 and



19, 2021 to discuss relations under the new Biden Administration³⁸. The conversation reflected an inelastic position from both nations as the US and China were straight with their speech. China took a defensive posture when the divisive topics of cyberattacks and pressure on Taiwan were mentioned and led to no cooperation in these areas.

The U.S., along with its allies of Canada, Britain, and the European Union, imposed economic sanctions through NATO on two dozen high-ranking Chinese officials on March 22nd. The sanctions were a coordinated effort to hold the government accountable for human rights violations. This continues to strain relationships, which is significant as China is a major

trade partner to all these countries. China now claims the spot of the EU's largest trading partner and the U.S.'s largest importer³⁹.

April 8th was the largest Chinese incursion to date with 25 aircraft⁴⁰. The previous record was from March 26th when China deployed 20 aircraft just a day after the Biden Administration established a Coast Guard Working Group with Taiwan to strengthen the defensive partnership⁴¹.

The leaders of the U.S. and Japan met on April 16th and released a joint statement in which they encouraged a peaceful resolution to cross-strait issues.⁴² During the visit of Japan's Prime Minister Suga to President Biden, the two nation-heads discussed China's actions in the Indo-Pacific region and throughout the world. Both nations agree that recent Chinese activities, such as the use of economic and other forms of coercion go against the international rules-based order⁴³. *Taiwan's Presidential Office spokesman Xavier Chang welcomed the joint statement from Taiwan and pledged to deepen relations with like-minded partners.* In a statement, Chang related that "Taiwan, the US and Japan share common values in defending freedom, democracy and human rights, as well as common interests in promoting regional security and prosperity⁴⁴" *China's Communist Party stands in firm opposition to the joint statement, prompting responses from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Chinese embassies in both the U.S. and Japan.* A spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry responded to the joint statement, saying that it "grossly interferes in China's domestic affairs and severely violates basic norms governing international relations. China deplores and rejects it." The spokesperson continues in urging the two nations to "take China's concern seriously, abide by the one-China principle, and immediately stop meddling in China's domestic affairs and harming Chinese interests." The response ends with an assurance that the government will do all in its power to defend China's sovereignty, security, and development interests⁴⁵. The embassies of either nations have issued

similar responses, accusing Japan and the US of adopting a “Cold War” mentality and infringing on China's territorial sovereignty⁴⁶.

The World Medical Association (WMA) voted almost unanimously in favor of a resolution to support Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly (WHA) and World Health Organization (WHO) on April 20th; China was the only dissenter⁴⁷. The resolution passed after a period of intense debate from the Taiwan Medical Association (TMA) and Chinese Medical Doctor Association (CMDA). The former argued that politics should not take precedence over health while the latter insisted that "Taiwan is part of China," and that China can ensure the health of Taiwan's people.

Taipei started 24 hours a day, 7-day simulation of a Chinese invasion from April 23 to 30⁴⁸. The process involved using an innovative software to simulate an invasion from China and prepare for all possible scenarios. The exercise will recreate different big threats from China like invasion and surgical operations.

The positions remain firm and more inelastic. On Sunday April 25, the Vice president of Taiwan Lai Ching-te stressed that Taiwan is an island with sovereignty and that it will continue to be respected. At the same time, he reflected that only the people from Taiwan can decide the route of the island⁴⁹.

Outlook -Possible Scenarios

Historically, a change in global hegemony, much like the one occurring now, has always been accompanied by war. That being said, the United States does not want the situation in Taiwan to escalate into an armed conflict. Within the next year, the US will be monitoring the situation and responding to China's actions without the use of force. With regards to China, there are two main scenarios to examine: whether the nation does or does not attack Taiwan with military force.

Experts have been making predictions on a future large-scale war and trends show that the region of the Taiwan strait is a hot spot for such an occurrence⁵⁰. The risk of a large-scale war still on the table but, with technological innovations like cyber-attacks or the increased reach of military weapons, such wars are less probable⁵¹. Regardless of either scenario, China will maintain the implementation of cyber-attacks to debilitate the independent economy of Taiwan and undermine the country through unconventional war involving cyber, trade, opinion, and politics.

Provocative Wildcards That May Result in Retaliation

- *Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen met with an unofficial delegation sent by US President Joe Biden on April 15, 2021. The topics discussed involved the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait and Beijing's* ⁵².”
- *It is likely that China will increase their pressure with Taiwan as the CCP 100-year Anniversary approaches*⁵³. The CCP is using this event to promote communism and its strength to the globe, and they don't want to appear weak in any aspect⁵⁴.
- *Taiwan commissioned a new coast guard ship into service on April 29th to counter the “gray zone” conflicts in which Chinese militia cross into Taiwan’s maritime border.*^{55”}.

- Outlook for the US 2021

*The Biden Administration will exhibit continued strengthening of alliances and partnerships to decrease any intention of attack from Beijing*⁵⁶. *The US will prioritize increasing their influence on the Asian-Pacific region*⁵⁷. The Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs for the Biden Administration, Asia strategist Dr. Kurt Campbell, has marked the importance for the US to continue maintaining diplomatic relationships in the region. Campbell has made it clear in a

2020 seminar that this includes both a constructive relationship with China and a constructive relationship with Taiwan, which do not have to be mutually exclusive⁵⁸. This holds true for other nations in the region as most want the economic benefits of trade with China while still preserving allyship and the political support of America. Campbell relates that the U.S. must use a coalition among nations to put forward towards China a unified diplomatic front⁵⁹.

- If China Attacks

The current probability of a military attack on Taiwan and the likelihood of an armed conflict between the US and China is between 05% to 25%⁶⁰. This number has risen in the past few months given the pressure from Beijing with the military simulations and invasions of airspace that have been occurring since 2020.

A possible time for attack regarding a study and comparison with Russia could be after the Beijing Winter Olympics, which end on February 20, 2022. The Olympics presents an opportunity to build up global prestige and attacking soon after may mean a limited response, as occurred when Russia “took back” Crimea after the Sochi Olympics⁶¹. Moving forward, China will calculate each step carefully.

-If China does not Attack

Given that the probability that China will attack is only up to 25%, the likelihood that Beijing does not attack is much greater, being at or above 75%. Xi Jinping has been very strategic in declaring a specific deadline for reunification. Xi wants to make progress but that does not mean that he will rush the process. *China will keep increasing wise steps to not use force and maintain the plan to achieve national rejuvenation.* China does not want to awaken a global anti-China coalition but that does not guarantee that China will not use force in these times because, as history has proven, war is full of miscalculations⁶².

China will increase their operations around the world trying to get more allies and support on political, economic, and security interests from partnerships across East Asia and the Western Pacific to strengthen their natural sphere of control. China will also try to mold the political environment and boost policy preferences, adjust public discourse, and coerce political leaders whom the PCC believes to be obstacles for its plan in the United States. China will continue to soften opinion in the United States about Hong Kong's democracy and religious freedom⁶³.

China will procure to undermine the US allies ⁶⁴. Beijing will condemn the evolving US-Taiwan cooperation and try to increase doubts on the commitment from the United States in the region while also striving to undermine Taiwan's democratic system. Frictions will continue to grow with China's actions to corner Taiwan into depending heavily on the mainland for economic reasons. Beijing will be expanding their military actions in the Taiwan Strait⁶⁵.

Conclusion

A decades-long debate over Taiwan's status as sovereign continues. China's goals for reunification of all its territories have resulted in an ever-increasing pressure on the island territory to renounce its separatist ideals; however, Taiwan appears to be committed to its independence now more than ever. Intervention from the US has heightened tensions between the two great powers of Beijing and Washington. Though an escalation into an armed conflict is not as probable as a continuation of the status within 2021, tensions will remain high unless the nations involved can find a diplomatic solution through a unified front.

Endnotes

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