

## Research Article

### PRC POLICY AND ACTIONS ON TAIWAN

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#### ABSTRACT

The 21st century is witnessing undeniable rise of China and as it's becoming ever more influential and powerful in both economy and military force. Despite relative setbacks of economy we have seen in the last two years China overall have completely transformed itself from a socialist agrarian juggernaut to a highly industrialised, developed, powerful and ambitious international player. But under this façade the country still carries issues that have been there during very foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. This would be the Taiwan Issue. Despite massive economic might across the Taiwan Strait, disparity of population and military might between PRC and Taiwan have been increasing over the years and brings the issue of unifying Taiwan to China (Taiwanese reunification) more likely in some sense but highly complicated for the contemporary international relations situation. In this article we will examine the changing views on either side of the Strait and examine policies in relation to current situations in the region to determine likelihood of reunification and if so possible date for it.

**Keywords:** PRC, ROK, Taiwan, Reunification, One China-Two Systems.

#### INTRODUCTION

Mainland China and Taiwan shares largely common history and yet the China's economic prosperity changed balance in the relationship with increased PRC influence and ultimately established the "One China" policy. Aside from "One China" policy PRC has "One China" principle. This principle was discussed and approved on 1992 by both mainland China and Taiwan during the "1992 Consensus". According to the consensus both PRC and Taiwan agreed that mainland China and Taiwan must be a unified sovereign state but no clear agreement was made on governance. Current ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan does not agree with the "One China" principle and claims China means on PRC and Taiwan is not China, hence is a sovereign nation, and there must be "One China and One Taiwan".

A study made in 2015 showed that 64 percent of Taiwan's population considers themselves Taiwanese and only 12 percent considered themselves as Chinese. Also the same study showed 68 percent of the population supported the idea of independence. PRC is a multinational country and considers Taiwan as its 23<sup>rd</sup> province. If Taiwan pursues the path of independence, China has many regions who might want to follow suit, such as Tibet and currently Hong Kong. Therefore, China puts extreme care in issues related to Taiwanese independence.

#### Literature review: cooperation Between PRC and Taiwan

When Taiwan lost its UN membership and Security Council membership in 1971, it was a huge blow for its external affairs and international prestige. So UN and western countries tends to disapprove actions of Taiwanese government and Chinese policy on the matter. In other words, Taiwan is quite politically pressed in global politics. Despite this Taiwan established diplomatic relations with more than 20 countries of Africa and Latin America and it maintains independent trade, cultural and scientific relations with more than 140 countries, including 20 highly developed countries.

64 countries have Taiwanese trade and cultural delegation while 1 has a consulate. Taiwan fought hard to get international membership despite not being a recognised state. For instance to get WTO membership it faced constant pressure from China during both its application process and membership period, Taipei actively tried to balance against China's political influence and to persuade other WTO members of the rightfulness of Taiwan's position in accordance with WTO rules. The support of the major powers, particularly the US, made it possible for Taiwan to apply for and join the WTO independently of China and to reject all the political demands made by Beijing during the final stage of its application process. During the cross-strait conflicts after becoming a WTO member, particularly with regard to the blue book dispute and its GPA accession, Taiwan continued to lobby the most powerful WTO members in order to fight back against the, in Taipei's view, unjustified demands from China, based on the 1992 Chairman's statement<sup>1</sup>. The city of Taipei hosts 48 delegations of 44 countries and the country itself boasts membership in 893 international non-government organisations<sup>2</sup>. Taiwan hosting such missions can't be seen as China's recognition of the state. Another WOT membership case be used here. China clearly distinguished between functional trade issues and political issues with regard to cross-strait relations in the trade body. While Beijing adjusted its behavior in line with WTO norms on functional trade issues, it continued to be more rigid on symbolic and political issues and pursued a firm strategy of presenting Taiwan as a Chinese and non-sovereign member of the WTO<sup>3</sup>. On the other side of Taiwan Strait, PRC announced its strategic goal of creating a "rich, powerful, democratic, socially advanced, and harmonious" socialist country by 2049 which would be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding PRC<sup>4</sup>. After being elected as the new leader of PRC during Communist Party of

<sup>1</sup>Bjorn Alexander Lidnemann, Cross-Strait Relations and International Organizations: Taiwan's Participation in IGOs in the Context of Its Relationship with China, 2014, Springer VS, Wiesbaden. Page 157

<sup>2</sup><https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan>

<sup>3</sup>Bjorn Alexander Lidnemann, Cross-Strait Relations and International Organizations: Taiwan's Participation in IGOs in the Context of Its Relationship with China, 2014, Springer VS, Wiesbaden. Page 159

<sup>4</sup>The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China "China's Military Strategy", May 2015, Beijing

Available at: <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/index.htm>

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China's conference held on November 2012, Xi Jinping announced in his speech that implementation of Chinese Dream or Resurrection of the Great Chinese nation will be the goal of the country. He introduced 2 foreign policy concepts in relation to implementation of Chinese Dream:

1. To create favourable condition for supporting Chinese development by establishing and maintaining peaceful and cooperative foreign relations.
2. To defend Chinese national interests if it may result deterioration of relations with other countries<sup>5</sup>. The issue surrounding Taiwan is part of the Chinese national interest.

Also in his speech at XIX conference of CCP, Xi Jinping noted that importance of "One country two systems" and "unification of the motherland would be the main strategy of China in the new era". This concept of new era is another term denoting Taiwanese unification to China and according to Xi Jinping the year 2050 would be the year of completing Resurrection of the Great Chinese nation. In total, 14 issues are mentioned in the new era, including Taiwanese unification. In other words, these announcements can be interpreted as Beijing's timeline for unifying Taiwan to China will be the year 2050<sup>6</sup>. Unless China unified Taiwan to itself the Great Resurrection may not be completed and Chinese Dream concept will not materialize fully. The last 3 years of 20<sup>th</sup> century marked significant events for PRC as it took back Hong Kong and Macao from its former colonizers and mainland authority over them was reinstated. These two actions are historic achievements implemented by Jiang Zemin under Deng Xiaoping's advice. In territorial terms the only part that still needs unification for China is Taiwan. Conditions to implement Deng Xiaoping's proposal to unify the mainland and Taiwan by peaceful means are very different from Hong Kong and Macao and its more free. Even if Taiwan is fully unified, it may still retain its armed forces and mainland may not station any troops on the island. Moreover, Taiwanese current status has the conditions of it maintaining certain foreign relations and cooperation authority over itself. But generations of Taiwanese leaders opposed unification with China under these terms. Although both sides reached an agreement as result of 1992 consensus, current government of Taiwan led by Democratic Progressive Party and Tsai Ing-wen denies them. Directly or indirectly as result of this, Communist Party of China expressed its reversion to unification to mainland using military force if necessary and adopted Law on National Security, thus creating legal framework for possible unification via military actions.

Comparison of PRC and Taiwan military capacity in numbers<sup>7</sup>

	PRC	Taiwan
Total manpower	2 million (estimate)	220,000
Active personnel	0.98 million	130,000
Land force	99A, 98A, 96A, 88A/B, Total: 7,400 (estimate)	M-60A, M48A, Total: 1200(estimate)
Naval aviation	750 (estimate)	390 (estimate)
Naval force	80 (estimate)	20
Naval vessels including capital ships	70 (estimate)	4
Submarines	15,000	10,000
Marines	2,850 (estimate)	500
Planes of various roles	J-10 - 370 Su-27/J11 - 329 Su-30 - 97 Su-35 - 14 J-15 - 20 J-16 - 16 J20 - 6 (prototype) 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> generation fighters: 852	Mirage 200 - 55 F 16 - 144 Ching-kuo -128 4 <sup>th</sup> generation fighters: 327 w
Population	1.39 billion	24 million

<sup>5</sup>中国外交新闻-2018

<sup>6</sup> Is China planning to take Taiwan by force in 2020?

Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2126541/china-planning-take-taiwan-force-2020>

<sup>7</sup>Defense of Japan-2018. Available at:

[https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/pdf/2018/DOJ2018\\_1-2-3\\_web.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2018/DOJ2018_1-2-3_web.pdf)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION: PRC POLICY AND ACTIONS ON TAIWAN

Military doctrines in both sides of Taiwan Strait has changed its forms but their fundamental ideals still stands. For China it would be defending its national interest both around it shores and internationally, please be noted as mentioned above for this case Chinese national interest includes unification of Taiwan, and recent geopolitical situations around South China sea is increasingly urging China to develop and bolster its naval and advanced warfare capacity. In recent years, Chinese People's navy significantly modernized itself and its capacity to implement offensive and tactical operations increased a lot with thanks to introduction of air craft carries and advanced naval aviation weaponry. This was demonstrated during South China Sea disputes and during recent exercises conducted with Russian Pacific navy. For Taiwan the main goal of its armed forces was to defend the island from possible Chinese invasion and to be used a deterrence. Although it's heavily outnumbered in comparison to China, Taiwanese armed forces has been investing in modernization of its armed forces, particularly for air force and navy to be on par with the changing strategic situations. Taiwanese authorities and armed forces command are acknowledging that traditional land force based warfare may not be the ideal deterrence to threat of invasion and shifted its attention to other branches of the armed forces. The opposing military in Taiwan Strait is supplemented by direct and indirect participation from regional and global players. The biggest player to be involved in the Taiwan Issue after China and Taiwan is USA. The reason that the US opposes mainland China's pursuit is that Washington believes China is a hostile force and thus Taiwan will be utilized to threaten American political influence and security interests in the Asia-Pacific region if Beijing achieves unification<sup>8</sup>. Another big regional power who is carefully observing and giving importance to the issue is Japan. Similarly to USA, to understand Japan's own interests involved in the Taiwan Issue and its real targets, which often hide behind its cooperation with the US, it is also necessary to analyse Japan's attitude toward China. In fact, its official "respects and understands" and its domestic political forces' open support for the pro-independence movements in Taiwan have revealed Japan's serious concerns about its neighbour's rapid economic growth and increasing military capabilities<sup>9</sup>. Since the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century or early 2000's CCP officials on several occasions made remarks "China and Taiwan should not carry on separate ways in the long term and this issue with historic roots must be resolved" during international conferences. Such stable view on the matter gradually unified all positions within the Communist Party. But PRC government never officially announced a set date for unification of Taiwan to the public. For instance, the government used several rather general and routine answers whenever they were questioned about Taiwanese unification date by the press. This refusal to give a set date for reunification is a result of CCP's long term plan and secrecy over the complicated matter over Taiwan. Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin, Hu Jingtao, and Xi Jinping all have expressed their positions on the matter during official visits and negotiations. Under Xi Jinping's leadership the reunification of Taiwan is becoming actively discussed once more. But Taiwanese internal situation is closely associated with PRC and international environment and it's clear that any resolution make take great amount of time and effort. Nevertheless, one of China's top priorities is economic growth. It considers the first 20 years of the twenty-first century as a period of important strategic opportunity that it should

<sup>8</sup>Xiaochuan Sang, Power, Interests, and Internal factors: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective on the Taiwan Issue, 2019, Palgrave and Macmillan, Singapore. Page 167

<sup>9</sup> Same page

capitalize on to accomplish its main goal to build a prosperous society. A peaceful periphery is foremost needed. Furthermore, as long-term indicators appear to favor the mainland, China believes reunification is a way to make itself stronger and more respected, but not at the expense of exhausting itself unnecessarily through a war. Therefore, China's military buildup opposite Taiwan is not preparing to adopt a military option for reunification but rather to credibly prevent Taiwan from taking audacious moves toward independence. Although Chinese leadership remains prepared to use all means necessary to prevent Taiwan's independence, they believe that the military option should be secondary to the full exploitation of political and economic incentives and thus would only be used as a last resort<sup>10</sup>. This was the Chinese long term view on the Taiwan Issue until recently and the relative lack of results thus far, complemented by changing situations in Hong Kong, Sino-US relations may lead to more aggressive approach. In January 2019, Chief of staff of the Central Military Committee General Li Zuocheng stated "If anyone tries to separate Taiwan from China, PLA will use all necessary measures to protect our national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity"<sup>11</sup>. In his article written on South China Morning post, researcher Den Yuwen identified 4 reasons for potential use of force by China in unifying Taiwan<sup>12</sup>. These reasons we believe are worthy of consideration and rather interesting points. These are:

**Firstly**, although Beijing provided financial assistance to Taiwan for many years, it failed to attract favourable view of the island's inhabitants. Every year the issue surrounding Taiwan Strait is deteriorating in some ways.

**Secondly**, as times go by, shared similarities of the Han Chinese people and the young Taiwanese are fading rapidly.

**Thirdly**, influence of Taiwanese political parties are continuously decreasing. Even though Kuomintang party is in power once more, it lacks the position and political backing to unify Taiwan with the mainland.

**Fourthly**, the people of China are increasingly demanding unification of Taiwan even if it requires military action. Also he identified that if China is reverting to use military the most suitable date for reunification would be 2021. This is due to the CCP's 100 years anniversary set to held in 2021 and also the same year marks completion of the first stage of creating a "Prosperous society" goal. China is carefully integrating reunification of Taiwan via military means in training and reforms of PLA. Special attention is given to maintaining constant preparedness and improving offensive capability. In recent years, Chinese military has been increasingly giving importance of modernizing cross branch cooperation, combined arms tactics, and inclusion of amphibious operation's capacity around offshore regions in training of Navy, Air force and Naval infantry branches. Therefore, PLA strategy aims to train its personnel more actively in more challenging conditions and incorporate necessary combat skills and experience in it by creating an advanced training, monitoring, and inspection system. Historically in 1979, based on the premise that economic and social ties could eventually lead to reunification, China changed its policy on Taiwan

from "liberation" to "peaceful reunification." Owing to relatively stable cross-Strait relations until 1995, a sustained relaxation of military confrontations across the Strait had existed. China's lowered priority for military spending had resulted in neglected military modernization. After Lee Teng-hui's trip to the United States in 1995 and the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, Beijing realized that the danger of an independent Taiwan was looming large and if forced to go to war, there were many gaps in its military capabilities<sup>13</sup>. Learning from this CCP have greatly improved its military arsenal, readiness of its troops, and naval forces around Taiwan since then. Also the military strategic policy of CCP states that PLA must eliminate old fashioned policy of giving preference to land forces before navy and stressed the importance of improving combat capability of the navy in response to the changing geopolitical environment surrounding China and its national interest zones. This led to adoption of the "Active Defence" concept in the PRC's military strategy and it highlights naval engagements and identified closest threat to China is highly likely to come from offshore areas and warned first engagements of any confrontation would be happen in either in amphibious conditions or in naval combats with high probability<sup>14</sup>. Defence white book of China 2019 mentioned "PRC in its sovereign rights, will develop infrastructures on South China sea islands and coral reefs and send troops to guard it; and will conduct routine patrols around Diaoyu islands in East China sea"<sup>15</sup> expressing the country's resolve on the matters. As researchers predicted this position is decreasing China's flexibility on Taiwan issue. In other words, As China gets stronger militarily its shifting its policy on disputes islands and Taiwan to a more decisive stance.

#### The Defence White Book mentioned about the Taiwan Issue:

*While China will pursue*

*"peaceful reunification" and "one country-two systems" policies it will decisively confront any actions or foreign entanglements aimed at dividing the nation. "China must reunify and it will be reunified."*

*"China has the decisiveness and the capacity to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity and China will never accept or allow division of a territory to any country, any organisation or any political force by all means. If this worst case occurs China will not back down from using force and will use all necessary measures. This is not antagonising our brothers and sisters in Taiwan but refers to foreign entanglements in Taiwan and a few extremists with the slogan of Taiwanese independence and their actions. PLA will decisively defeat anyone who tries separate Taiwan from China and will defend our national unity with any cost it may require ..."<sup>16</sup>. It can be assumed that China's rapid strengthening of its naval force capability under military reforms is the direct result of ongoing situation in Taiwan Strait and equally complicated South China Sea dispute. This undoubtedly shows China's view of holding military option as mean of reunification if the necessary conditions occur. With modernisation came greater responsibilities, and increasingly the PLA – especially its Navy (PLAN, 中国人民解放军海军) – began assuming additional roles, such as conducting patrols outside of China's coastal areas and holding exercises in the West Pacific. Little by little, the*

<sup>10</sup>Shiping Hua, Reflections on the Triangular Relations of Beijing-Taipei-Washington Since 1995: Status Quo at the Taiwan Straits?, 2006, Palgrave and Macmillan, New York. Page 89

<sup>11</sup>China's military strength could advance Taiwan unification by force, says US official. Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2182377/chinas-military-strength-could-encourage-idea-taiwan>

<sup>12</sup> Is China planning to take Taiwan by force in 2020?

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<sup>13</sup>Shiping Hua, Reflections on the Triangular Relations of Beijing-Taipei-Washington Since 1995: Status Quo at the Taiwan Straits?, 2006, Palgrave and Macmillan, New York. Page 88, 89

<sup>14</sup>The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China "China's Military Strategy", May 2015, Beijing.

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<sup>15</sup>新时代的中国国防. 中国白皮书-2019. Available at: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content\\_5414325.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/24/content_5414325.htm)

<sup>16</sup>Same source

PLAN was transforming from a green-water navy into blue-water one, capable of operating well beyond China's shores. Although the PLAN was to play a greater role in defence of the PRC's territorial claims in East and South China Seas, modernisation and transformation remained largely geared toward a role in a Taiwan scenario and preventing outside forces from intervening in the Taiwan Strait. The same dictate applies to the other PLA services – its Air Force (PLAAF, 中国人民解放军空军), and Army (中国人民解放军) – as well as the Second Artillery Corps (中国人民解放军火箭军) which is in charge of China's missile arsenal and nuclear deterrent. The Second artillery corps in particular, which by 2015 was aiming an estimated 1,500 short and medium range ballistic missiles at Taiwan, continued to figure in Beijing's military plans against the island, though in recent years its medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM) deployment has also begun to target other countries within the region<sup>17</sup>.

### Taiwanese reunification timeline or date

We consider following conditions to be having influence on resolving the issue around Taiwan.

**One**, overall improvements of general statistic figures of PRC are becoming a favourable precondition for CCP to resolve the Taiwan issue. These includes:

- People's Liberation Army of China reached a new capacity level that can invade and occupy Taiwan and it's ready to offer stiff resistance and deterrence to USA in the region thus balancing the two major players.
- China is increasingly improving its capability to adapt, resolve and overcome any economic negative effects of international sanctions or regional economic crisis that may come as a result of military action by China.
- Advancements in science and advanced technology will become deciding factor in an armed conflict and will become a guarantee against international sanction. CCP leadership no doubt has a contingency plan for the worst case scenario of Taiwan issue getting resolved not by peaceful means but by using force. Also the party is expressing its willingness and boldness to defend the nations' interest aggressively.

**Two**, changes in Taiwanese domestic situation remains under careful observation and attention of PRC government. If extreme changes occur in Taiwanese domestic situation, for instance ideas of independence spreads widely, CCP might swiftly use military force. But for any other case, peaceful unification remains to be the most cost efficient and rational path.

**Three**, if military action is unavoidable in Taiwan, the mainland must have stable social and economic conditions and must have the capability to overcome challenges it may face. It is highly probable that China will not revert to military action in resolving the Taiwan Issue if its domestic conditions are not favourable with social unrests or economic hardships.

### Xi Jinping's government's dream

The result of Xi Jinping's government's first 5 years of work have received applaud of the Chinese people and Chinese people residing globally and in some respect from the international community. Hard fight against corruption led by Xi Jinping's government and CCP, biggest modernisation of the PLA in its history, "One belt-One road" initiative and governance system embodied by Xi Jinping all have

created very favourable conditions to resolve the Taiwan Issue and gave hope to China on Taiwanese reunification that was not there before. From documents and statements its making, it can be observed that Xi Jinping's administration is very confident that it will resolve the long standing Taiwan Issue during its office term. Chinese scholars often note that Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping led the Chinese people to "stand on its feet" and "gave wealth". If Xi Jinping fails to deliver reunification, thus not ensuring safety of the nation's unity and territorial integrity, the goal of "becoming powerful" will stall and Xi Jinping's legacy will reach or surpass his previous leaders, including Deng Xiaoping. Therefore, the Taiwan Issue may become more urgent matter to resolve as the term nears its end. Timeline wise CCP is considering following conditions for Taiwanese reunification. Exactly 70 years have passed since Taiwan became autonomous in 1949. This increasing long time will only make reunification harder and is a large burden on CCP. When CCP celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Taiwan Issue will come to attention more and is likely to become a sore point for the party policy and achievements. This may become a pressure for Xi Jinping's government to act more decisively on the Taiwanese reunification.

## CONCLUSION

Considering all the above mentioned points we made following conclusions:

**Nearest date for resolving the Taiwanese Issue can be the year 2021.**

For CCP peaceful reunification is the best and preferable option. On the other hand, if Taiwanese government under Tsai Ing-wen acts unexpected moves for the mainland or if other favourable conditions are created, CCP might take the initiative and implement the reunification using the historic anniversary date to win over more popular support and finally ensure national unity and territorial integrity in the Taiwan Strait.

**The latest deadline to resolve to Taiwan issue must be before Xi Jinping's term of office ends.**

On the other hand, PRC's economic growth is slowing down and reconstruction of the system and change of development model is underway and many other social issues needed to be addressed are waiting solutions. In this conditions, without any extremely opportunistic changes in Taiwanese domestic situation or without a golden opportunity to complete the reunification by peaceful means, CCP is very unlikely to act decisively before 2021. But Xi Jinping's long term view and strict style of leading makes reunification a possibility under his administration. If we consider Xi Jinping's full term will continue until either in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> terms, his administration will last until 2032 at the latest. It seems the 10 years between 2022 and 2032 will be the decade that is most likely to bring resolution for the Taiwan Issue.

**If Xi Jinping's full term ends without any resolution on reunification, the next suitable timeline to resolve the Taiwan Issue would be before 2049. In other words, the issue will be fully resolved and reunification will be completed before PRC's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Taiwanese autonomy.**

Aforementioned Three Step Strategic Policy of CCP is about transforming China into a developed country by 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PRC. So the historic anniversary will undoubtedly require results on reunification issue that has been one of primary policy focuses of China for so long. Political groups who aims to maintain relative independent status of Taiwan might use any means to delay to

<sup>17</sup>Michael Cole, *Convergence or Conflict in the Taiwan Strait: The illusion of peace?*, 2017, Routledge, New York. Page 165-166

reunification until 2049. This would create more room, time and space for other countries, for instance USA, to manoeuvre, participate or even influence the reunification process.

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