# A conflict between China and Taiwan: An analysis from a realism perspective

# Halda Nuriyya Azzara

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia Email: haldanuriyya17@gmail.com

# Badrus Sholeh

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia Email: badrus.sholeh@uinjkt.ac.id

## Abstract

The conflict between China and Taiwan has become a long conflict that until now has not found a bright spot. From time to time, the conflict between China and Taiwan seems to be getting worse and always attracts the attention of the international community. The dispute between the two countries also affects relations between countries, whether dealing with China or Taiwan. This article will analyze the conflict between China and Taiwan from the perspective of realism as a theory in the study of international relations. By analyzing the conflict from the perspective of realism, this article will discuss how China and Taiwan try to maintain their national integrity and how other countries interact with this conflict. The research method used in this article is literary studies by collecting secondary data to explain and analyze the conflict and find the result and discussion. By this method, there are some points were found, starting from the concept of power in the conflict between China and Taiwan, the diplomatic relations, and the survival of both parties in the international system.

Keywords: realism, China and Taiwan Conflict, International Relations, One China Policy, diplomatic.

## Introduction

In international relations, every country not only interacts with each other and creates relationships. Through these interactions, each country has an interest in maintaining the integrity of its country. However, international relations are not only colored by interactions or cooperation between countries. Existing interactions can also be conflicts between countries that certainly have a great influence on related parties and even become the attention of the global community. Of course, every conflict has various causes and some of them may be difficult to resolve and can even trigger a war.

The conflict between China and Taiwan is one of the conflicts between countries in international relations that are quite complex. Recognition of the integrity of the state of each side is also a problem in this conflict. Not only state recognition but it is also related to the recognition of diplomacy and the existence of each party in international relations. As we know, China and Taiwan have different ideologies where China with communism and Taiwan with democracy. Before discussing further how the twists and turns of the conflict between China and Taiwan, the history before China and Taiwan has different identities to date is quite long.

The existence of ideological differences between democracy and communism cannot be separated from the history of the collapse of the Qing dynasty. Sun Yat-sen brought democratic values to China at that time with his ideas. To support this idea, then the Kuomintang party or KMT was formed. However, the democratic principle that Sun Yat-sen wanted to bring unfortunately did not succeed until the end of Sun Yat-sen's life. On the other hand, the influence of the Qing dynasty's reign cannot be eliminated.

After Sun Yat-sen's death, a general named Chiang Kai-shek sought to continue the principle of democracy to be applied in China, as Sun Yat-sen wished. With more capable strength, General Chiang Kai-shek had the support and strength to achieve his goals. In addition, the military power possessed by General Chiang Kai-shek was also useful to help eliminate the remnants of the Qing dynasty's influence. Nevertheless, not all the territories that still held the influence of the Qing dynasty were successfully subdued by General Chiang Kai-shek.

The efforts made by General Chiang Kai-shek are not always smooth because there is a threat that comes. In 1927, the communist party began to show its existence with supporters from several walks of life. This problem then leads to the existence of two camps that cause differences in identity. Some groups that support the principle of democracy then occupy the region that inhabits the place of residence in Taiwan. While in other areas of communist dominance, the Chinese Communist Party front formed the People's Republic of China or known as PRC, and simultaneously claimed Taiwan. This claim of sovereignty over Taiwan then raises the issue of Taiwan's existence as a country in the eyes of the international community.

Until now, Taiwan is still claimed by China as its territory. Therefore, Taiwan's independence will not be recognized by China. Taiwan's recognition as a country also affects other countries that establish cooperative relations with China over the enactment of the One China Policy. According to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, a country can be recognized as a state if it meets such requirements as permanent residents, clear territory, having a government and the ability to carry out international relations with other countries. When referring to the Montevideo Convention of 1933, Taiwan is already able to be voted on as a country. However, due to the conflict between China and Taiwan, recognition of Taiwan is not easy to do.

The study of international relations has many perspectives to examine or understand an event that occurs, ranging from the existence of conflicts between countries to diplomatic relations of each country. The perspective of realism or often studied as a theory of realism is one of the mainstream theories in the study of international relations. The theory of realism has exerted a great influence on international relations, so it is known as an established theory. The roots of the perspective of realism have been found since 403-404 BC during the famous period of the Peloponnesian War which was later written by Thucydides (Antunes and Camiso, 2017).

Just like most theories, realism has assumptions in it. First, the state is a major actor in international relations. In this case, the state is believed to be the holder of an important role in every event in international relations. Second, realism believes that the international system is anarchy where there is no supreme power other than the state itself. Amid an anarchic international system, each country is faced with a state of survival where each country has its interests to be able to survive. Third, realism believes that human nature is selfish and will do anything to achieve its interests such as gaining power. In this case, the national interest of a country becomes an essential thing and anyone will fight for it for its existence in the international system.

Several prominent actors helped build realism, including Niccolo Machiavelli and Hans J. Morgenthau. Machiavelli's thoughts on realism are illustrated in his book The Prince (1532). In his work, Machiavelli brings to the fore a leader who must be like a lion in power and cunning like a fox (Antunes and Camiso, 2017). Both parables intend that for the leader to be able to carry out his policies, it requires great power and vigilance against threats that can come at any time.

Meanwhile, Morgenthau in his mind focused on national interest and morality. This thought also departed from the events of World War II. Morgenthau found that power is above morality which also refutes idealists. In an anarchy situation, which is a situation in an international system, morality is not something that can be applied (Morgenthau, 1970 in Donnely, 2022). If morality is relied upon in every policy, then the existing policy will only show weakness. Therefore, every political action carried out by a country aims to show the existence of power.

The thinking of realism figures tries to show the true state of the world and seeks to form a relevant perspective in examining events in international relations. Post-World War II is believed to give a spotlight

to realism which at that time refuted the perspective of liberals who viewed the international world more optimistically, but in fact, what happened at the end of the war remained. The perspective of realism invites us to think more realistically in understanding international relations.

Until now, the assumptions of realism can be witnessed directly by the occurrence of conflicts in international relations. Of the many conflicts that exist, some of them have a long period and result in prolonged disputes. Terms of, realism are still able to be a reference in examining various conflicts that occur even in the contemporary era. This article will provide an analysis of the conflicts engulfing China and Taiwan from the perspective of realism. As discussed earlier, both China and Taiwan have their interests. To achieve and defend their interests, both also make policies to support those interests.

#### Literature Review

Silitonga (2020) in "Geopolitics and International Contemporary Issues in Asia Pacific and Beyond", the division of China and Taiwan over ideological differences caused Taiwan's sovereignty to be not recognized by China. However, China still claims that Taiwan is part of China. On the other hand, Taiwan has the United States as its backer. Silitonga (2020) stated that relations between Taiwan and the United States also triggered tensions due to interventions to suppress influence from China. According to the authors, looking at the relationship between Taiwan and the United States does not help much for Taiwan in terms of being able to be fully recognized as a separate country from China. In this case, the author looks back at the perspective of realism in looking at international relations.

As we know, China and the United States are two countries that have a great influence on the international system. In the end, any policy or interaction of each party with the other party even though it is in the name of 'cooperation', there is a goal to strengthen their position and carry out their interests. Similarly, the One China Policy is present. The One China Policy is also considered controversial because of course this policy invites various responses from the international community.

This One China Policy has an impact on both China and Taiwan. The author agrees that this One China Policy provides benefits to China while for Taiwan, this policy is a blow. The presence of this policy is seen as a threat to the international community which is a warning to countries that want to establish relations with China. If you look at the perspective of realism, the One China Policy policy is related to the power possessed by the state to strengthen its interests. In this regard, China with its power through the policy tried to limit Taiwan's wiggle room in the international world.

In "Geopolitics and International Contemporary Issues in Asia Pacific and Beyond", it is also explained that the problem of implementing the One China Policy can be studied through the understanding of offensive realists (Silitonga, 2020). The presence of this policy during the China and Taiwan conflict actually presents the potential for a major military conflict in which China seeks to strengthen its existence and power.

As a threatened party, Taiwan will find it increasingly difficult to gain international recognition as a whole country. In addition, Taiwan also has difficulty joining international organizations. Silitonga (2020) gives an example of events where Taiwan has been in trouble due to not being able to become a member of an international organization. One of them is that when SARS disease is hitting its territory, Taiwan cannot receive information about the prevention of SARS from WHO because Taiwan is not a member of WHO. The effects of the One China Policy also hampered the UN's help in the 1999 earthquake. Kofi Annan who at that time served as Secretary-General of the United Nations said that there must be approval from the People's Republic of China to be able to send a disaster assessment team (Chiang, 2004 in Silitonga, 2020).

The implementation of the One China Policy is very burdensome for Taiwan in protecting its territory. Countries that want diplomatic relations with China are not able to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan related to Taiwan's sovereign status. However, international cooperative relations with Taiwan can still be informally conducted. Taiwan's informal consulate office allows Taiwan to continue its foreign relations. The explanation presented by Silitonga became one of the references in compiling this article, The above explanation helps the author to examine the China and Taiwan conflict related to the One China Policy so that it can help to analyze this conflict from the perspective of realism. The strength here becomes an important element in the international world to be able to survive and spread power.

#### Methods

In this article, the research method applied is literary studies. Literary studies are a research method by obtaining data from sources in the form of books or other library sources. Research using literary studies will take data, read, and then the data is processed as research material (Melfianora, 2017). This method includes how the author collects data from related topics and processes the data to get conclusions. The data used in this article is secondary data.

## **Results and Discussion**

#### The concept of power in the China-Taiwan conflict

The perspective of realism gives a spotlight on the power in international relations. Morgenthau as one of the figures in realism stated that power is something important where it is all intended for the national interest. Although the perspective of realism has been criticized for its impression that looks pessimistic, the assumptions held by the perspective of realism are able to explain the events that occur in the international relations and able to photograph how the state behaves in carrying out its national interests.

Currently, we know several countries with their power to try to dominate international relations in various aspects. Some countries such as the United States, Japan, China, and even South Korea have their own strengths either in hard power or soft power. In this section, the author will further discuss how China with its concept of power maintains its claim to Taiwan's sovereignty as well as how Taiwan seeks to build power to respond to this conflict.

China with its position as one of the most influential countries today certainly cannot be separated from its long history to build strength to date. Mao Zedong (1893-1976) became one of the figures who had an important contribution to China. Mao Zedong is one of the founders of the Communist Party of China who is famous for his ideas for revolutions against economic and political policies to bring China to glory (Yuliantoro, 2021).

The development of this country continued and the next leader, Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) managed to raise China until it was recognized as the country with the largest economic power besides the United States. For his efforts to stabilize the Chinese economy, Deng Xiaoping earned the nickname "father of the economic revolution". Not only did it experience an increase in the economy, but China also then had a military power that could not be doubted.

The power built by China is then strengthened by the existence of a foreign policy principle called Responsible Great Power (Yuliantoro, 2021). This principle was introduced during the leadership of Jiang Zemin. Responsible Great Power is a policy that is used as a principle for China to be able to be responsible as a country that has great power in international relations. This responsibility shows how China can address international level problems from various aspects. In addition, the principle of Responsible Great Power also aims to show that this world order is not only centered on Western powers.

During Xi Jinping's leadership, China demonstrated its military ability to safeguard sovereignty. China is also increasingly developing trade and investment cooperation ties. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, also influences how the implementation of Chinese foreign policy to aggressively maintain China's sovereignty. Of course, this also affects Taiwan as a party that seeks to secede from China and declare the integrity of the country.

Until now, China as a country that has great influence in international politics continues to prevent Taiwan's actions to gain its sovereignty. The conflict between China and Taiwan cannot be separated by pressure

from Chinese forces that continue to threaten Taiwan. From the perspective of realism, the struggle of power greatly affects China's conflict with Taiwan where Taiwan as a threatened party seeks to safeguard its interests from Chinese power.

Just like China or any other country, to strengthen sovereignty, Taiwan also needs power. To be recognized as a state, in addition to fulfilling the Montevideo Convention Article 1, a country also needs to obtain confirmation from another country. In this case, Taiwan has difficulty getting recognition from other countries because of China's claim to Taiwan territory. It also makes it harder for Taiwan to join international organizations such as the United Nations. Although Taiwan is difficult to declare itself a complete country, the Taiwanese government continues to strive to maintain the status quo by having a clear population, territory, and a government capable of carrying out relations with the government of other countries.

During the leadership of Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016), his policy preferred to avoid provocations coming from China and also avoid conflict between the two. This is because China has great power in military and economic aspects, so Taiwan's efforts are also aimed at maintaining national security.

Entering the reign of Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan looks to take bolder steps in the face of conflict with China. The policy is taken by Tsai Ing-wen also pays attention to the wishes of the Taiwanese people in terms of the rejection of reunification. But behind the statement, China also remains steadfast in taking away the right to Taiwan's territory. Following up on this conflict, Taiwan under the leadership of Tsai Ing-wen also established closeness with the United States. Taiwan's proximity to the United States is certainly motivated by the use of power and the interests of each party. As explained earlier, Taiwan needs the power to be able to defend its territory and any policies made will affect the national security of Taiwan. The United States, currently under the leadership of Joe Biden, chose to support Taiwan, which was later demonstrated by sending military forces to Taiwan to conduct joint exercises. Of course, it cannot be expected that the closeness between the United States and Taiwan can get a good response from China.

If we compare the strength between China and Taiwan, it can be estimated that China will easily take control of Taiwan and assert claims to Taiwan's territory. However, the international system is not that simple because there is a role for the United States during the conflict between China and Taiwan. As two great powers, if China and the United States are triggered to create a major conflict then it is conceivable how the impact can be had on international stability.

Again, if we look at the China's conflict with Taiwan, the concept of strength here has an important role to play. Force becomes a shield to protect each country from the coming threat or even the power itself is used to threaten other countries. Here it has been shown that China relies on its power to achieve what it wants. It does not rule out the possibility that with the power it has, China could have waged a war to claim Taiwan. But compared to war, both make strategies and policies that can then be implemented through foreign policy. This is done to defend the sovereignty and realize their respective national interests.

#### China and Taiwan's strategy of defending the sovereignty

From the perspective of realism, the international system is anarchy in which there is no supreme power of the state itself. With a system like this, every country is faced with a survival situation and is responsible for itself. Efforts to survive can be realized by a country through foreign policy or specific strategies to deal with future conflicts.

Every country has its strategy whether it is to carry out its national interests or protect itself. The same goes for China and Taiwan. Strategies carried out through existing policies can vary depending on whom the leader is. For this discussion on China and Taiwan policy, the author will focus on the policies pursued by Xi Jinping as China's president and Tsai Ing-wen in leading Taiwan.

One China Policy is a policy implemented by China to protect its sovereignty as well as a way to claim Taiwan as Chinese territory. This policy was rejected by Taiwan because it was against Taiwan's desire to stand as an independent country. Not only for China and Taiwan, but this policy also affects other countries.

The implementation of the One China Policy gives rules to other countries that want to maintain diplomatic relations with China. The regulation states that through One China Policy means respecting the existence of a Chinese government where it is not allowed to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan. One China Policy is certainly very burdensome for Taiwan. The implementation of the One China Policy makes it difficult for Taiwan to gain international recognition to become a complete country and directly Taiwan is also difficult to establish diplomatic relations with other countries even though the Taiwanese government could carry out relations with other countries.

Not only does it enforce the One China Policy, to defend its sovereignty, but China also enforces policies from various aspects ranging from military, political, and economic. The implementation of these policies is a response to the presence of threats to China from the United States which is a supporter of Taiwan. U.S. support for Taiwan poses a major threat to China over its weapons assistance to Taiwanese forces.

From the military aspect, there are several policies implemented by China on the strategy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) under the Chinese government army. First, the Maritime Blockade policy by conducting missile attacks and seizures of islands off the coast of Taiwan (Dewi and Dewi, 2019).

Second, the policy is called Limited Force or Coercive Options. This policy is in the form of attacks aimed at Taiwan's infrastructure or leadership. The purpose of implementing this policy is to reduce the confidence of the Taiwanese people in the Taiwanese government.

Third, is the implementation of the amphibius invasion. The implementation of this policy through a joint island landing campaign to break through Taiwan's coastal defenses. This breakthrough is also an opportunity to build a landing with capabilities capable of accommodating goods and military personnel.

Fourth, is the implementation of the Air and Missile Campaign. Not much different from the maritime blockade, the Air and Missile Campaign plan can carry out missile attacks. One of the missiles prepared by China to attack Taiwan is the DF-16 missile which has a range of 1,000-1,500 km.

In addition, China also imposes policies from political aspects to prevent Taiwan from fighting for its sovereignty. China implements Isolated and Alone where the policy aims to eliminate Taiwan from official recognition from international forums. In this policy, Xi Jinping cut official ties between Taiwan and other countries by controlling the power owned by China. It is also related to the implementation of the One China Policy which prohibits other countries from formally pursuing relations with Taiwan.

The next policy implemented by China also covers the economic aspect. The policy is to reduce the number of tourists who come to visit Taiwan. China also made Taiwan depend on its economy to China considering that in the business and investment, China and Taiwan have a fairly good relationship. Taiwanese people also have the convenience to work in China which is one of China's strategies so that Taiwanese people choose a career and occupy China.

Under pressure from various policies carried out by China, especially the One China Policy, Taiwan responded to this by fighting back through the efforts under the leadership of Tsai Ing-wen. To fight for Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen made efforts through several approaches, namely small states diplomacy and diplomatic recognition (Ahzani, 2021).

Small states diplomacy is a way used by small countries to fight for their interests. This method is followed by diplomatic efforts that support the preservation of the existence of the state and also maintain its role internationally. Through small states diplomacy can also support the preparation of strategies for international politics to support the country's national interests.

With existing capabilities, Taiwan can take advantage of geostrategic positions where Taiwan is small but quite strategic. Taiwan can carry out non-diplomatic cooperative relations with several countries around Taiwan, for example, ASEAN countries. Taiwan's economic capabilities also include agriculture, industry, and service.

In an international political strategy, Tsai Ing-wen's government is trying to survive by leveraging its proximity to the United States through non-diplomatic relations. Efforts in this strategy include the transaction of defense equipment for Taiwan's military purposes. It also supports the balance of power between Taiwan and

China to prevent China from aggressively attacking.

Taiwan's next strategy is diplomatic recognition. Given to be able to become a whole country, Taiwan still has not fulfilled the recognition of other countries. Thus diplomatic recognition is a way for Taiwan to gain recognition from other countries to achieve true sovereignty. Until now, several countries recognize Taiwan's sovereignty, but the presence of these countries has not been able to help Taiwan to maintain its sovereignty, especially among countries that recognize Taiwan, there is no superpower in it.

In her diplomatic recognition strategy, Tsai Ing-wen took advantage of her closeness to the United States through the U.S. Visa Waiver program. The cooperation started by Tsai Ing-wen with Trump who is still serving as president of the United States at that time, seeks to raise Taiwan's name internationally. But the United States has also been outspoken in cooperating with Taiwan. This is also done by the United States to avoid conflict with Beijing (Ahzani, 2021).

#### Survival in diplomatic support for Taiwan

Since the perspective of realism believes that the international structure is anarchy, each country is responsible for itself concerning the national security and defense of the country. That way, each country will build its security system and strength through various means. But in the modern era, not only security and defense factors must be maximized to guard the country. The survival of a country determines whether it will be able to survive or not in the international sphere.

The impact of the conflict between China and Taiwan also affects other countries, especially regarding the issue of diplomatic relations. Solomon Islands, which was one of the major countries in the Pacific Ocean, was previously a country with official relations with Taiwan. However, in September 2019 the Solomon Islands finally turned away from Taiwan and chose to have diplomatic relations with China.

The contributing factor to the Solomon Islands' switch to side with China is the economic factor. Solomon Islands has close business ties with China and in addition, the development of China's power in the economy and military power is inevitable. The benefits obtained by Solomon Islands in the economy by conducted a diplomatic relations with China are certainly greater than the existence of diplomatic relations with Taiwan. With the cooperation with China, the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands believes it can help the development of Solomon Islands (Putri, 2019).

In addition, seeing the benefits of economic, and geopolitical factors are also a consideration for Solomon Islands to establish diplomatic relations with China. China's entry into the South Pacific region is an opponent of U.S. power in the region. As a country that follows the great powers, of course, the Solomon Islands needs to redesign its strategy to be able to receive benefits from the power dynamics in the Asia Pacific region.

#### Conclusion

Realism sees every country in the international sphere will always compete and cause conflict. This is due to human nature which is selfish and always attaches importance to its interests. The international situation is survival where strength is important. Each country seeks to build strength from various aspects such as military, political, and economic.

The conflict triggered by ideological differences between China and China shows their respective interests in defending their sovereignty. In this conflict, Taiwan is in a position threatened by China's great power in international politics. This prevents Taiwan from gaining a position and being recognized as a whole country by other countries so Taiwan is currently only able to maintain the status quo.

Taiwan also needs a great power that is a supporter to be able to launch its interests in the international sphere. Proximity to the United States is certainly utilized by Taiwan to achieve its national interests. However, the support of the United States does not ensure Taiwan will soon become a completely independent country considering that the United States also has its interests in this problem.

Strength in the international situation is also a factor that influences the transition of diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Solomon Islands decided to move from its cooperation with Taiwan to formal relations with China. Under the One China Policy, Solomon Islands are not allowed to recognize Taiwan's sovereignty.

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