[**Taiwan crisis**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1661871/taiwan-crisis)

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CENTURIES of experience in diplomacy have still not equipped the Western powers with skill to deal with crises in international affairs. In the last 75 years, the stakes have risen and the risks mounted with the presence of nuclear weapons. It is easy to create a crisis but almost impossible to predict how it will end.

President Joe Biden is most ill-advised in raising the stakes in his wager with China by bringing in the issue of Taiwan. Nearly the entire international community regards Taiwan as an integral part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the war of 1895 between China and Japan, ceded Taiwan and the Pescadores to Japan “in perpetuity and full sovereignty”. Up until that time, Taiwan had been Chinese territory. For the next 50 years, Taiwan and its adjacent islands were administered by Japan.

During World War II, Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek met in Cairo in 1943 and declared: “It is their purpose that … all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan], and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China.” The terms of the Cairo Declaration were confirmed by the Potsdam Declaration. The Japanese instrument of surrender undertook “to carry out the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration”. Japanese forces on Taiwan surrendered to the Republic of China (ROC), who thereafter administered the island.

From 1945 until 1950, the US considered Taiwan to be a part of China. In January 1950, president Truman stated: “In keeping with [the Cairo and Potsdam] declarations, Formosa was surrendered to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek [of the ROC], and for the past four years the United States and the other Allied Powers have accepted the exercise of Chinese authority over the island.”

How far will Biden go in using the Taiwan card against China?

Secretary of state Dean Acheson said at the same time: “The Chinese have administered Formosa for four years. Neither the United States nor any other ally ever questioned that authority and that occupation. When Formosa was made a province of China nobody raised any lawyer’s doubts about that.” In 1949, the PRC was established.

The situation changed drastically with the outbreak of the Korean war. President Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait in June 1950. He also stated that “the determination of the future status of Formosa must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations”. By the instrument of surrender, Japan renounced all claim to these areas, but they were not reassigned to China. This position was taken to provide a legal basis for sending the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait — an area that would be ‘Chinese territory’ if Taiwan were accepted as part of China.

In 1952, Japan signed a peace treaty with the Allies and “renounced all right, title and claim to Taiwan and the Pescadores as well as the Spratley Islands and Paracel Islands”. Once again, Taiwan was not conveyed to China.

For a quarter century, the US held the ROC regime as the de factogovernment of the island of Taiwan. Its position changed in 1972. In the Shanghai communiqué, the US stated: “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but ‘One China’ and that the Taiwan is part of China. The United States government does not challenge that position.”

Few communiqués were drafted with such care and after such prolonged negotiations as the famous Shanghai Communiqué issued after president Nixon’s trip to China in 1972. Its text had been settled earlier by Henry Kissinger and Zhou En-lai. It was based on the principle that there was ‘One China’, ergo Taiwan was part of China.

Taiwan was expelled from the UN and China’s seat at the Security Council was taken by the PRC. In December 1971, the PRC stood by its ally Pakistan. Japan was shocked by the Shanghai Communiqué. This provides a lesson to those who now court the US or any great power. Afghanistan’s president Najibullah was shown the door by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in brutal language.

How far will Biden go in using the Taiwan card against China? On its part, China is in no hurry to forcibly take over Taiwan. It has, however, rejected all proposals to disavow the use of force against Taiwan — it is a domestic matter, not an international one. But it has done little to persuade, still less tempt Taiwan to voluntarily rejoin China. Hong Kong’s experience has been an unhappy one. President Xi Jinping will not be intimidated by Biden’s postures. But uncertainty remains. China’s military power can reach the US. The best course is for the US itself to reiterate the ‘One China’ formula and propose Taiwan’s return to China with guarantees of autonomy and respect for its democratic system.

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