

Taiwan Strait Tensions

Geopolitics Series — Worksheet 2 of 3 | Reading & Discussion | Intermediate–Upper Intermediate

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

PART 1 — Key Vocabulary

Study these words before reading. You will see them in the passages below.

Word	Definition
strait	a narrow body of water connecting two larger bodies of water
sovereignty	the right of a government to rule its own territory without outside interference
deterrence	the use of military power or threats to prevent an enemy from taking action
reunification	the process of bringing together a country or region previously split into two separate parts
diplomatic recognition	the official acknowledgment by one country that another government or state is legitimate
autonomy	the right or ability to govern oneself or make decisions independently
blockade	sealing off a place to prevent people, goods, or forces from entering or leaving
de facto	existing in practice or reality, even if not officially recognized by law
geopolitical	relating to how geography and location affect a country's political power and relations
military posture	the overall readiness, size, and deployment strategy of a country's armed forces
status quo	the current state of affairs — the existing situation that many parties want to preserve
escalation	a gradual increase in the intensity or seriousness of a conflict

PART 2 — Vocabulary Practice

A. Matching: Write the number from Column A next to the correct definition in Column B.

Column A — Words	Column B — Definitions
1. sovereignty	A. existing in practice but not officially recognized by law

2. blockade	B. how geography shapes a country's political power and relationships
3. deterrence	C. the existing state of affairs that many want to preserve
4. de facto	D. governing oneself independently
5. autonomy	E. the right to rule without outside interference
6. geopolitical	F. sealing off a place to control who or what enters
7. status quo	G. using military power or threats to prevent an attack

B. Fill in the Blank: Complete each sentence with a word from the vocabulary list.

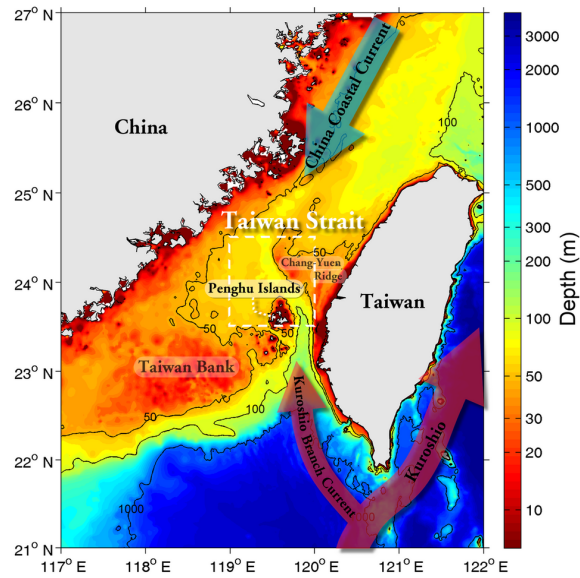
- Taiwan operates as a _____ independent country — it has its own government, military, and currency, even though China does not recognize it.
- Taiwan's government argues that it should have full _____, free from Beijing's interference.
- Many world leaders believe maintaining the current _____ — neither independence nor unification — is the safest path.
- China conducts large military exercises near Taiwan as a form of _____ against any move toward formal independence.
- The Taiwan _____ is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, used by thousands of ships each year.
- Taiwan's future has become a highly _____ issue, drawing concern from the US, Japan, and many other nations.

PART 3 — Reading Passage 1

"The Island at the Center of the World"

A Small Island with a Big Role

Taiwan is a small island of about 23 million people, located roughly 180 kilometers off the southeastern coast of mainland China. Despite its size, Taiwan is one of the most strategically important places on Earth. It sits at the junction of the East and South China Seas — waterways through which trillions of dollars of global trade pass every year. Taiwan is also home to TSMC, the world's most advanced semiconductor manufacturer, producing the chips inside almost every smartphone, laptop, and AI system on the planet.



Bathymetric map of the Taiwan Strait — the 180 km-wide waterway between mainland China and Taiwan that carries trillions of dollars of shipping each year.

A Divided History

To understand Taiwan, you need to know its history. In 1949, China's civil war ended with the Communist Party defeating the Nationalist government. The Nationalists retreated to Taiwan and established the Republic of China (ROC). The Communist mainland became the People's Republic of China (PRC). Both governments claimed to be the legitimate ruler of "all of China" — a dispute that has never been officially resolved.

Two Governments, One Claim

Today, the PRC insists that Taiwan is a breakaway province that must eventually be reunited — by peaceful means if possible, by force if necessary. Taiwan's government has evolved toward a distinct Taiwanese democratic identity. Most Taiwanese prefer the current status quo — neither formal independence nor unification — according to consistent polling. Only a handful of countries formally recognize Taiwan as an independent state; most maintain unofficial relations to avoid angering Beijing.

Comprehension Questions: Answer in complete sentences.

1. Why is Taiwan described as "one of the most strategically important places on Earth"? Give two reasons.

2. What happened in China in 1949, and how did it create the Taiwan situation?

3. What does each government — Beijing and Taipei — claim about Taiwan's political status?

4. What do most Taiwanese people prefer regarding their political future, according to the passage?

5. Why do most countries avoid formally recognizing Taiwan as an independent state?

6. What is TSMC, and why does its location in Taiwan make it geopolitically significant?

PART 4 — Reading Passage 2

"Military Pressure and the World's Response"

China's Military Exercises

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has dramatically increased military exercises near Taiwan. Following high-profile visits by foreign officials to Taipei, China has launched live-fire drills, sent record numbers of aircraft into Taiwan's air defense zone, and practiced blockade scenarios. These exercises serve two purposes: demonstrating military capability to Taiwan's government, and testing the response of the United States and its allies.

Why Semiconductors Make Taiwan Irreplaceable

TSMC produces more than 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductor chips — the components that power AI systems, smartphones, fighter jets, and medical devices. If Taiwan's chip factories were destroyed or cut off by a blockade, the global technology industry would face an immediate crisis. Economists estimate that a conflict over Taiwan could trigger a global economic shock several times larger than the 2008 financial crisis.

The US Position

The United States does not formally recognize Taiwan as independent, but maintains strong unofficial ties. Under the Taiwan Relations Act — a US law passed in 1979 — Washington must provide Taiwan with defensive weapons and treat any non-peaceful attempt to determine Taiwan's future as a matter of "grave concern." US officials are deliberately vague about whether American forces would defend Taiwan directly — a policy known as "strategic ambiguity."

What Could Happen Next?

Military analysts see three possible scenarios: a Chinese invasion, a naval blockade designed to pressure Taiwan without direct combat, or continuation of the current tense status quo. Most experts consider a full invasion the least likely near-term option — it would be extremely costly. A blockade is seen as more plausible: it would devastate Taiwan's economy and force a political crisis without a single shot being fired. The Taiwan Strait remains one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the world.

A. True or False: Write T or F on the line.

1. ___ Taiwan is about 180 km from the coast of mainland China.

2. ___ Both Beijing and Taipei agree that Taiwan is currently an independent state.

3. ___ The Republic of China government moved to Taiwan after losing the civil war in 1949.

4. ___ Most countries in the world formally recognize Taiwan as an independent nation.

5. ___ TSMC produces more than 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductor chips.

6. ___ The US Taiwan Relations Act requires Washington to sell Taiwan defensive weapons.

7. ___ China's large-scale military exercises near Taiwan only began for the first time in 2024.

8. ___ A naval blockade of Taiwan could cause a global economic shock larger than the 2008 financial crisis.

B. Comprehension Questions: Answer in complete sentences.

1. Why does China conduct military exercises near Taiwan? What two purposes do they serve?

2. What makes TSMC so important to the global economy? Give a specific example from the passage.

3. What is "strategic ambiguity," and why do you think the US uses this policy?

4. What is the difference between a military invasion and a naval blockade? Which do experts consider more likely, and why?

5. The passage says a conflict over Taiwan "could trigger a global economic shock." Use evidence to explain why.

6. How is the Taiwan Strait situation connected to the US-China trade war from Worksheet 1?

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

Use the word bank to complete each sentence below.

Word Bank: reunification | geopolitical | defensive | irreplaceable | deterrence | blockade | catastrophic

1. China views Taiwan as a breakaway province and insists that _____ is the only acceptable outcome.
2. Taiwan's role in chip manufacturing gives it enormous _____ importance — a small island can shape global power.
3. The US Taiwan Relations Act requires Washington to provide Taiwan with _____ weapons and support.
4. TSMC's chips are _____ to the global tech industry — no other company can match its capabilities.
5. China uses large-scale naval drills near Taiwan as a form of military _____ to warn against independence.
6. If China imposed a full _____ around Taiwan, the global supply of advanced chips could collapse.
7. The world watches the Taiwan Strait because a conflict there would have _____ consequences for the global economy.

PART 6 — Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or small group. There are no wrong answers — explain your reasoning.

1. Taiwan operates as an independent country, but most nations don't officially recognize it. Why do you think so many governments avoid formally recognizing Taiwan?
2. TSMC in Taiwan produces most of the world's advanced chips. How does one factory on a small island affect your daily life?
3. The US policy of "strategic ambiguity" means intentionally being unclear about whether it would defend Taiwan. Do you think this strategy is smart or dangerous?
4. If you were the leader of Taiwan, what would your strategy be — seek formal independence, maintain the status quo, or negotiate with China?
5. Some people compare Taiwan's situation to Ukraine before Russia's 2022 invasion. Is the comparison fair? What are the similarities and differences?

ANSWER KEY — Taiwan Strait Tensions — For Teacher Use Only

PART 2A — Matching

- 1 – E (sovereignty: right to rule without outside interference)
- 2 – F (blockade: sealing off a place)
- 3 – G (deterrence: using threats to prevent an attack)
- 4 – A (de facto: existing in practice but not officially)
- 5 – D (autonomy: governing oneself independently)
- 6 – B (geopolitical: how geography shapes political power)
- 7 – C (status quo: the existing state of affairs)

PART 2B — Fill in the Blank

- 1. de facto
- 2. autonomy
- 3. status quo
- 4. deterrence
- 5. strait
- 6. geopolitical

PART 3 — Passage 1 Comprehension

- 1. It sits on key global shipping lanes; it houses TSMC, maker of the world's most advanced chips.
- 2. The Communist Party won the civil war; the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan and both claimed to rule "all of China."
- 3. Beijing: Taiwan is a province to be reunified. Taipei: Taiwan is a self-governing democracy.
- 4. Most prefer the current status quo — neither formal independence nor unification.
- 5. To avoid angering Beijing, which considers formal recognition an act of hostility.
- 6. TSMC makes the world's most advanced chips; a conflict could cut off global tech supply.

PART 4A — True or False

- 1. T
- 2. F — Beijing says Taiwan is a province; Taipei says it is self-governing.
- 3. T
- 4. F — only a handful of countries formally recognize Taiwan.
- 5. T
- 6. T
- 7. F — exercises have been ongoing for decades; scale has increased recently.
- 8. T

PART 4B — Passage 2 Comprehension

- 1. To demonstrate military capability; to test US and allied responses.
- 2. TSMC makes chips for AI, smartphones, fighter jets, and medical devices; disruption = immediate global crisis.

- 3. Deliberately unclear about whether the US would defend Taiwan; deters both attack and independence declaration.
- 4. Invasion = direct assault; blockade = economic strangulation. Blockade is considered more likely.
- 5. TSMC produces 90%+ of advanced chips; disruption would affect every tech-dependent industry worldwide.
- 6. Both are fronts in the same US-China power competition; chips, trade, and military posture are interlinked.

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

- 1. reunification
- 2. geopolitical
- 3. defensive
- 4. irreplaceable
- 5. deterrence
- 6. blockade
- 7. catastrophic