

The Taiwan Policy Gap between the Two Main US Political Parties and Its Implications

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Abstract: In the context of the whole-of-government strategic approach the United States (US) currently applies toward China, the Democratic and Republican parties have reached a consensus on “using Taiwan to contain China,” compromising the integrity of the one-China policy and seriously eroding the political foundations of China–US relations. However, considerable differences persist between the two parties regarding Taiwan policy. The Republicans, as represented by Donald Trump, have appeared more radical and more straightforward, whereas the incumbent Biden administration of the Democratic Party has shown significant duplicity. Democrats in the US Congress have introduced relatively fewer Taiwan-related bills than their Republican counterparts; by comparison, some Republican lawmakers have even introduced resolutions calling for resuming “diplomatic ties” with Taiwan. The Taiwan policy gap between the Democratic and Republican parties mirrors their differences on China policy: liberal think tanks advocate for “strategic ambiguity” on Taiwan, but conservatives back “strategic clarity.” And the gap also reflects the shifting lobbying priorities of Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party. Looking ahead to the upcoming decade, the Democratic and Republican parties will continue to compete to “support Taiwan,” thus rendering the Taiwan question even more dangerous. After 2024, if Democrats remain in power, they may hasten the “internationalization” of the Taiwan question; otherwise, if

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Republicans return to the White House and both chambers of Congress, China and the US may find their relationship even more confrontational. Although the political situation in Taiwan will very unlikely have any fundamental impact on the Taiwan Strait, it will, to a certain extent, influence the intensity of China–US rivalry.

Keywords: Democratic Party, Republican Party, Taiwan question, United States

The Taiwan question is the most important and sensitive issue between China and the United States (US). Its trajectory is subject to China–US strategic relations and changes in US domestic politics. In the current context of the US viewing China as its top strategic competitor and carrying out containment on all fronts, the Democratic–Republican consensus on “using Taiwan to contain China” has translated into numerous “pro-Taiwan” actions, seriously infringing upon China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and jeopardizing peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. So far, the academic and strategic communities in China and elsewhere have conducted intensive research into America’s Taiwan policy, including that of the Trump and Biden administrations, and the Taiwan-related legislation in recent Congresses. However, there has been much less research on the differences between the Trump and Biden administrations or between the Democratic and Republican parties on Taiwan policy. Considering the broad influence of party politics on the US executive branch and Congress, the authors will focus their analysis on the Taiwan policy gap between the Democratic and Republican parties, while exploring the reasons behind it, to gain better insights into the US Taiwan-related policymaking process.

I. Differences between the Democratic and Republican Parties on Taiwan Policy

Against the backdrop of the US “great-power competition” strategy, the Democratic–Republican consensus on “using Taiwan to contain China” has translated into practical policies of the executive branch, legislation in Congress, and policy recommendations from the strategic community, including reducing restrictions on “official contacts” with Taiwan and elevating their

“official relations”; continuing to sell arms to Taiwan and strengthen “security cooperation” with Taiwan, gradually incorporating the island into the US “Indo-Pacific strategy”; expanding economic, scientific, and technological cooperation with Taiwan and using Taiwan’s advanced chip production capacities to nurture America’s manufacturing sector; and assisting the Taiwan authorities in protecting Taiwan’s “international allies” and expanding “international space.” However, by comparing Donald Trump and Joe Biden as well as the latest four Congresses in the US (115th to 118th),¹ we can observe marked differences between the Democratic and Republican parties as regards their way, extent, and goal of playing the “Taiwan card.”

First, Trump was more radical and straightforward in his approach to hollowing out the one-China policy; by comparison, Biden has appeared more duplicitous, emphasizing greater coordination with US allies on Taiwan policy. In essence, America’s Taiwan policy is subject to and serves its China policy. During Trump’s presidency, he pressed for shifting America’s China policy from “engagement” to “competition” and, accordingly, its Taiwan policy from using Taiwan to “balance China” to “contain China.” After assuming office in 2017, Trump blatantly hollowed out the US one-China policy by, for instance, declassifying for the first time former President Ronald Reagan’s “Six Assurances” to Taiwan and listing them, together with the Taiwan Relations Act, as the key documents guiding America’s Taiwan policy. Successively, Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act, the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018, and the TAIPEI Act of 2019, providing legislative support for lifting restrictions on “official contacts” with Taiwan, more explicitly assisting Taiwan in its defense, and helping Taiwan sustain and expand its “international space.” In terms of policy implementation, Trump sent Alex Azar, his Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Keith Krach, Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, to Taiwan, both at ministerial level, the highest since the termination of “diplomatic relations.” During Trump’s four years in office, the US approved 11 arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$18 billion, including F-16V fighter jets, HIMARS multiple rocket

¹ The 118th US Congress began in January 2023 and will end in January 2025. This paper analyzes Taiwan-related legislation in the 118th Congress as of November 2023.

launchers, Harpoon coastal defense systems, and other advanced weaponry. US arms sales to Taiwan evolved from a “package” modality to a regular modality. In addition, Trump declassified, ahead of schedule, the February 2018 US Strategic Framework for the “Indo-Pacific,” claiming that the US will defend “the first island chain nations, including Taiwan.” All these moves boosted America’s “official relations” and “quasi-alliance” with the island, fueling a Taiwan “strategic clarity” debate in the US and further compromising the one-China principle.¹ It can be said that Trump outdid his two predecessors, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, in the intensity of interference in cross-Strait relations; during his term of office, China–US rivalry over Taiwan became even fiercer.

By comparison, the Biden administration has adopted a two-faced approach, vigorously pushing forward the “internationalization” of the Taiwan question and rallying American allies to meddle in cross-Strait relations more explicitly and noisily to contain China. During his dialogue with the Chinese government, Biden himself has repeatedly promised “four noes and one no-intention,” which include that the US does not support “Taiwan independence” and has no intention to have a conflict with China. Senior US officials, such as National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, have reiterated that the US one-China policy has not changed. In practice, however, the Biden administration has largely inherited its predecessor’s Taiwan policy framework, aggressively challenging China’s sovereignty over the island. For instance, this administration has openly questioned United Nations (UN) Resolution 2758 by urging UN member states to support Taiwan’s “meaningful participation” throughout the UN system. In May 2022, the US Department of State (DOS) website updated its section on relations with Taiwan, removing reference to the island being “part of China” and adding the wording that “Taiwan is a key US partner in the Indo–Pacific.” Blinken has tampered with US political commitments to China by defining the core of the US one-China policy as “commitments to peaceful resolution of cross-Strait differences,” linking China’s approach to Taiwan to the US one-China policy. Despite China’s strong opposition and repeated warnings, the Biden administration

¹ Wang Shushen, “The Trump Administration’s Taiwan Policy and Its Implications,” *American Studies Quarterly*, No. 5 (2021): 117–134.

greenlit then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, escorted by US fighter jets. To "use Taiwan to contain China," the Biden administration has tried to enhance Taiwan's asymmetric combat capabilities and build "integrated deterrence" in the "Indo-Pacific." Joint statements issued by the US–Japan summit, the US–South Korea summit, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the Group of Seven (G7), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit have all emphasized the "importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," making a gesture of collective response involving the US and its allies in the event of a Taiwan contingency. In addition, the Biden administration has encouraged American allies to send officials or lawmakers to visit Taiwan.

Second, Republicans in the US Congress have been more aggressive than their Democratic colleagues on Taiwan-related legislation—some have even introduced extreme bills that, if passed, might ruin the China–US relationship. Since the end of the Cold War, Republican lawmakers have adopted a tough stance toward China, as manifested by the recent four US Congresses. With the souring of the cross-Strait relations and rising tensions between China and the US, pro-Taiwan forces in the US Congress have resurged, constantly stirring up trouble on the Taiwan question.¹ Members of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus, predominantly Republicans, introduced almost all of the Taiwan-related bills in the 115th and 116th Congresses between 2017 and 2020; during the same period, those introduced by Democrats were in the single-digit range.² After losing control of the House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm elections, Republicans introduced an increased number of Taiwan-related bills, from 22 in the 115th to 46 in the 116th Congress, to look more hawkish on China than Democrats. The 117th Congress that began in January 2021 introduced as many as 54 Taiwan-related bills, hitting a record high, 43 of which were by Republicans. In terms of topics, most of the bills introduced by Republicans were highly provocative, calling for, for example, strengthening relations with

¹ Xin Qiang, "Resurgence of Pro-Taiwan Forces in the US Congress and Its Impacts," *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 7 (2019): 1–9; Zhang Tengjun, "Shifting Legislative Agendas of the Latest Three US Congresses Concerning China: Characteristics, Motivations, and Prospects," *Contemporary American Review*, No. 1 (2022): 17–36.

² These Republican lawmakers included James M. Inhofe, Michael McCaul, Ted Yoho, and Lindsey Graham. Zhou Wenxing and Lin Gang, "New Trends in US Congress's Interference in the Taiwan Question," *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 10 (2020): 58.

Taiwan, arming Taiwan, deterring China's mainland from "invading Taiwan," and renaming the "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" in the US. By comparison, the Taiwan-related bills introduced by Democrats were relatively moderate, such as establishing scholarship programs, providing Taiwan with public health assistance, and supporting Taiwan's participation in the Inter-American Development Bank. Although some Democratic bills also contained clauses calling for strengthening US military presence in the Taiwan Strait, they acknowledged that "while enhancing deterrence, it is also essential to maintain open and effective crisis communication and risk reduction mechanisms."¹

During Trump's term of office, the US Congress significantly strengthened its influence on the executive branch's Taiwan policy, often, if not always, pressuring the latter to accept its legislation. For example, both the House and the Senate unanimously passed the Taiwan Travel Act introduced by Representative Steve Chabot and Senator Marco Rubio, both Republicans, surpassing the two-thirds majority threshold for the bill to become law even if the President vetoed it (in fact, Trump signed the Act into law shortly afterward). The TAIPEI Act of 2019, presented by Republican Senator Cory Gardner to the 116th Congress, also won unanimous approval from both parties. Afflicted by the impeachment inquiry initiated by the then Democratic-controlled House, Trump had no intention or energy to counter Congress's intervention in Taiwan policy. Consequently, he signed the Act into law unconditionally, adding to the inclination of the US Congress to meddle in cross-Strait relations.

By contrast, during the first two years of Biden's presidency, with Democrats in charge of both chambers of Congress, he took certain countermeasures against some of the highly provocative Taiwan-related bills introduced by lawmakers from both parties. The Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 (S. 4428) is a good example. From June to September 2022, the Act was reviewed by the 117th Congress. The Democratic-controlled Senate modified part of the original text, removing some clauses seriously infringing on China's sovereignty. The original text stated that "it shall be the policy of the United States...to rename the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States as the Taiwan Representative

¹ "H.R.3972: Taiwan Peace and Stability Act," <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr3972/BILLS-117hr3972ih.pdf>.

Office”; “the appointment of an individual to the position of Director of the American Institute in Taiwan’s Taipei office shall be subject to the advice and consent of the Senate”; and “Taiwan is designated as a major non-NATO ally.”¹ China Review News Agency commented, “These provisions are intended to treat Taiwan as a ‘sovereign state,’ directly challenging America’s one-China policy.”² Not surprisingly, the bill was met with strong opposition from the Chinese government, and the Biden administration also expressed concern, urging the Senate to alter some “symbolic” language in the bill to avoid agitating China. The revised text reported by the Senate changed its wording from “it shall be the policy of the United States” to “it is the sense of Congress that the United States...should seek” to “rename the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States as the Taiwan Representative Office.” “The appointment of an individual to the position of Director of the American Institute in Taiwan’s Taipei office shall be subject to the advice and consent of the Senate” was deleted. Furthermore, the “designation of Taiwan as a major non-NATO ally” was changed into “treatment of Taiwan as a major non-NATO ally.”³ Dissatisfied with the revised text, 46 Republicans jointly introduced a House version of the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 (H.R. 9010) on September 28, 2022, retaining several provocative clauses that the Senate had deleted. Taking charge of both chambers at that time, Democrats refused to review the bill on the grounds that its language remained too sensitive and radical. As a result, the Act did not pass the 117th Congress.

Generally speaking, Republican lawmakers have been more hawkish toward China; some conservative ones have even introduced Taiwan-related bills that could potentially have a disruptive effect on the China–US relationship. From the 116th to 118th Congress, Republicans, such as Thomas Tiffany, have introduced multiple resolutions calling for resuming “formal diplomatic relations” with Taiwan. At the maximum, these resolutions had more than 40 co-sponsors, exclusively Republicans. They called on the US President to “resume normal diplomatic relations with Taiwan,” “abandon the antiquated

¹ “S. 4428: Taiwan Policy Act of 2022,” <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/s4428/BILLS-117s4428rs.pdf>.

² “Editorial: ‘Taiwan Policy Act’ Is Most Dangerous for Its ‘Substantiveness,’” <http://bj.crntt.com/doc/1064/7/1/3/106471348.html?coluid=137&kindid=20311&docid=106471348&mdate=0921054537>.

³ “S. 4428: Taiwan Policy Act of 2022,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4428/text>.

‘One China Policy,’” and “advocate for Taiwan’s full membership in the United Nations and other international organizations.”¹ In the current 118th Congress, where the Republican Party retakes control of the House, its lawmakers introduced a series of extreme, “pro-Taiwan” bills shortly after the first session began. From late February to early March 2023, more than ten Taiwan-related bills were reviewed or passed by House committees. For example, the House Financial Services Committee agreed to the Taiwan Conflict Deterrence Act of 2023, which seeks to “deter Chinese aggression toward Taiwan” by directing the US Department of the Treasury (USDT) to impose financial sanctions on China and restrict financial services for Chinese leaders and their family members; the Pressure Regulatory Organizations to End Chinese Threats to Taiwan Act, which demands that, if China takes action against Taiwan, the US Federal Reserve, USDT, and Securities and Exchange Commission should take steps to exclude China from certain international financial organizations; and the Taiwan Non-Discrimination Act of 2023, which calls on the US government to support Taiwan’s membership in the International Monetary Fund. Concurrently, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs voted for the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020, requiring periodic reviews and updated reports relating to the DOS’s Taiwan guidelines. Coming in various forms, these Taiwan-related bills have all been highly extreme.

II. Reasons behind Democratic–Republican Differences on Taiwan Policy

The Taiwan policy gap between the Democratic and Republican parties mirrors their differences on China policy, ideologies, and representation of interest groups and is attributable to the lobbying priorities of the Taiwan authorities, especially the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

First, the Trump and Biden administrations differ in their objectives and approaches to containing China. They similarly view China as America’s top strategic competitor and have launched a whole-of-government, omnidirectional, and all-encompassing “strategy of great-power competition.”

¹ “H. Con. Res. 10: Expressing the Sense of Congress That the United States Should Resume Normal Diplomatic Relations With Taiwan, Negotiate a Bilateral Free Trade Agreement With Taiwan, and Support Taiwan’s Membership in International Organizations,” <https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hconres10/BILLS-118hconres10ih.pdf>.

Trump tried to use American might to bring China to its knees, especially on trade and economic issues. For this purpose, he significantly intensified the use of Taiwan to contain China. During the early stage of his presidency, Trump took some tentative steps to break the taboo that surrounds US exchanges with Taiwan but subsequently showed restraint due to China's opposition. In 2018, Trump started a trade war with China, which was responded to with strong countermeasures. To force concessions from the Chinese side and win Congressional support for his trade war, Trump used Taiwan as a bargaining chip by signing the Taiwan Travel Act, elevating the level of exchanges with Taiwan, selling arms to Taiwan, and incorporating Taiwan into his "Indo-Pacific strategy." In 2020, a presidential election year in the US, the fast-spreading COVID-19 inflicted a hard blow on the American economy. Against such a backdrop, Trump and his Republican Party took attacking China as their campaign strategy, fanning hysterical Sinophobia sentiment. In a move to vent anger after Trump's loss in the presidential race, his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced, on the eve of leaving office, the lifting of all "self-imposed restrictions on the US-Taiwan relationship." Worse still, the Trump administration attempted to send Kelly Craft, then US Ambassador to the UN, to visit Taiwan. Although Trump's impulse to cross China's "red line" was clear, he did not completely abandon the one-China policy for fear of a war with China. From Beijing's strong opposition and effective countermeasures, the Trump administration came to realize that China has a firm resolve and full ability to deter "Taiwan independence" and any "US-Taiwan collusion." John Bolton, Trump's National Security Adviser, disclosed after his resignation, "One of Trump's favorite comparisons was to point to the tip of one of his Sharpies and say, 'This is Taiwan,' then point to the historic Resolute desk in the Oval Office and say, 'This is China.'"¹ Obviously, Trump's assessment of the sensitivity of the Taiwan question and China's growing might became increasingly sober over time.

By comparison, Biden's approach to Taiwan has been arguably two-faced, subject to and serving his double-dealing tactics that aim to "outcompete"

¹ John Bolton, "The Scandal of Trump's China Policy," June 17, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/john-bolton-the-scandal-of-trumps-china-policy-11592419564>.

China while also seeking “coexistence” with China to avoid an armed conflict. The duplicity of Biden’s China policy has become increasingly evident as a result of the Ukraine crisis and the Palestine–Israel conflict. Vowing to win the race with China in the upcoming “decisive decade,” the Biden administration has recalibrated its Taiwan policy to “outcompete” China, using the island to accelerate the formation of a global power structure and posture to America’s advantage. Since the Ukraine crisis erupted in February 2022, the Biden administration has doubled its “appeasement” and “deterrence” of China. It has assured China, more frequently than ever before, that the one-China policy has remained unchanged and the US will not support “Taiwan independence.” Yet, at the same time, the Biden administration has adopted a deterrence strategy through such means as threatening massive economic sanctions on China and incorporating Taiwan into the US “Indo–Pacific strategy” militarily and speedily, in an attempt to keep the two sides of the Taiwan Strait separated at low costs. It can be said that the Biden administration’s oral assurances are “insincere,” whereas its efforts in urging NATO members, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other allies to meddle in cross-Strait relations more proactively, explicitly, and aggressively and prepare militarily for the possible conflict are “real.” Out of the same strategic mindset and policy logic, Biden opposed the inclusion of obviously provocative clauses in the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 but supported and signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23 NDAA), authorizing substantive military aid to Taiwan in the next five years. There is no fundamental difference between Trump and Biden as regards US military “support for Taiwan’s defense.” Biden has repeatedly said that the US will “defend Taiwan” in the event of “aggression.” However, the ultimate purpose of the US “support for Taiwan’s defense” is not to safeguard Taiwan’s security but to use the island as a pawn against China. According to US media, the Biden administration has been considering plans to destroy Taiwan when necessary;¹ in other words, the US will not hesitate to sacrifice Taiwan to stop China’s reunification.

¹ “Distrust Grows toward Washington amid Revelation of US’ ‘Destruction of Taiwan’ Plan,” February 24, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1286179.shtml>.

Second, the foreign policy, especially China policy, teams of the Trump and Biden administrations have different approaches toward Taiwan, which can be roughly categorized as “strategic clarity” and “strategic ambiguity.” Members of the foreign policy teams advising the US government primarily come from think tanks or universities—some may be senior officials from former administrations. In most cases, these people have obvious party affiliations and, after joining the government, will tend to promote policies that suit their purposes or those of the think tanks they used to work for. The viewpoints and positions they express after returning to the think tanks will reflect their real considerations to a considerable extent.

Trump’s foreign policy advisors, such as Randall Schriver, Matthew Pottinger, and Bolton, were all China hawks, advocating for “defending Taiwan” or maintaining “strategic clarity” on Taiwan. They argued that the US should clarify its “commitment to Taiwan’s defense” to deter China from using force. Pompeo, who joined the Hudson Institute after ending his tenure as US Secretary of State, said during a visit to Taiwan that “Taiwan does not need to declare its independence because it is already an independent nation,” urging the US government to diplomatically “recognize Taiwan.” On his April 2023 Taiwan trip, Bolton called for “full diplomatic relations with Taiwan” and “dual recognition” of both sides of the Taiwan Strait. He said:

And we have to tell China and Russia what the consequences are if they take actions against Taiwan. Not just in the immediate response, but over the longer term, to basically excommunicate China from the international economic system if it did take military actions against Taiwan or attempt to throw a blockade around it.¹

Pottinger, Deputy National Security Adviser in the Trump White House, who is currently working for the Hoover Institution, asserted,

China is convinced the United States “is actively endorsing or implicitly emboldening an independence movement in Taiwan, and

¹ “US Ex-Security Adviser Calls for Closer Ties with Taiwan,” <https://thehill.com/policy/international/us-ex-security-adviser-calls-for-closer-ties-with-taiwan/>.

that U.S. support for Taiwan remains the primary obstacle standing between China and its ability to achieve unification.” It would be wrong to conclude that a policy of reassurance by Washington, rather than deterrence, would reduce Beijing’s appetite for changing the status quo through force.¹

These conservative Republicans have openly emboldened “Taiwan independence” separatists and conveyed the false impression of “one China, one Taiwan.” They were the masterminds behind Trump’s radical Taiwan policy.

By comparison, most of Biden’s advisors are proponents of “strategic ambiguity” or “maintaining the status quo” on Taiwan. They insist that while providing help for Taiwan in various areas to sustain the island’s “de facto independence,” the US should not support, or contrarily should oppose, “Taiwan independence” to avoid a military conflict with China. The public statements of Blinken and Sullivan have been largely in line with those of Biden himself. The opinions expressed by some liberal think tankers, especially former Democratic Party officials, have revealed their deep-seated calculations. For instance, Richard Bush and Ryan Hass at the Brookings Institution insist that the US policy of “strategic ambiguity” is effective and that maintaining the one-China policy while substantively elevating relations with Taiwan is in America’s strategic interests. They believe that “Beijing has concluded that the cost of an invasion remains too high” and will therefore not easily use force; in such circumstances, “U.S. support should be dedicated to fortifying Taiwan’s capacity to withstand the full range of pressures the island already contends with from China” and “making clear to Beijing the high price of using force to compel unification”; however, the US should avoid narrowing “its focus to military fixes” or backing China “into a corner” by deploying additional military power in the Taiwan Strait or signing the “Mutual Defense Treaty” with Taiwan.² Daniel Russel at the Asia Society opposed “an insistence by U.S.

¹ Susan M. Gordon et al., “U.S.–Taiwan Relations in a New Era: Responding to a More Assertive China,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 2023, 96.

² Jude Blanchette and Ryan Hass, “The Taiwan Long Game: Why the Best Solution Is No Solution,” https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-long-game-best-solution-jude-blanchette-ryan-hass?check_logged_in=1.

officials that Taiwan must be ‘retained’ as a strategic military asset,” which, he criticized, “contradicts the principle embedded in the One China policy.” Russel added:

Actions and signals by Washington that Beijing interprets as confirmation that the United States remains prepared to accept unification, so long as it is peaceful and on terms agreed upon by China and Taiwan—a position at the heart of the U.S. One China policy—helps to mitigate fear that the “window” for unification is closing and therefore to diminish the sense of urgency that fosters risk-taking.¹

The Ukraine crisis did not narrow the gap within the US strategic community on Taiwan policy. Zhou Wenxing at Nanjing University concluded after analyzing samples of American think tankers that those who embrace “strategic clarity” believe that the Ukraine crisis has increased the possibility of an earlier Chinese “invasion” of Taiwan and therefore the US should upgrade its “defense relations” with Taiwan across the board or even establish “diplomatic relations” and intervene in Taiwan-related affairs militarily. By contrast, “strategic ambiguity” supporters argue that while assisting Taiwan in improving its self-defense capabilities and resilience and strengthening US defense and security relations with all allies and partners to sustain credible military deterrence capabilities in the “Indo–Pacific” region, the US should seek to establish reliable dialogue channels with China to ensure that competition between the two sides will not escalate into a confrontation or conflict. In light of this, the US should avoid making any explicit security commitments to Taiwan; otherwise, pro-independence separatists on the island might use the “blank check” from the US to provoke China, ending up dragging the US into a regional conflict.²

Third, Republicans are generally deemed more “pro-Taiwan, anti-China”

¹ “U.S.–Taiwan Relations in a New Era: Responding to a More Assertive China,” 100.

² Zhou Wenxing, “U.S. Think Tanks’ Perceptions of China Policy, Causes, and Countermeasures: A Comparative Analysis of Think Tank Experts’ China-Related Research,” *Journal of Intelligence*, No. 2 (2023): 60–61; Zhou Wenxing and Yao Huanyu, “Mainstream U.S. Think Tanks’ Perceptions of U.S. Taiwan Policy after the Russia–Ukraine Conflict and Their Implications,” *Cross-Taiwan Strait Studies*, No. 1 (2023): 148–161.

than Democrats. The stance of the Republican Party is attributable to its campaign strategy over the long term and ideological extremization in recent years, as well as to the DPP authorities' lobbying activities. Since the 1970s, Republicans have deliberately touted their advantages related to national security issues in US elections. For example, both Reagan and George W. Bush adopted a tough stance on Taiwan affairs during their campaigns and the early periods of their presidency, just as many Republican lawmakers have done. For election purposes, Republicans often criticize Democrats for "being weak on China," presenting themselves as China hawks in campaign languages and on Taiwan policy. After Trump won the Presidency, right-wing populism gained currency in the US. The Republican Party, as a whole, exposed its racist, nationalist, and unilateralist tendencies, most noticeably, white supremacy. Also exposed were its deep-rooted anti-communist, anti-socialist ideology and a close interests-based connection with the military-industrial complex.¹ Most of the lawmakers pushing Taiwan-related legislation in the US Congress are members of the Congressional or Senate Taiwan Caucus, concurrently serving in committees on military, foreign affairs, and intelligence. There are exchanges of interests between these lawmakers and the US military, intelligence agencies, conservative think tanks, and defense contractors. In some cases, we can find military assets or military-industrial enterprises in their states or constituencies. Such a kind of long "marriage" with the military-industrial complex has rendered the Republican Party more willing to take risks in elevating US relations with Taiwan, which will damage the one-China principle, stoke tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and even push Taiwan into the fire.

Meanwhile, the US politicians' ceaseless hollowing out and erosion of the one-China policy are inseparable from the Taiwan authorities' lobbying activities. The Taiwan authorities' lobbying in the US can be traced back to the Cold War period, targeting both the Democratic and Republican parties. Since returning to power in 2016, the DPP has ramped up its lobbying activities in the US. Trump's telephone conversation with Tsai Ing-wen in December 2016 was due to the Taiwan authorities' lobbying via former Republican Senator Bob

¹ Zhang Zhaoxi, "An Analysis of the Ultra-Tough Attitude of the Republican Party toward China in the United States," *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 8 (2021): 9–17.

Dole. Republican Representative Chabot and Senator Rubio, co-sponsors of the Taiwan Travel Act, have long been wooed by the Taiwan authorities and lobbied by the “Formosan Association for Public Affairs.” Edward Royce, Republican and former Chairman of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, has visited Taiwan multiple times and been awarded by the Taiwan authorities the Order of Brilliant Star with Special Grand Cordon and the Medal of Honor for Parliamentary Diplomacy. After the Taiwan Travel Act came into effect, Royce was appraised by Taiwanese media as the “greatest contributor.” In addition, the Taiwan authorities have long been a generous donor to the Project 2049 Institute founded by Schriver, contributing \$350,000 to \$500,000 per annum.¹ Conservative think tanks, including the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Brookings Institution, have all been the targets of bribery and influence from the Taiwan authorities.

III. Implications and Outlook

The Taiwan question has always been the most important and sensitive issue in China–US relations. America’s attempt to meddle, more aggressively alongside allies, in cross-Strait relations will inevitably add to the complexity and difficulty of the Taiwan question. In the forthcoming decade, there will be no fundamental adjustment in the US “China containment” strategy, and the collusion between “Taiwan independence” separatists and the US will very unlikely reverse. As a result of the collusion and interactions between the two main US political parties and “Taiwan independence” separatists, the Taiwan question will exhibit the following characteristics.

First, in the context of the US-initiated “great-power competition,” the Democratic and Republican parties will compete against each other for an “anti-China, pro-Taiwan” image, putting the Taiwan Strait at greater risk. Under the strategic consensus of sustaining American hegemony, suppressing China, and “using Taiwan to contain China” and due to the serious political polarization within the US, politicians from both parties will debate and contend openly

¹ Tong Liqun, “Taiwan’s Lobbying Activities in the United States since Tsai Ing-wen Took Power,” *Taiwan Studies*, No. 5 (2020): 53–60.

and fiercely in elections and government–Congress politics surrounding such issues as “who can win the race with China” or “who can defend Taiwan more effectively.” Consequently, the US government may play the game of “salami slicing” on its one-China policy, constantly touching China’s red line. During the 2020 presidential election, in the face of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic difficulties and strong criticism from Democrats, Trump and his Republican Party adopted a political strategy of boosting his campaign by attacking China. As a result, China–US rivalry escalated across the board from a trade and technology war to a propaganda and ideological one, precipitously elevating the risk of a military conflict. During the 2022 midterm elections, Pelosi led a delegation composed exclusively of House Democrats to Taiwan to respond to Republican criticism of weakness on national security issues. Her visit was intended to boost Democratic candidates but triggered a big fight between China and the US. Following in her footsteps, Kevin McCarthy (then House Republican leader, later elected as Speaker) also expressed plans to visit Taiwan. Due to the strong warnings and protests from the Chinese government, McCarthy altered his plan and met with Tsai Ing-wen in Los Angeles. Looking ahead, tense competition between the Democratic and Republican parties will inevitably lead US politicians to vie against each other for a “pro-Taiwan” image. Similar scenarios will re-occur, posing fresh shocks to China–US relations.

Despite their intense bargaining and tug-of-war on budgetary issues such as taxation, appropriations of funds, and the debt ceiling, the Democratic and Republican parties, driven by the military–industrial complex, both support an increase in military spending. Their competition over elevating “military relations” with Taiwan, will make the US military assistance to Taiwan more direct and more provocative. In the second half of 2022, a bipartisan agreement was reached on raising the national defense topline for Fiscal Year 2023 to \$857.9 billion, exceeding \$800 billion for the first time in American history. The FY23 NDAA, approved by both parties and signed into law by Biden, included the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act, which stipulated “providing military or non-military aid to Taiwan,” “engaging with Taiwan in a series of combined training, exercises, and planning activities,” and “prioritizing and expediting the processing of requests from Taiwan under the Foreign Military

Sales program.” Notably, for each of the fiscal years 2023 through 2027, the FY23 NDAA authorized grant assistance to Taiwan up to \$2 billion (\$10 billion over five years) via the DOS-run Foreign Military Financing program. This move seriously damaged the mutual trust between China and the US. After the crisis in Ukraine broke out, some US politicians optimistically predicted that, by supporting Ukraine, the West could “permanently weaken Russia,” referring to the aid to Ukraine as “the best money we’ve ever spent.”¹ Further, there emerged a voice comparing “Ukraine today” to “Taiwan tomorrow.” Under such circumstances, the Democratic and Republican parties have reached a consensus on turning Taiwan into a “fortress” to increase the costs of a “military reunification” and thus sway China’s policymaking. They attempt to use Taiwan to deter China in times of peace and fight a proxy war in times of conflict, with the aim of “weakening China” and comprehensively “exhausting China.” Driven by the “great-power competition” strategy and stimulated by the Ukraine crisis, both parties support the augmentation of US military spending and a full revamp of US military and industrial production capacities. Overall, the US will continue to upgrade its strategy of “using Taiwan to contain China,” posing grave challenges to China–US relations and security in the Asia Pacific.

Second, a Democratic win in the upcoming 2024 elections will hasten the internationalization of the Taiwan question, whereas a Republican victory may see China–US rivalry become increasingly confrontational. Given the ongoing Ukraine crisis and Palestine–Israel conflict, Biden has limited strategic resources at his disposal and, therefore, “does not want conflict” with China because of Taiwan. If Biden wins reelection in 2024, he may continue to apply a two-faced approach. The Democratic Party prefers to encircle China with an international united front, i.e., inducing or coercing more US allies and partners into interfering in cross-Strait relations under the premise that the situation does not get out of control at the current stage. While promoting “small circles” within the G7 and NATO and with Japan and South Korea to meddle in cross-Strait relations, the Biden administration has also attempted

¹ Kemal Derviş, “What Are the West’s Strategic Goals in the Ukraine War,” <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-are-the-wests-strategic-goals-in-the-ukraine-war/>; Alexander Bolton, “Russia Issues Arrest Warrant for Lindsey Graham after Ukraine Comments,” <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/4024960-russia-issues-arrest-warrant-for-lindsey-graham-after-ukraine-comments/>.

to stir up trouble in larger international contexts. Apart from distorting UN Resolution 2758 to create the false impression of “one China, one Taiwan,” the Biden administration invited the Taiwan authorities to the so-called Summit for Democracy in an attempt to make the 100-plus participating countries and regions endorsers of the legitimacy of the Taiwan authorities. “Democracy versus autocracy” has become the prevailing American narrative in its China containment strategy, and Taiwan is hailed by the US-led West as a “showcase of democracy” and an “outpost against autocracy.” Unsurprisingly, the Taiwan question will become increasingly ideologized. The US will continue to urge other countries to support Taiwan’s “democracy and freedom,” distorting China’s counter-secession and counter-interference actions, which are dedicated to preserving its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as “autocratic aggressions” and a challenge to the “free world.” With simmering tensions in the Taiwan Strait, the possibility cannot be excluded that the US government might collude with the Taiwan authorities and spread internationally new theories such as “Taiwan’s undetermined status” and “UN representation for Taiwan.”

One of the priority goals of the Democratic Party on Taiwan policy is more aggressive interference from NATO and European countries. While seeking a stronger and larger NATO, the Biden administration has vigorously pressed for a NATO expansion to the Asia Pacific. Currently comprising 32 member countries and long dominated by the US, NATO sees China as a “systemic rival,” with a gesture of interfering in cross-Strait relations in collaboration with some of America’s Asian allies. In June 2022, NATO invited Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to its summit in Madrid. In February 2023, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited Japan and South Korea, unveiling plans to open a NATO liaison office in Japan. These moves signify that NATO is being incorporated into America’s strategic track of encircling China. The fact is, however, that the US is using NATO to “kidnap” European countries in its “China containment” strategy, which will hurt European interests. The ongoing strategic confrontation between NATO and Russia and the war between Ukraine and Russia have greatly affected European economies and livelihoods. For the sake of their long-term interests, European countries should rethink the root causes of the Ukraine crisis, vigorously pursue strategic autonomy, and rein in NATO’s global expansion. French President

Emmanuel Macron has called for European strategic autonomy and expressed his disapproval of Europe's policy that follows America's lead and interferes in cross-Strait relations, demonstrating the strategic soberness of at least some European leaders.¹

Alternatively, if the Republican Party wins in the 2024 elections, it may pick up a radical "using Taiwan to contain China" policy. In this scenario, China may face an even greater violation of its core interests, and the risk of a China–US military conflict will rise further. On the eve of the 2024 elections, the US House of Representatives, currently controlled by Republicans, is working on various "pro-Taiwan" bills under the names of "defending Taiwan's security" or "stopping China's aggressions," eager to promote their "tough on national security issues" image to curry favor with voters. To increase pressure on Democrats, the Republican Party has made full use of Congressional oversight by demanding the Biden administration to put into action, more vigorously and more stringently, the existing Taiwan-related acts. If the Republican Party sweeps both houses of Congress and the presidency after 2024, it may take more provocative measures to elevate US relations with Taiwan, which include: more openly spreading the false impression of "one China, one Taiwan" through a gesture of establishing "formal diplomatic relations" with Taiwan; elevating military cooperation with Taiwan and comprehensively incorporating the island into the US "Indo–Pacific strategy" through joint military exercises, training for formed units, and massive military assistance. With a stronger Cold War mentality, the Republican Party will pressure US allies and China's neighbors even harder to pick sides. Strategically, after returning to the White House, the Republican Party may reduce assistance to Ukraine to facilitate a compromise with Russia and focus all resources and energy against China. "Using Taiwan to contain China" will be high on its agenda, and its blatant provocations will, without a doubt, be met with strong countermeasures. The potential confrontation between China and the US may be more tense and explosive than the one witnessed during Pelosi's Taiwan visit, shaking the political foundations of China–US relations and seriously threatening peace, stability, and prosperity

¹ Frida Ghitis, "Opinion: Amid Fallout of Macron–Xi Meeting, Another World Leader Tries His Luck," <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/13/opinions/macron-xi-lula-diplomacy-china-ghitis/index.html>.

in the Asia Pacific. In the event of a massive Chinese military response due to US provocations, people in Taiwan will be the greatest victims.¹

Third, the political situation in Taiwan can hardly cause fundamental changes in the Taiwan Strait but will affect the intensity of China–US rivalry. In the current context of China–US competition, “American-friendliness” has become a defining feature of various political forces in Taiwan. In the 2024 Taiwan leadership election, the mainstream political parties including the DPP, the Kuomintang (KMT), and the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP) all advocated for strengthening military relations with the US to prevent “reunification by force.” For instance, the DPP deems the intensifying China–US strategic rivalry an opportunity. Self-proclaimed “a pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence,” the DPP’s candidate Lai Ching-te bent over backward to please the US, volunteering his services as a proxy for containing China in an attempt to seek “Taiwan independence” with the help of the US. The KMT has been actively vying with the DPP for US support; some political figures from that party have expressed loyalty to the US through various channels. In June 2022, the KMT Chairman Eric Chu said during his US trip that “the KMT’s pro-American stance has never changed since the founding of the party,” labeling the KMT as belonging to the same camp and the same “value alliance” with the US.² The KMT’s candidate Hou Yu-ih wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs*, proposing a “three Ds” strategy to maintain stability across the Taiwan Strait, i.e., deterrence, dialogue, and de-escalation.³ His strategy, in essence, still relies on the US and its allies to develop Taiwan’s military capabilities as a means of “maintaining the status quo” and “preventing reunification by force.” The TPP’s candidate Ko Wen-je said that, presently, there is no way for Taiwan to confront the mainland by itself and, therefore, it is an inevitable choice for the island to collaborate with external allies and keep consistent with the US in “principles.” After half a century of maneuverings, the US has established strong influences

¹ Kishore Mahbubani, *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*, trans. Center for China and Globalization (Simplified Chinese Press, 2021), 101–102.

² “From Beijing: The Kuomintang Should Not Seek a Hasty Cure for Its Problems!,” June 10, 2022, <http://bj.cmnt.com/doc/1063/8/7/0/106387033.html?coluid=3&kindid=13&docid=106387033&mdate=0610184102>.

³ Hou Yu-ih, “Taiwan’s Path between Extremes,” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/taiwan/taiwans-path-between-extremes>.

on Taiwan's politics, political parties, and society. Political figures, no matter which camp they belong to, Blue, Green, or White, all need to go through the "interview" of the US government, and the US can influence Taiwan's politics through such means as expressing support, cold shoulder, or displeasure openly or covertly. With increased emphasis on using Taiwan to contain China, the US will show a stronger intent and apply more diversified means to meddle in Taiwan's politics. Now, with the end of the election, Lai Ching-te has become the new leader of Taiwan. As a stubborn pursuer of "Taiwan independence," he may probably sustain a policy of "preventing reunification by force," cooperating with the US in its strategy to "use Taiwan to contain China." Thus, Taiwan will remain a pawn of the US.

The more blatantly the US plays the "Taiwan card," the more assertively China will oppose "Taiwan independence" and foreign interference. As China grows economically and militarily, it has greater capabilities to resolve the Taiwan question. Even during the three Taiwan Strait crises back in the 20th century when it was under-resourced militarily, China demonstrated a strong will and determination to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, successfully deterring the KMT authorities and "Taiwan independence" separatists and effectively constraining the US "pro-Taiwan, anti-China" policy. Now, after decades of strenuous efforts, China has grown much stronger in military terms. In response to Pelosi's Taiwan trip and Tsai Ing-wen's US trip, China conducted powerful combat readiness patrols and military exercises, exhibiting its capabilities to defeat "Taiwan independence" and foreign interference with decisive measures when necessary. With the intensification of China-US rivalry, some Americans think that a long rule of the DPP, which confronts China, is more in line with the US strategic interests. However, an escalation of cross-Strait confrontation will inflict greater hardship on Taiwan, making it the most vulnerable and easiest prey to the multi-party game. Amidst rising geopolitical tensions, war or peace has become a critical issue of concern to Taiwan residents, and some multinational corporations and Taiwanese companies have postponed their investment plans on the island, reducing Taiwan's attractiveness to foreign investors. In the future, if the pro-independence separatists represented by the DPP collude with Republican

hardliners in the US, the Taiwan Strait may be engulfed in another round of turmoil.