

The Biden Administration's Tug-of-War with China: Opportunities and Challenges for Taiwan

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Abstract

Uncertainty surrounds any incoming U.S. administration as to its commitment to existing alliance systems and security guarantees extended to small states facing an existential threat. Confronted with an increasingly belligerent China and signals by Xi Jinping that he is running out of patience on the “Taiwan question,” Taipei understands the need to not only continue the deepening engagement with the United States that occurred under the Trump administration, but in fact to see bilateral ties with its security partner reach even higher levels so as to strengthen its deterrence against China. Although the Biden administration has emitted encouraging signals with several references to continued U.S. support for Taiwan, the extent to which the latter will be allowed to participate in a fledgling “alliance of democracies” to combat authoritarianism remains to be seen. Still, the viability and efficacy of U.S.-led alliances—whether Trans-Atlantic or as part of an enlarged “Quad” in the Indo-Pacific—will be contingent on the willingness of key regional partners to overcome differences, which in recent years have undermined their ability to implement a comprehensive, concerted, and sustained strategy in response to Chinese assertiveness and rule-breaking.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific Strategy, Alliance Systems, US-China Relations, US-Taiwan Relations, Democracy

I. Introduction

The election of Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States on November 3, 2020, engendered different responses in Taiwan and across the Indo Pacific. For many, president Donald Trump’s “hardline” response to the challenge posed by China had been a necessary course correction which only an atypical outsider like Trump could engineer and sustain. For this segment of the population, Trump’s defeat at the hands of the Democrat candidate, Joe Biden—as much of an “establishment” figure as one could get in American politics—presaged a return to U.S. policy toward China that was deemed too permissive, if not naive, and therefore detrimental to the ability of democracies to push back against efforts by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to displace the United States and, just as troubling, to exert greater influence within international organizations and perhaps rewrite the rules of international politics. For them, therefore, Biden’s election could have catastrophic consequences for Taiwan, which in their assessment had benefited greatly under Trump as a consequence of his hawkish approach to China.



Figure 1. U.S. President Joe Biden

Source: White House, “Joe Biden THE PRESIDENT,” February 20, 2021, Accessed, *White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-biden/>>.

For others, Trump's defeat in the controversial elections promised to bring back some normalcy in American politics and to repair the reputation of the United States with international partners. In their opinion, the damage that the former president had caused to American democracy, and the divisiveness that he had cultivated to strengthen his appeal with his base, had not only undermined the effectiveness of U.S. policy making, but furthermore made it easier for autocratic regimes, such as those in China, Russia and Iran, to ignore its criticism over human rights abuses in their countries by engaging in "whataboutism". Among those who have welcomed Biden's election, there is great optimism over the opportunity to reestablish the United States as a leader of democracies, and to shift away from the brand of "America First" isolationism that underpinned the Trump administration, toward a more muscular internationalism.¹ Rather than alienate democratic allies and pull out of various international bodies, as the Trump administration often did whenever it encountered opposition to its worldview, the Biden administration has signaled its intent to deepen alliances while recommitting the United States to global institutions where an American pullout only had the effect of ceding more space to China to exert its influence and shape policy (the World Health Organization being a prime example of this during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Supporters and critics of presidents Trump and Biden have also both made the mistake of overpersonalizing the American presidency. In doing so, they have failed to recognize that rather than being solely the result of Trump's idiosyncratic personality or vision, the more hawkish stance that characterized U.S. policy toward China from 2016 was the result of a gradual shift in attitudes that had been occurring within the U.S. and in other countries (See Figure 2).² In fact, more skeptical and negative views on China preceded the Trump administration. This shift was bipartisan, institutional, and stemmed principally from the realization that decades of U.S. engagement with the People's Republic of China (PRC) had failed to yield a country that was more liberal, democratic, or willing to act as a responsible stakeholder. Instead, the policy

1. Alexander Cooley & Daniel Nexon, *Exit From Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 69-70.

2. Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, & Christine Huang, "Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries," October 6, 2020, *Pew Research Center Global Attitudes & Trends*, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>>.

of strategic patience, espoused by both Democrat and Republican administrations, had only allowed China to strengthen its economy—often by unfair means—while building up a military that is now in a position to threaten its neighbors and possibly to displace the U.S. as the regional hegemon.

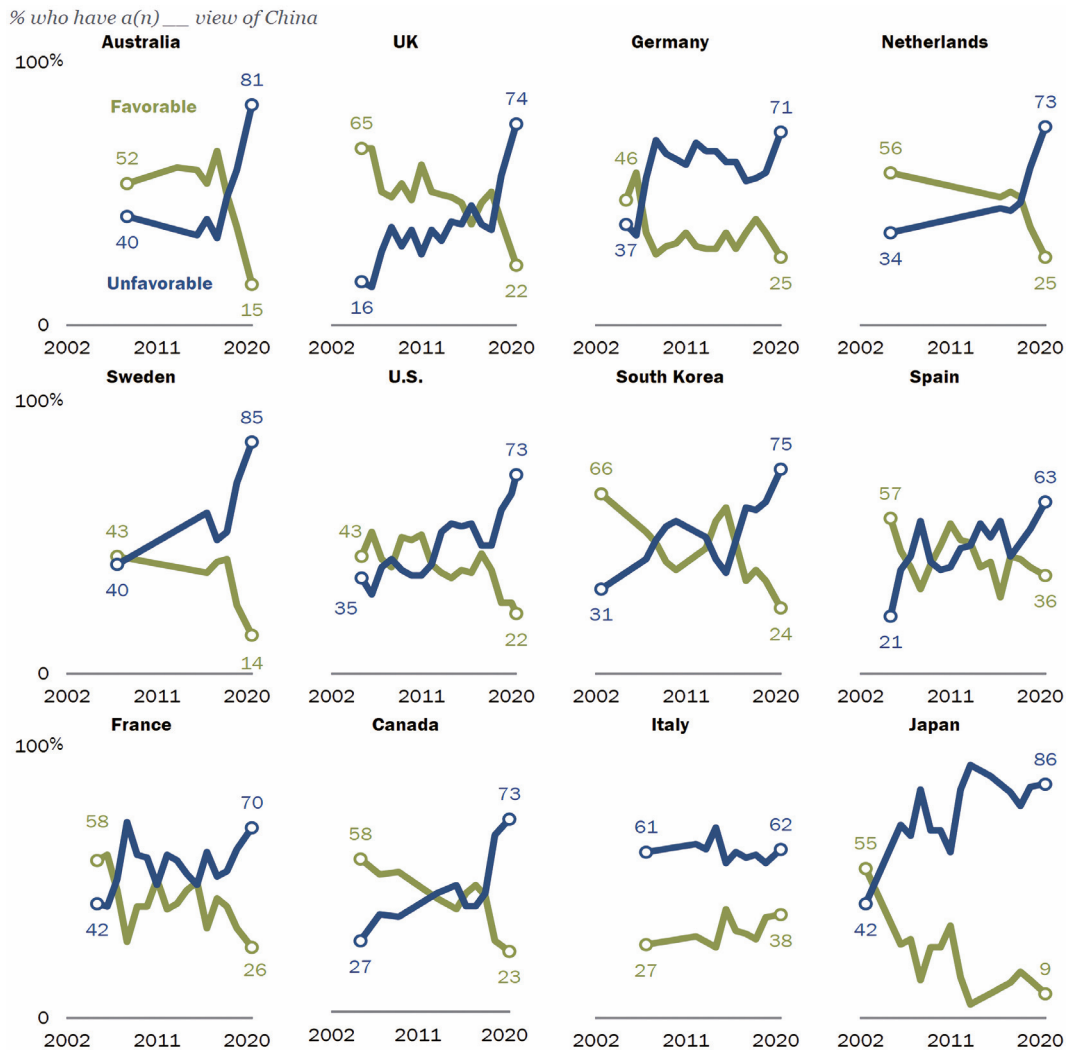


Figure 2. Increasing Negative Evaluations of China across Advanced Economies

Source: Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, & Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries.”

While there is little doubt that president Trump’s personality, and that of his appointees to senior posts in the national security establishment, had something to do with the tone of U.S. policy toward China, it is also equally true that Trump arrived in

the White House at a time when it was no longer possible to argue that “more of the same” with regards to China was still a viable policy. By that point, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s troubling authoritarianism, crackdowns in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, military adventurism in the East and South China Sea, along the border with India and in the Taiwan Strait, hostility toward Australia, the detaining of Canadian nationals, as well as disinformation over the origins of COVID-19 in Wuhan in late 2019, had dispelled any lingering doubt that “playing nice” with China could guide it in a direction that was more amenable to the liberal-democratic world order that has existed since the conclusion of World War II. Writing in the first volume of his memoirs as president, Obama lamented—perhaps too late, admittedly—that for “China’s leaders, foreign policy remained purely transactional. How much they gave and how much they got would depend not on abstract principles of international law but on their assessment of the other side’s power and leverage. When they met no resistance, they’d keep on taking.” And this is the former president expressing his frustrations over China when the much tamer Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao were at the helm in Beijing!



Figure 3. Former U.S. President Donald Trump

Source: Gage Skidmore, “President of the United States Donald Trump speaking at the 2018 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC),” February 23, 2018, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donald_Trump_\(39630669575\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donald_Trump_(39630669575).jpg)>.

Thus, rather than being an architect of a new policy toward China, Trump was a symptom. It follows, therefore, that the Biden administration will also reflect the tectonic shift that has occurred within the community of China watchers in the United States. President Biden's own rhetoric, as well as many of the appointments he has made to key positions at the National Security Council (NSC), the Department of State and Department of Defense (DoD),³ clearly demonstrate that his intentions are not to return the China policy as it was under president Obama, as many of his critics feared—and this, even if, in some cases, the appointees are as what one media has described then as “Obama alums.” As *Axios* has reported, “Virtually every team in the National Security Council, from technology to global health to international economics, will incorporate China into their work.”⁴ A substantial number of the appointees at the NSC, State and DoD, furthermore, have a history of working on issues such as combating authoritarian influence or of engagement, at the think tank level, with Taiwan. According to *Nikkei Asia*, “the largest contingent of U.S. President Joe Biden's national security team will be the Indo-Pacific directorate, one filled with experts who have advocated a tough stance on China.”⁵

Finally, the Biden administration, which has already been depicted as “soft” on China by its critics, will face immense pressure from the Republican Party and society at large to demonstrate that it is capable of standing up to its principal challenger on the international stage. The domestic consequences of appearing to be too soft on China will also compel the Biden administration to continue many of the policies that were implemented under president Trump.⁶

3. Robbie Gramer & Jack Detsch, “Biden's National Security Council Sharpens Focus on China,” February 18, 2021, *Foreign Policy*, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/18/biden-national-security-council-china-focus/>>.

4. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Biden's whole-of-National Security Council strategy,” *Axios*, February 2, 2021, <<https://www.axios.com/bidens-whole-of-national-security-council-strategy-431454bb-43dc-45ef-9ccc-8a3f229ba598.html>>.

5. Ken Moriyasu, “Biden's Indo-Pacific team largest in National Security Council,” *Nikkei Asia*, February 11, 2021, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Biden-s-Asia-policy/Biden-s-Indo-Pacific-team-largest-in-National-Security-Council>>.

6. Domestic considerations as drivers of foreign policy is nothing new in the United States. As Brian VanDeMark observes, presidents Kennedy and Johnson “learned to err on the side of being too tough in their approach to the world. From the China experience they became convinced

II. Whither the Sino-American “Reset”

The overarching context of U.S.-China relations under the Biden presidency will have direct repercussions on the future tone of American engagement with Taiwan. Having already indicated its intention to collaborate with China in addressing global warming and appointing seasoned diplomat John Kerry as its climate czar, the Biden administration has inadvertently fueled speculation that Washington could seek a *quid pro quo*, whereby it would ignore Chinese transgressions in exchange for collaboration on issues of global concern. Whether and how Beijing responds to this offer, and whether Washington can secure Beijing's collaboration on what it has called a “critical standalone issue,” while at the same time retaining a more hawkish policy on other areas of Chinese behavior, will define the context within which the United States' relationship with Taiwan will evolve.

Much like Trump's supporters and Biden's detractors, Beijing has also tended to overpersonalize American foreign policy. As a result, the CCP leadership appears to have hoped that, with Trump out of office, the new administration in Washington would return bilateral relations to the *status quo ante*. Such expectations early on led it to call for a “reset” in the relationship. A month after Biden's election, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged then president-elect Biden to have the “right perception” of China and cooperate with Beijing “to restart dialogue, return bilateral relations to the right track and rebuild mutual trust.”⁷ On Inauguration Day, foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying picked up on that theme, telling a press briefing that “over the past few years, the Trump administration, especially [Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo, has buried too many mines in U.S.-China relations that need to be eliminated, burned too many bridges that need to be built, and destroyed too many

that a country could not be lost to Communism without astronomical domestic political consequences. They learned not to question or reexamine foreign policy assumptions, at least publicly. If they did, they worried that most Americans would not understand, Kennedy and Johnson, anxious to protect their right flank, consciously took account of those elements, even if they did not share all of their assumptions.” Brian VanDeMark, *Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent Into Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), pp. 121-122.

7. Liu Zhen, “China's foreign minister calls on Joe Biden to ‘restart dialogue’ with Beijing,” *South China Morning Post*, December 19, 2020, <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3114596/chinas-foreign-minister-calls-us-president-elect-joe-biden>>.

roads that need to be repaired.”⁸ Pompeo, Hua continued, was “a clown of the doomsday” and a “joke of the century” who “spread all kinds of lies and poisons,” calling on his successor, Anthony Blinken, to “rightly view China and Sino-American relations.”



Figure 4. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

Source: Klein Schmidt, “Wang Yi during the Munich Security Conference 2017,” February 17, 2021, *Wikipedia*, <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wang_Yi_MSC_2017.jpg>.

Equally for the United States, the incoming administration was hoping that by extending an olive branch to Beijing it could hope to meet China halfway and renew important collaboration on pressing problems such as global warming, global health, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Washington nevertheless adopted a clear-eyed approach to China by stating that it regarded China as a competitor with whom it would seek to collaborate when doing so served the U.S. national interest.

8. “China calls for ‘better angels’ to prevail in reset with US,” *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2021, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/21/china-calls-for-better-angels-to-prevail-in-reset-with-us>>.

“We will take on directly the challenges posed [to] our prosperity, security and democratic values by our most serious competitor, China,” Biden said in a speech during his first visit to the Department of State in February. “We will confront China’s economic abuses, counter its aggressive course of action to push back China’s attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance,” he said. “But we’re ready to work with Beijing, when it’s in America’s interest to do so.”⁹

Early on in the Biden administration, it became clear that a “reset” would be far more difficult to achieve than the more optimistically inclined had believed. Rather than “rightly view China and Sino-American relations”—which in real terms signifies ceasing all criticism of China on human rights and territorial issues—Blinken made no secret that his overall view had much in common with his predecessor. In a telephone conversation with top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi in February, Blinken, who has repeatedly described China as the U.S.’ “most serious competitor,” said the United States would continue to stand up for human rights and democratic values in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, adding that the Biden administration would continue to confront China’s “attack on human rights, intellectual property and global governance.”¹⁰ In the same telephone conversation, Yang, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, said that China and the United States should respect each other’s “core interests” and that the United States should to stop meddling in China’s “internal affairs,” including in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan—“the most important and sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations [which] affects China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹¹

9. “Biden says U.S. ready to work with China when it is in America’s interest,” *Reuters*, February 5, 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-biden-idUSKBN2A42RM>>.

10. “Blinken presses China on Xinjiang, Hong Kong in call with Beijing’s top diplomat,” *Reuters*, February 6, 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-idUSKBN2A604Y>>.

11. Wang Qi, “China’s top diplomat urges US to correct mistakes during ‘frank and tough’ phone call with Blinken,” *Global Times*, February 6, 2021, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215106.shtml>>.



Figure 5. Blinken with Yang Jiechi

Source: 〈楊潔篪會見美國常務副國務卿布林肯〉, *Xinhua Finance Agency*, October 8, 2015, <<http://tc.xfafinance.com/html/Policy/2015/75809.shtml>>.

It soon became evident that the two sides would have difficulty finding common ground or separating “critical standalone issues,” like climate change, from ideological competition between the two sides. John Kerry, Biden’s climate envoy, has already dispelled the notion that Washington would trade Chinese collaboration on climate change for U.S. abandonment of the protection of human rights. Confronting Beijing’s human rights and trade abuses, he has said, “will never be traded” for climate cooperation.¹² In turn, foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said that although “China is ready to cooperate with the United States and the international community

¹² Zachary Basu, “John Kerry: U.S.-China climate cooperation is a ‘critical standalone issue,’” *Axios*, January 27, 2021, <<https://www.axios.com/john-kerry-china-climate-9c2f3a13-9c6f-46ef-a63e-26a8962059af.html>>.

on climate change,” cooperation in specific areas between the United States and China “is closely linked with bilateral relations as a whole. China has emphasized time and again that no one should imagine they can ask China to understand and support them in bilateral and global matters when they blatantly interfere in China’s domestic affairs and undermine China’s interests.”¹³ Beijing’s transactional nature and approach to collaboration on Washington’s “critical standalone issues” therefore represents a major impediment to an early “reset” in relations.

President Biden’s first telephone conversation with Xi Jinping in early February also made it clear that Beijing’s hopes of a U.S. drawdown on human rights and other matters were unfounded, based as they were on a misreading of trends and attitudes in the United States. A readout of the conversation between the two leaders states that “President Biden affirmed his priorities of protecting the American people’s security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific. President Biden underscored his fundamental concerns about Beijing’s coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan.”¹⁴ According to sources who were privy to the ice-breaking telephone call, the Chinese side appears to have been taken aback by Biden’s bluntness and insistence on matters under dispute.

13. John Feng, “China Uses Climate Change To Threaten Joe Biden Administration,” *Newsweek*, February 2, 2021, <<https://www.newsweek.com/china-uses-climate-change-threaten-joe-biden-administration-1566056>>.

14. “Readout of President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of China,” February 10, 2021, *White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/10/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-china/>>.



Figure 6. CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping

Source: 王曄, 〈第一觀察：讀懂五中全會，這是一個「導航密碼」〉, *Xinhuanet*, November 10, 2020, <http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-11/10/c_1126718542.htm>.

The Biden administration has also demonstrated that its words will be backed by action by continuing military patrols in contested areas of the South China Sea and around Taiwan. The continuation of a policy long associated with the Trump administration was largely in response to greater assertiveness by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which continued unabated in the lead-up to and immediately following Biden's inauguration. Unreduced activity by the Chinese military during the period of transition in the United States also demonstrated an inability on the part of the CCP to reduce tensions so as to secure concessions by the incoming administration. Here again, this revealed a misreading of U.S. bipartisan intentions and perhaps expectations of American weakness and disengagement under the Biden administration, possibly stemming from the COVID-19 situation and constitutional crisis caused by former president Trump's challenging the validity of the November elections. Consequently, while the Biden administration arguably entered office with a realistic view of Sino-American relations—one of much continuity with the policies already put in place by the Trump administration—Xi and the CCP seem to have miscalculated. Whether it acts out of frustration by doubling down or, aware of the potential backlash,

by adjusting its behavior so as to incentivize the United States to be more accommodating, remains to be seen. Either way, China's response will have an immediate and direct impact on Taiwan and its engagement with the United States and regional partners.

III. Early Signals of U.S. Intentions toward Taiwan

The incoming administration has so far been consistent in its position on Taiwan. Prior to and following Inauguration, senior U.S. officials have emphasized its desire to ensure that Taiwan has the means to defend itself against aggression and that it can play a meaningful role within the international community. In January, Blinken said the Biden administration would uphold its commitment to ensure that Taiwan has the ability to defend itself, adding that it would be a “grievous mistake” for China to use force against the island-nation. Three days after Inauguration and in response to growing military pressure by China against Taiwan with a substantial number of PLA Air Force and PLA Navy intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ, the Department of State in a communiqué stated that United States' “commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid and contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and within the region.”¹⁵ Following remarks by Beijing in late January that “Taiwanese independence means war,” John Kirby, the Pentagon's press secretary, stated that “We find that comment unfortunate and certainly not commensurate with our intentions to meet our obligations under the *Taiwan Relations Act* and to continue

15. “PRC Military Pressure Against Taiwan Threatens Regional Peace and Stability,” January 23, 2021, *U.S. Department of State*, <<https://www.state.gov/prc-military-pressure-against-taiwan-threatens-regional-peace-and-stability/>>; The full statement reads: “The United States notes with concern the pattern of ongoing PRC attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan. We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan's democratically elected representatives.

We will stand with friends and allies to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values in the Indo-Pacific region — and that includes deepening our ties with democratic Taiwan. The United States will continue to support a peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues, consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people on Taiwan. The United States maintains its longstanding commitments as outlined in the Three Communiqués, the *Taiwan Relations Act*, and the Six Assurances. We will continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability. Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid and contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and within the region.”

to, as Secretary Blinken at the State Department said yesterday, look for ways where we can cooperate with China, but we have obligations that we intend to meet.”¹⁶ In a sign of continued support for Taiwan in Congress, in mid-February lawmakers reintroduced the *Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act*, which calls for increased security cooperation between the U.S. and Taiwan and authorizes the U.S. president to use military force to defend Taiwan against an attack by China.¹⁷



Figure 7. A ROCAF F-16 Shadows a Chinese Bomber Near Taiwan

Source: Military News Agency, ROC, “A ROC Airforce F-16 fighter jet shadows a PLA Airforce Bomber that had approached the island of Taiwan,” February 10, 2020, *Wiki Commons*, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:An_ROC_Airforce_F-16_fighter_jet_shadows_a_PLA_Airforce_Bomber_that_had_approached_the_island_of_Taiwan.webp>.

16. Robert Delaney, “Pentagon spokesman dismisses China’s warning on Taiwan as ‘unfortunate,’” *South China Morning Post*, January 29, 2021, <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3119695/pentagon-spokesman-dismisses-chinas-warning-taiwan-unfortunate>>.

17. Chiang Chin-yeh & Chung Yu-chen, “U.S. congressmen reintroduce bill to protect Taiwan from China attack,” *Focus Taiwan*, February 19, 2021, <<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202102190005>>.

Blinken has also stated that he would like to see Taiwan play a more robust role around the world. For international organizations that do not require the status of a country, he said, Taiwan should become a member, while in others where official statehood is a requirement, “there are others ways that [Taiwan] can participate.” Blinken also said he was in favor of greater engagement with Taiwan and referred to a move by his predecessor, Mike Pompeo, to relax restrictions on official dealings with Taipei. “I want to see that process through to conclusion if it hasn’t been completed, to make sure that we’re acting pursuant to the mandate in the [Taiwan Assurance] act that looks at creating more space for contacts.”¹⁸



Figure 8. Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Source: Gage Skidmore, “Congressman Mike Pompeo speaking at the 2012 CPAC in Washington, D.C.,” February 10, 2012, *Wikimedia Commons*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mike_Pompeo_\(6874339623\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mike_Pompeo_(6874339623).jpg)>.

¹⁸ David Brunnstrom & Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. secretary of state nominee Blinken sees strong foundation for bipartisan China policy,” *Reuters*, January 20, 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-state-china-idUSKBN29O2GB>>; See also Stacy Hsu & Joseph Yeh, “Biden to make sure Taiwan can defend itself: Blinken,” *Focus Taiwan*, January 20, 2021, <<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202101200006>>.

While the Biden administration is unlikely to depart from the United States’ “one China” policy, it is unlikely to rescind Pompeo’s decision, made in the final days of the Trump administration, to scrap a decades-long regime of self-imposed restrictions on official contact between American officials and their Taiwanese counterparts (the so-called “Taiwan guidelines”). As such, there is reason to expect that Washington will continue to push the boundaries of what is “permissible” in U.S.-Taiwan relations—including visits by senior U.S. officials to Taiwan—and to withstand whatever retribution Beijing throws at it in response. There is also a very high likelihood that initiatives such as the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) and other bi/multilateral initiatives involving Taiwan in democracy promotion, good governance, religious freedom, information literacy and other “soft” areas necessary to combating authoritarian influence will continue, especially as many nongovernmental organizations—the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) among them—establish regional offices in Taipei after being forced to leave China and Hong Kong due to constant harassment by the authorities.



Figure 9. 71st U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken

Source: Ron Przysucha, “Welcoming the 71st Secretary of State Antony Blinken,” January 27, 2021, *U.S. Department of State*, <<https://www.state.gov/dipnote-u-s-department-of-state-official-blog/welcoming-the-71st-secretary-of-state-antony-blinken/>>.

The growing importance of Taiwan as a leading developer and manufacturer of highly advanced semiconductors and role amid efforts to secure a resilient supply chain alternative to China will also create additional incentives for U.S. engagement with, and security guarantees to, Taiwan. Ensuring Taiwan's presence within the democratic club could also help prevent the transfer of advanced IC technology to Chinese firms and its inevitable adoption by the Chinese military.

IV. Alliances and Challenges

In an article in the March/April 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, then-presidential aspirant Biden wrote:

During my first year in office, the United States will organize and host a global Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world. It will bring together the world's democracies to strengthen our democratic institutions, honestly confront nations that are backsliding, and forge a common agenda. Building on the successful model instituted during the Obama-Biden administration with the Nuclear Security Summit, the United States will prioritize results by galvanizing significant new country commitments in three areas: fighting corruption, defending against authoritarianism, and advancing human rights in their own nations and abroad.¹⁹

Biden has made it clear that he intends to repair and reinvigorate the alliance system to counter the authoritarian challenge posed by countries like China and Russia. From the Trans-Atlantic Alliance with European nations to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”)²⁰ or the “Economic Prosperity Network” in the Indo-Pacific, the new administration, with Blinken in the lead, has signaled a new commitment which, if implemented, could create promising opportunities for Taiwan—provided that it is

19. Joe Biden, “Why America Must Lead Again Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” March/April 2020, *Foreign Affairs*, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>>.

20. Masaya Kato & Ken Moriyasu, “Quad vows to work with ASEAN and Europe in first Biden-era meeting,” *Nikkei Asia*, February 19, 2021, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/Quad-vows-to-work-with-ASEAN-and-Europe-in-first-Biden-era-meeting>>.

allowed to participate. Taiwan's inclusion into such fora will necessitate U.S. leadership; without it, it is unlikely that other, smaller democracies will risk Chinese retribution over their engagement with the Asian democracy.

While laudable and without doubt necessary, such goals remain aspirational for the time being. Over the years, several efforts were made to create regional groupings, only for such efforts to fail over disputes among sovereign states and a divide-and-conquer strategy by Beijing. The Indo-Pacific is a particularly difficult terrain for the creation of a coherent and durable grouping, due to different systems of governance (many states are undemocratic), the immense geographical territory, as well as proximity to China and high reliance on its economy. Already, two key partners of the United States in the region, Japan and South Korea, have been at odds over history, bringing their relations to a new low and undermining efforts to create a united front against China; differences between Washington and Tokyo over how to respond to the military coup in Myanmar have also resulted in tensions early in the Biden administration, with Japan fearing that too harsh a response could push the military junta in Myanmar closer to China.

It will be years, therefore, before true alliances can be consolidated and thereby present a credible counter to Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. For the foreseeable future, strategies will be *ad hoc* and involve ever-shifting "membership." Consequently, while Taiwan will continue to seek engagement at the multilateral level, its principal ally and security guarantor will remain the United States. So far, the Biden administration has made it clear that its commitment to Taiwan is as solid as it was under the Trump administration.