

Taiwan and the Second Trump Administration

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Abstract

The 2024 election highlights the success of Donald Trump's perseverance and campaign strategy, with significant implications for U.S. foreign policy. His presidency could influence the timeline for ending the war in Ukraine and the management of Xi Jinping's actions in the Taiwan Strait. Trump's election is likely to shape the future of U.S.-China relations and impact the economic power dynamic between the two countries, potentially exacerbated by tariffs. Taiwan's leadership in semiconductors faces new challenges, while its long-term defense budget remains insufficient. Under increasing military threats from China and in response to Trump's likely demands, Taiwan will need to prioritize defense improvements and preparations. The extent of Trump's support for Taiwan's defense will be closely watched. As a critical asset to the U.S., China, and the world, Taiwan holds a pivotal role in technology and cannot afford to be neglected. The potential deterioration of U.S.-China economic relations and stagnation in China's annual economic growth may compel Xi to prioritize relations with the U.S. over a focus on Taiwan. Observing whether this shift could alter Xi's agenda for a possible Taiwan campaign will be important. Nonetheless, Taiwan remains under threat from a potential Chinese invasion or blockade in the future.

Keywords: 2024 U.S. Election, Second Trump Administration, Taiwan's Security, Cross-Strait Relations, Sino-American Competition

I. Introduction

The 2024 U.S. election is a critical event not only for the United States but also for the international community.¹ As the U.S. faces two ongoing conflicts — one in

1. CSIS, "The Global Impact of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election," September 26, 2024, CSIS, <<https://features.csis.org/2024-us-election-global-impact/>>.

Ukraine and another in the Middle East — alongside China’s looming military threat to Taiwan, some observers have suggested that the U.S. is poised to elect a “wartime president.”² While most countries have refrained from publicly endorsing specific U.S. presidential candidates, certain preferences are becoming evident. Israel, Russia, North Korea, and Hungary have expressed favorable views of Donald Trump, while China, Iran, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and several other countries seemed to be hoping for the election of Kamala Harris to continue President Biden’s foreign policy. Given Trump’s distinctive leadership style and personality, global attention will be focused on his policies, particularly his approach to international relations, and, crucially, the future of the war in Ukraine. Trump’s reelection campaign has once again sparked intense debate and media attention, with headlines such as “Donald Trump Returns to Power, Ushering in New Era of Uncertainty” (*The New York Times*).³ This paper begins by examining Taiwan’s perspective on the 2024 U.S. election, then reviews the dynamics between Taiwan, China, and the U.S. during Trump’s first administration, and concludes with an exploration of the potential future trajectory of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations in a second Trump term.

II. What Taiwan Learned from the 2024 U.S. Elections

1. Full of Surprises, but the Solid Foundation of Democracy Remains

In the Republican primaries of January to March 2024, former President Donald Trump triumphed over Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, and after Super Tuesday in early March, Nikki Haley, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, dropped out of the race. By March 12, both Trump and President Joe Biden had secured more than half of the delegate votes from their respective parties, effectively setting up

2. Frederick Kempe, “The US is electing a wartime president,” October 19, 2024, *Atlantic Council*, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/the-us-is-electing-a-wartime-president/>>.

3. “America Makes a Perilous Choice,” November 6, 2024, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/06/opinion/trump-wins.html>>; Shane Goldmacher & Lisa Lerer, “Donald Trump Returns to Power, Ushering in New Era of Uncertainty,” November 6, 2024, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/06/us/politics/trump-wins-presidency.html>>.



Figure 1. 2024 U.S. Elections

Source: Depositphotos.

a head-to-head contest for the presidency. However, Biden's performance in the June 27 presidential debate was widely seen as disastrous, and mounting pressure from congressional members led him to withdraw from the race on July 21. This decision paved the way for Vice President Kamala Harris to take over as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. Harris was nominated without challenge at the Democratic National Convention in August 2024. Biden's late withdrawal — about three weeks after initially considering it — meant that Harris entered the race later than most candidates and became an exceptional nominee who did not face the traditional primary battle.

On July 13, 2024, Donald Trump survived an assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania, which led to the resignation of U.S. Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle a week later. Trump won the presidential debate against Biden but lost to Harris in a debate in September 2024. A few days after that, on September 15, Trump received another assassination threat in Florida. This sequence of events brought to mind the 2004 shooting incident in Taiwan, where Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian and his vice-presidential running mate Annette Lu were both shot while traveling in the same jeep during a rally in Tainan. Similarly, in 2015, the Kuomintang (KMT) presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu

was replaced by Eric Chu due to political and public pressure. These incidents show that while a presidential campaign process can be disrupted by unforeseen events, the uncertainties that arise in democratic elections are shared by both Taiwan and the United States. Ahead of the election, both Republicans and Democrats exchanged harsh remarks about Puerto Rico, an episode that some have described as an “October Surprise.” The controversy over political correctness, especially concerning sensitive ethnic issues, served as a cautionary lesson for Taiwan’s politicians. The U.S. election highlighted how a single slip of the tongue at a critical moment in a campaign could cost thousands of votes, a lesson that Taiwanese politicians have no doubt taken to heart.

2. Issues that Matter to American Voters

In June 2024, voters in key swing states generally believed that Trump would handle major issues such as the economy and immigration better than Biden. The issues that most concerned American voters were economic issues (50%), followed by illegal immigration (37%), political extremism or polarization (25%), and abortion (19%).⁴ According to a *CNN* exit poll conducted just before the election, the top issues for Trump supporters were the economy (51%), immigration (20%), democracy (12%), abortion (6%), and foreign policy (4%). For Harris supporters, the most important issues were democracy (56%), abortion (21%), the economy (13%), foreign policy (3%), and immigration (2%). These differences reflect the contrasting priorities of the two camps: many Harris supporters are motivated by opposition to Trump’s perceived anti-democratic actions and rhetoric. Taiwan also observed that the 2024 U.S. election signified a shift toward more conservative and right-leaning politics in the U.S. rural areas are expected to become more supportive of the Republican Party, while the progressivism traditionally associated with the Democratic Party faces significant setbacks. Taiwan also experiences regional political divisions between the northern and southern parts of the country, along with ethnic-based political preferences. These regional and ethnic differences influence the country’s varying attitudes toward China.

4. Clifford Young & Bernard Mendez, “How the Swing States Feel about the 2024 Election,” June 21, 2024, *IPSOS*, <<https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/how-swing-states-feel-about-2024-election>>.

3. Trump Eliminates Legal Obstacles, Demonstrating His Determination to Fight

When Trump entered the 2024 campaign, he faced four criminal cases — two at the federal level and two at the state level. Known for his tenacity in legal battles, Trump’s primary strategy has been to delay proceedings as long as possible, ideally until after the election. Trump is deliberately working through each step of the judicial system, hoping to secure a favorable ruling, especially from the Supreme Court. A notable example of this occurred when the Supreme Court rejected a Colorado ruling that sought to disqualify Trump from running in the state just before “Super Tuesday” on March 5, 2024. In late May 2024, Trump was found guilty in the hush money case, with sentencing initially set to occur just before the Republican National Convention in July. However, this was postponed until after the election. On July 1, the U.S.



Figure 2. Donald Trump’s 3rd Day Appearance for Court Fraud Trial in New York, October 4, 2023

Source: Depositphotos.

Supreme Court ruled that Trump, as a former president, enjoys a certain degree of immunity and does not need to attend trial for his involvement in the Capitol Hill riots, which were aimed at overturning the results of the 2020 election. The Court held that while the president has partial immunity from criminal charges related to the performance of official duties, it does not extend to private conduct.⁵ Since Trump was reelected, it is believed that the legal challenges against him could be dismissed, effectively allowing him to evade accountability for the various charges. This strategy has been described as “audacious and stunningly successful,” enabling him to delay or even avoid legal consequences for the time being.⁶

4. The Accuracy of American Polls and Forecasts Varies

The accuracy of American political polls and forecasts has proven to be inconsistent. Nate Silver, founder of the 538 website, and betting odds data have been more reliable in predicting outcomes compared to some other sources. For instance, Allan Lichtman, a renowned historian at American University, and the Crystal Ball website, fell short in their predictions. According to Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia, the final prediction on November 4 had Trump winning 262 electoral votes, only to lose to Harris, who was predicted to secure 276. In reality, the outcome was Trump’s 312 electoral votes versus Harris’s 226, indicating a significant discrepancy between predictions and results. In the seven major swing states, where pre-election polls had shown narrow margins, Trump emerged victorious in all, winning a majority of the popular vote in each. Voters who supported Trump were less vocal about their intentions compared to previous cycles, creating a gap of about 2% between the polls and the actual vote count. This highlights an enduring truth in both U.S. and Taiwanese elections: candidates can never be sure of the final outcome until the ballots are counted. Theoretical predictions often miss the mark, and even the betting market, while informative, cannot always predict electoral results with certainty. During the 2024 U.S. election, Trump and his running mate, J.D. Vance,

5. German Lopez, “Presidential Immunity,” July 2, 2024, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/02/briefing/presidential-immunity-supreme-court-trump-biden.html>>.

6. Devlin Barrett, Alan Feuer, & Charlie Savage, “Legal Strategy: Delay, Deflect, Win the Office,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2024, A1.

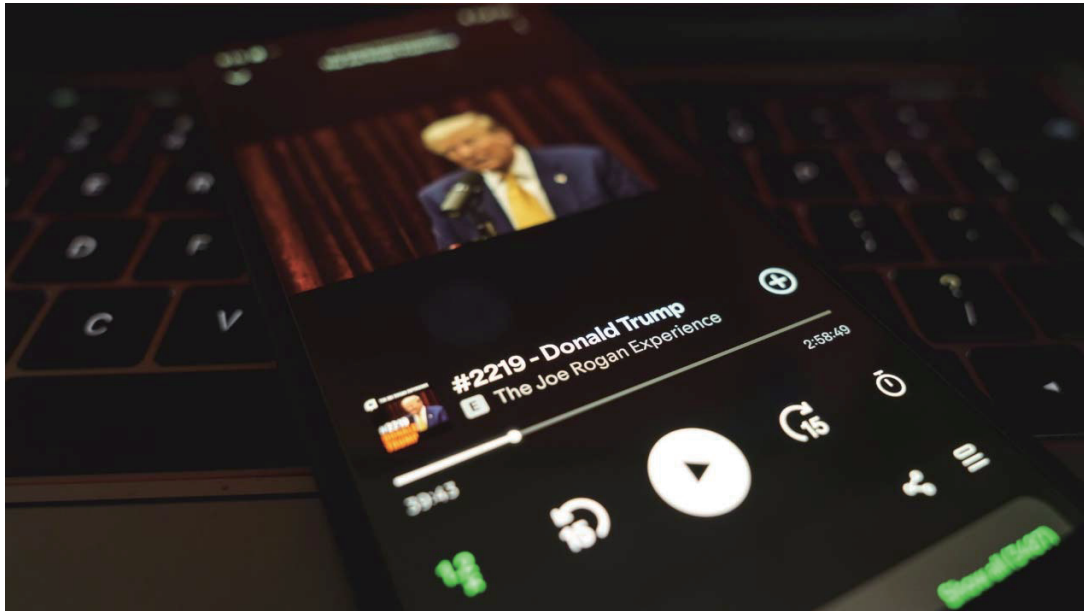


Figure 3. Popular Podcast the Joe Rogan Experience with Donald Trump, October 26, 2024

Source: Depositphotos.

made active appearances on podcasts, which are now considered a more effective way to reach young voters than traditional media outlets such as newspapers or mainstream television. This shift in communication strategies has also been seen in Taiwan's presidential campaign, reflecting broader changes in how democratic processes are being shaped by modern media and technology.

III. Taiwan and China During the First Trump Administration (2017-2021)

The first Trump administration saw significant shifts in U.S.-China-Taiwan relations. Initially, Trump's approach involved leveraging Taiwan-related issues, such as taking a phone call from Tsai Ing-wen and using the "One China" policy as a bargaining chip to influence China. However, his focus soon shifted toward broader U.S.-China economic and trade issues. Relations soured as disputes over the origins of COVID-19 arose, leading to a stronger U.S.-Taiwan partnership. In response, Beijing imposed sanctions on 28 senior Trump administration officials.

During this period, China found managing Sino-U.S. relations challenging, particularly due to Trump's national security team. While Trump himself maintained a relatively smooth rapport with Xi, his administration took assertive actions such as closing China's consulate in Houston and shutting down several Confucius Institutes. What surprised Beijing most was Trump's ability to unify a wide range of U.S. think tanks around national security concerns regarding China's domestic and foreign policies, thereby solidifying a tougher U.S. stance on China.

President Trump's perception of the China threat primarily centered on economic and trade issues, viewing the key to countering China as curbing its unfair trade practices. Tactically, he sought to create an impression of being close to Xi, presenting himself as a businessman with a "soft touch," believing that this friendly rapport would help advance U.S.-China relations. Upon taking office, the Trump administration established four ministerial-level dialogue mechanisms: the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue, the Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, the Law Enforcement and Cybersecurity Dialogue, and the Social and People-to-People Dialogue. However,



Figure 4. Conflict between the U.S. and China, Donald Trump and Xi Jinping

Source: Depositphotos.

aside from the Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, the other three mechanisms were only convened once or twice. The administration's core focus lay in the 13 rounds of trade negotiations with Beijing, culminating in the Phase One U.S.-China trade agreement in January 2020. While Trump frequently changed national security leadership, he remained steadfast in supporting the trade negotiation team, including Peter Navarro (Director of the White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy), Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross.

In March 2018, President Trump appointed two “hawks” known for their tough stance on China and support for Taiwan: CIA Director Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State, and John Bolton as National Security Advisor. Alongside Vice President Mike Pence, this new team reframed China as a “revisionist power,” “irreconcilable opponent,” and “strategic competitor.” Economically, the Trump administration highlighted China's alleged theft of U.S. intellectual property, technology, and even military blueprints, as well as its pressure on U.S. companies to surrender trade secrets in exchange for market access in China. Additionally, they pointed to China's efforts to exert undue influence through academia, media, and government officials and to interfere with American democratic processes. China's Belt and Road Initiative was viewed as a form of “debt diplomacy,” and Beijing's insistence that U.S. and multinational companies downgrade Taiwan's status was seen as undermining stability in the Taiwan Strait. Militarily, China was increasingly viewed as eroding the U.S. military's advantages across land, sea, air, and space, with the goal of driving the United States out of the Western Pacific and limiting its ability to assist its allies. China's deployment of advanced anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles on islands and reefs in the South China Sea was seen as a direct challenge to the freedom of navigation for U.S. military aircraft and warships.

In May 2020, the White House released *The United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China*, highlighting the Trump administration's adoption of “principled realism” in its China policy. This approach emphasized U.S. sovereignty and was grounded in principles such as freedom and openness, the rule of law, justice, and reciprocity. It stated that U.S. engagement with China should be selective and

outcome-driven, focusing on protecting the American people, homeland, and way of life, promoting economic prosperity, maintaining peace through strength, and expanding U.S. influence abroad. Following Trump's defeat in the November 2020 election, the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff published a report titled *The Elements of the China Challenge*, which set a definitive tone regarding the Chinese Communist Party. This report outlined key concerns about China's global ambitions and framed the CCP as a central challenge to U.S. interests, values, and global influence.⁷

To address the challenge posed by China, *The Elements of the China Challenge* report proposed 10 tasks to safeguard U.S. freedom and interests. Key

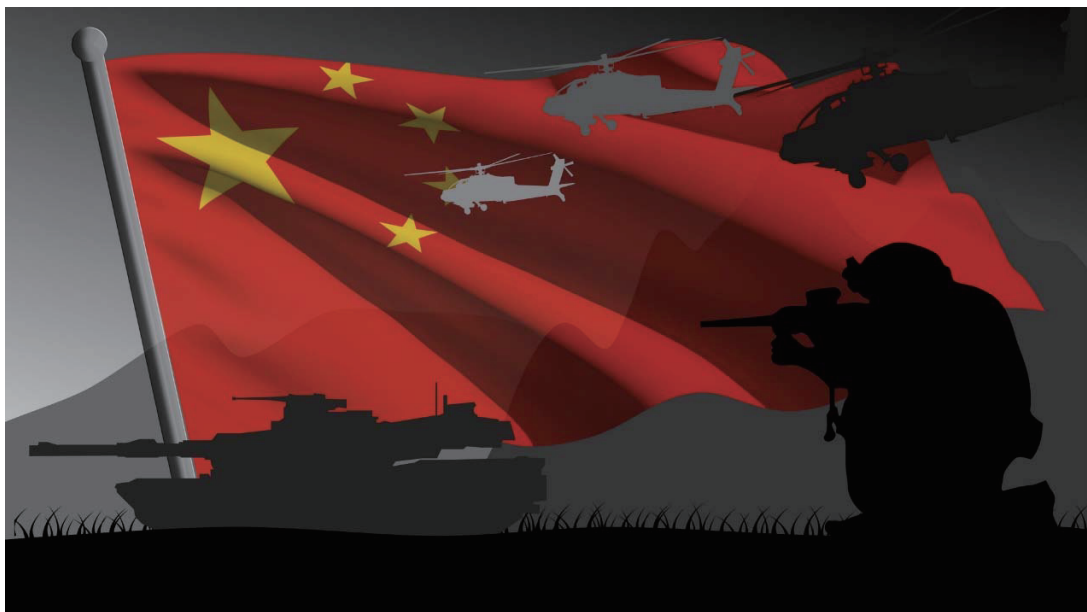


Figure 5. CCP as a Central Challenge to U.S. Interests, Values, and Global Influence

Source: Depositphotos.

7. The Policy Planning Staff, Office of the Secretary of State, "The Elements of the China Challenge," November 2020, p. 1, *U.S. Department of State*, <<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>>.

recommendations included maintaining the world's strongest, most adaptable, and technologically advanced military; bolstering alliances and partnerships through security cooperation grounded in shared interests and responsibilities; and reinforcing a free, open, and rules-based international order. Additionally, the report called for a reassessment of the U.S. alliance system and international organizations, promoting U.S. interests proactively, and deterring or constraining China when necessary.

Without firmly pro-Taiwan cabinet secretaries, the COVID-19 pandemic, China's assertive rise, and the conclusion of the U.S.-China Phase One trade agreement, the Trump administration's support for Taiwan might have been more restrained. Trump initially tried to leverage the "One China" policy as a bargaining chip to secure trade concessions from Xi, but this attempt was unsuccessful. Although Trump refrained from endorsing Beijing's "One China" principle, he did pledge to honor the "One China" policy, while prioritizing trade negotiations over Taiwan-related issues. President Trump and his economic team, including U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, focused primarily on achieving a trade deal with China. As a result, Lighthizer did not initiate trade talks with Taiwan despite congressional resolutions. This led Secretary of State Pompeo to designate Under Secretary of State Keith Krach to launch the U.S.-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD) with Taipei.

When Trump approved the sale of 66 F-16V fighter jets to Taiwan in August 2019, he delayed the transaction until the U.S.-China trade negotiations concluded, instructing National Security Advisor John Bolton to handle the sale discreetly.⁸ Analysis of arms sales to Taiwan during Trump's four-year term reveals that most sales were concentrated in the third and fourth years, comprising approximately 92% of the total US\$18.3 billion in approved sales. In comparison, Biden sold approximately US\$7.7 billion in four years.

8. John Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 314.

President Trump's relationship with Xi deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Chinese fighter jets increased the frequency of their intrusions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ); during that time, the relationship between the United States and Taiwan improved significantly. President Trump signed a number of Taiwan-related laws during his first presidency. The legal basis for the U.S. government to implement its Taiwan policy is no longer only the *Taiwan Relations Act*. With the initiatives of the U.S. Congress, the *Taiwan Travel Act* and *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act* have provided the legal foundation to increase the number of exchanges between senior U.S. and Taiwanese officials and assist Taiwan in ensuring its diplomatic relations with allies and Taiwan's participation in international organizations. The first Trump administration sent a cabinet member, Secretary of Health Alex Azar, to visit Taiwan



Figure 6. U.S. Secretary of Health Alex Azar Visited Taiwan in August 2020

Source: Office of the President, Taiwan (ROC), "President Tsai meets US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar," August 10, 2020, *Office of the President, Taiwan (ROC)*, <<https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6026>>.

in August 2020, during which he allocated budgets to host U.S.-Taiwan Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) activities to help Taiwan enhance its international profile in human security arenas.

IV. Possible U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations Under a Second Trump Administration

There has been much debate about whether President Trump is Beijing's preferred U.S. leader, but Chinese officials generally expressed a preference for Vice President Harris to be elected in 2024. Prior to the election, Chinese officials consistently stated that they would not interfere in the internal affairs of the United States, although scholars and experts generally expected Harris to win. Among them, Jia Qingguo from Peking University and Wu Xinbo from Fudan University expressed concerns about greater instability in U.S.-China relations should Trump return to office.⁹ When President Trump left office in January 2021, China imposed sanctions on 28 individuals from his administration including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, White House Trade Advisor Peter Navarro, former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft, and White House strategist Steve Bannon. Xi has sent a cautious congratulatory message to Trump on his reelection, awaiting a more definitive result. It is likely that U.S.-China-Taiwan relations will remain a focal point, with continued tensions over trade, Taiwan's status, and China's broader regional ambitions.

For Xi, Sino-U.S. relations must be managed by two strong leaders working together to guide their countries forward. The top priority for China remains its domestic economy, and any factors that hinder or damage economic growth need to be addressed. One of China's biggest challenges has been President Trump's

9. Yew Lun Tian, "China does not prefer Donald Trump, says leading Chinese scholar on White House race," October 17, 2024, *The Straits Times*, <<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/china-does-not-prefer-donald-trump-says-leading-chinese-scholar-on-white-house-race>>; Jennifer Jett, Janis Mackey Frayer, & Peter Guo, "Who does China's president want to win the U.S. election?" October 22, 2024, *NBC News*, <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-us-election-trump-harris-xi-jinping-rcna173770>>.

imposition of tariffs and the cancellation of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status. Under the Phase 1 trade agreement, China made significant concessions to the U.S., including the purchase of U.S. agricultural products, but the agreement is widely viewed as a failure. According to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, the deal's most undeniable aspect was its inability to meet expectations, with China purchasing none of the additional US\$200 billion in U.S. exports it had committed to under the agreement.¹⁰

Looking ahead, China has faced a difficult challenge with the Biden administration regarding the future of TikTok. As the Biden administration approaches the end of its mandate, the app has yet to complete the required transfer of ownership to a U.S. company, as stipulated by the U.S. government. This issue remains unresolved, and China hopes to delay it until the Trump administration takes office, where they may expect a different approach to the TikTok dispute.



Figure 7. U.S.-China Trade Conflict

Source: Depositphotos.

10. Chad P. Bown, "China bought none of the extra \$200 billion of US exports in Trump's trade deal," July 19, 2022, *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, <<https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/documents/bown-china-us-exports-trade-deal-2022-02.pdf>>.

In the 2024 Republican Party platform, Trump committed to implementing baseline tariffs on foreign-made goods and addressing unfair trade practices. He also pledged to “revoke China’s MFN status, phase out imports of essential goods, and prevent China from purchasing American real estate and industries.” If the U.S. were to revoke China’s Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status, it would lead to a decline in GDP for both the U.S. and China, with China experiencing a more significant contraction. It is estimated that China’s GDP would decline by 0.6% in 2025.¹¹ Xi’s failure to honor commitments, such as purchasing more U.S. goods and services, places Beijing in a difficult position as Trump prepares to re-enter the White House. To manage this, Beijing will need to formulate a strategy to both appease and contain Trump.

The implementation of higher tariffs on foreign goods, particularly from China, is inevitable under Trump, leading to potential conflicts with the European Union and China over trade barriers. It is quite possible that Beijing will attempt to drive a wedge

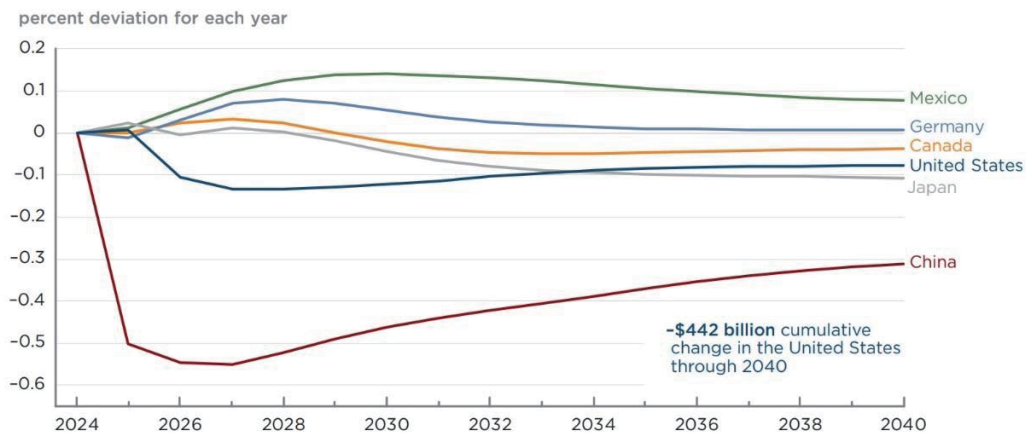


Figure 8. Projected GDP Growth Following Revocation of China’s Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status, 2025-40

Source: Megan Hogan, Warwick McKibbin, & Marcus Noland, “Economic implications of revoking China’s permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status,” p. 7.

11. Megan Hogan, Warwick McKibbin, & Marcus Noland, “Economic implications of revoking China’s permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status,” September 2024, *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, <<https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/2024-09/pb24-9.pdf>>.

between the U.S. and the European Union, thereby undercutting Trump's bargaining position. If successful, this could undermine Trump's ability to form a strong coalition against China, making it more difficult for the U.S. to impose punitive measures or achieve favorable trade deals with China. Given the complexity of issues between Beijing and Washington, the Taiwan issue could become a lower priority in bilateral relations, unless Xi explicitly uses it as leverage to negotiate broader terms with Trump on other aspects of Sino-U.S. relations.

Trump has repeatedly stated that he would impose tariffs on semiconductors from Taiwan. He opposes foreign companies, such as TSMC and Samsung, benefiting from subsidies under the *CHIPS Act* (Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors) introduced by the Biden administration. Trump has also accused Taiwan of "stealing the U.S. chip industry" — both technology and business — noting that Taiwan is a wealthy nation and that the Taiwanese people are highly skilled.¹² While implementing tariffs on products containing various types of chips would be a complex endeavor, his proposal to impose tariffs on Taiwanese and South Korean semiconductor production would inevitably raise costs across the entire chip supply chain. An alternative approach would be to encourage TSMC and Samsung to build additional semiconductor foundries in the U.S. to produce advanced 2-nanometer chips. Meanwhile, during an appearance on *The Tim Dillon Show* podcast on October 26, 2024, J. D. Vance stated that Ukraine is less strategically important than other regions, particularly Taiwan. Vance noted, "Taiwan makes so much of the computer chips, right? Which is such a driver of all economic growth, that if the Chinese took over Taiwan, it would be really bad for us."¹³

12. Wayne Chang, "Trump says Taiwan stole America's chip industry. But that's not true," July 24, 2024, *CNN*, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/23/tech/trump-taiwan-tsmc-chips-industry-hnk-intl/index.html>>; Seema Mody, "Trump accuses Taiwan of stealing U.S. chip industry. Here's what the election could bring," October 28, 2024, *CNBC*, <<https://www.cnbc.com/2024/10/28/trump-accuses-taiwan-of-stealing-us-chip-business-on-joe-rogan-podcast.html>>; Yifan Yu, "Trump win casts cloud over TSMC and Samsung U.S. chip plans," November 7, 2024, *Nikkei*, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/U.S.-elections-2024/Trump-win-casts-cloud-over-TSMC-and-Samsung-U.S.-chip-plans>>.

13. "JD Vance Tells Tim Dillon US Needs Weapons To Fight China, Not Russia," October 28, 2024, *Newsweek*, <<https://www.newsweek.com/jd-vance-tim-dillon-taiwan-priority-over-ukraine-1975851>>.

Rush Doshi, a former National Security Council official under President Biden, has warned that giving Trump free rein could result in the loss of a crucial decade for the United States (2020-2030), ultimately making it easier for Xi to achieve China's goal of national rejuvenation. Doshi highlighted several concerning tendencies: Trump's alienation of allies, his inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and his disregard for democratic norms. He also noted that Trump had previously undercut his own administration's efforts to counter Beijing by lifting controls on ZTE in exchange for Chinese purchases of U.S. agricultural and energy products — a move seen as politically motivated to boost his re-election bid in 2020.

Doshi describes Trump's stance on Taiwan as “a blueprint for calamity,” citing Trump's doubts about the U.S.'s ability to protect Taiwan due to its geographical distance. Doshi argues that this perception could signal a lack of U.S. resolve, potentially emboldening China to attempt a takeover, which “could spark a conflict that devastates the global economy.”¹⁴ What Doshi did not mention, however, is Trump's statement that, if Xi were to invade Taiwan, he would impose tariffs of 150%-200% and consider bombing Beijing. According to Trump, his “unpredictability” serves as a deterrent, suggesting that China would neither invade Taiwan nor risk provoking him.¹⁵

With Republicans in control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, it will be easier to pass legislation aimed at penalizing China for any military action against Taiwan. For instance, the *Taiwan Conflict Deterrence Act*, passed by the House of Representatives in September 2024, mandates that the Secretary of the Treasury disclose U.S. bank account information held by senior Chinese officials and their family members as a means of deterring China from attacking Taiwan through potential financial sanctions. There is ongoing discussion within the international security community about whether 2027 could mark a decisive year for China's

14. Rush Doshi, “What China's Leaders Grasp About Another Trump Term,” October 14, 2024, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/14/opinion/trump-china-election.html>>.

15. Kayla Epstein, “Trump says China respects him because Xi knows he is ‘crazy’,” October 20, 2024, *BBC*, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c39l89j10e1o>>.

military ambitions toward Taiwan. Addressing this potential challenge in the Taiwan Strait may become one of Trump's critical responsibilities if he is tasked with maintaining stability in the region.

Although China has not been a central issue in the 2024 U.S. election, discussions about it are consistently negative, focusing on topics such as export controls on chips, tariffs on Chinese goods, and responses to a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan. A late October 2024 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs shows that Americans' views on China have hit a record low. On a 0-100 "feeling thermometer," Americans rated China at 26, down from 32 in 2022. The poll also shows that a majority (55%) believe the United States should actively work to limit China's power, while 40% favor friendly cooperation. Americans' primary goals for U.S.-China relations are to avoid military conflict (69%) and to maintain the U.S.'

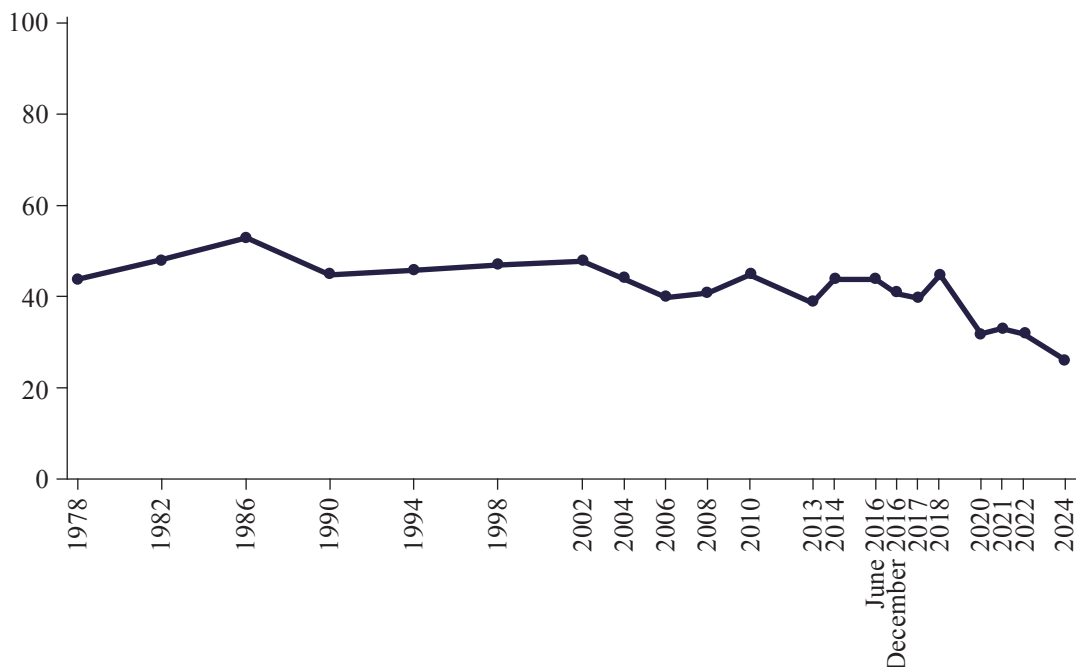


Figure 9. American Feeling Thermometer: China

Source: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "American Views of China Hit All-Time Low."

Note: Please rate your feelings toward China, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.

high-tech advantages (60%). Nearly half (49%) believe China holds greater influence in Asia than the U.S., 30% see them as equally influential, and 21% believe the U.S. is more influential. Additionally, 56% of Americans feel that U.S.-China trade weakens U.S. national security, while 39% believe it strengthens it.¹⁶

A July 2024 survey by the Pew Research Center shows that 81% of Americans hold an unfavorable view of China, with only 16% viewing it favorably.¹⁷ Under a second Trump administration, China — not Taiwan — would likely become the primary focus of U.S. security concerns. While China is expected to continue increasing its incursions into Taiwan’s air and maritime spaces, Beijing may think twice before escalating from gray-zone operations to an actual military blockade of Taiwan. Public opinion, which strongly influences foreign policy priorities, is something Trump cannot overlook if he aims to “make America great again.”

V. Conclusion

With Trump’s reelection, U.S. policy toward China is likely to shift significantly from the approach taken by the Biden administration. Vice President Harris is particularly concerned about Trump’s close relationships with authoritarian leaders, such as Xi and Russia’s Vladimir Putin, fearing that a second Trump term will embolden China’s repression and efforts to undermine democratic values and U.S. global leadership. Nevertheless, Trump is expected to concentrate on economic, trade, technology, and tariff conflicts with China. His cabinet will likely consist of loyal appointees, enabling quicker decision-making and reducing the chaos seen in his first term. Potential candidates for national security positions in a second Trump administration are notably vigilant regarding China and likely to advocate strong support for Taiwan. The possible downturn in U.S.-China economic relations,

16. Chicago Council on Global Affairs, “American Views of China Hit All-Time Low,” October 24, 2024, *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, <<https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/american-views-china-hit-all-time-low>>.

17. Laura Silver, Christine Huang, Laura Clancy, & Andrew Prozorovsky, “Views of China and Xi Jinping,” July 9, 2024, *Pew Research Center*, <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/07/09/views-of-china-and-xi-jinping/>>.

combined with stagnating growth in China, may push Xi to prioritize stabilizing relations with the U.S. over aggressive actions toward Taiwan. Nonetheless, any shift in Xi's strategy warrants close observation, as Taiwan could still face heightened risks of invasion or blockade in the future.

Chinese state media has asserted that Taiwan could face significant repercussions under a second Trump administration, speculating that Taiwan might shift from a "chess piece" to an "abandoned piece." However, given Trump's view of making the U.S. powerful again and with Taiwan regarded as a crucial strategic asset to the U.S., it is unlikely he would concede or withdraw from his approach. If Trump succeeds in bringing the war in Ukraine to a swift conclusion, this would allow the U.S. to concentrate more fully on countering China's growing threats in the Indo-Pacific. Such a shift could also help prevent further coordinated military actions by Russia, China, and North Korea. From this perspective, while Trump's approach introduces certain risks, ending the war in Ukraine could enable the U.S. to refocus on and strengthen its Indo-Pacific strategy.