



## Prospects & Perspectives



According to the 2024 Reagan National Defense Survey, 73% of respondents expressed support for recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation should China invade. Additionally, 58% of respondents supported an increase in U.S. military deployments in the Taiwan Strait region. Notably, support for Taiwan was bipartisan, with respondents from both the Republican and Democratic parties showing similar levels of agreement, regardless of political affiliation. Picture source: Depositphotos.

### **The Implications of the 'Reagan National Defense Survey' for the U.S., China, and Taiwan**

*By Kuo-Cheng Chang*



**T**he Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute released its 2024 Reagan National Defense Survey on December 5, 2024, which included findings on Taiwan-related issues. According to the survey, 73% of respondents expressed support for recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation should China invade, while 66% of Americans favored imposing economic sanctions on China under such circumstances. Additionally, 58% of respondents supported an increase in U.S. military deployments in the Taiwan Strait region. Notably, support for Taiwan was bipartisan, with respondents from both the Republican and Democratic parties showing similar levels of agreement, regardless of political affiliation.

Fox News further reported that the survey revealed a significant shift in American attitudes toward China. A striking 77% of Americans now view China as an adversary, a sharp increase from 55% in a 2018 survey. Conversely, only 15% now regard China as an ally, compared to 38% five years ago. Furthermore, over half (51%) of Americans currently identify China as the greatest threat facing the United States, a substantial rise from 21% in 2018 and 43% in last year's survey.

### **Implications for the United States**

For the American public, recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation is a natural stance. Historically, the United States has maintained direct engagement with Taiwan without requiring China's mediation, as outlined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. This act explicitly stipulates that "whenever the laws of the United States refer to or relate to foreign countries, nations, states, governments, or similar entities, such terms shall include Taiwan and shall apply to Taiwan." However, Taiwan has not formally declared independence from the Republic of China, and the world has yet to witness the establishment of a "Republic of Taiwan." There is no country with the name of Taiwan that can be recognized by the United States. Since 1979, the U.S. has recognized the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China, adhering to the "One China" policy and refraining from recognizing "two Chinas." As such, U.S. recognition of Taiwan as an independent state would require a fundamental shift in this longstanding policy. Unless Taiwan declares itself the "Republic of Taiwan," U.S. recognition would remain limited to the "Republic of China."



If China were to resort to military aggression against Taiwan, it could compel the United States to reconsider its “One China” policy. Such a scenario could lead to two potential outcomes: either deterring China’s invasion plans or prompting Beijing to intensify its military efforts to swiftly conquer Taiwan, rendering U.S. recognition of Taiwan moot. Additionally, domestic consensus within Taiwan is crucial, as several major political parties remain opposed to any overt moves to strengthen Taiwan's status as an independent nation.

### **Implications for the China: Economic Sanctions and Strategic Preparedness**

With regard to economic sanctions, a clear U.S. stance indicating that any disruption of peace in the Taiwan Strait would trigger economic penalties could contribute significantly to regional stability. However, China has already drawn lessons from Russia’s handling of Western economic sanctions during the Russia-Ukraine war. For instance, Russia accelerated de-dollarization, increased the proportion of gold in its foreign reserves, and promoted local currency settlements, such as trading in yuan and rubles with China.

China is actively advancing the internationalization of the yuan through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), thereby expanding its global use. Additionally, it is further developing its digital currency (e-CNY) to strengthen control over cross-border payments. Like Russia, China is diversifying its energy import sources, forging deeper ties with Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and bolstering its domestic energy reserves.

China is also pursuing a “dual circulation” strategy to enhance the resilience of its domestic market and supply chains, particularly in critical areas like semiconductors and high-end manufacturing. It is investing in domestic technological innovation to reduce reliance on foreign technologies and establishing sovereign financial payment systems, including cross-border trials of the digital yuan. These efforts underscore China's preparedness to withstand economic sanctions. For the U.S., implementing sanctions against China would require thorough preparation and strong public support, as such actions would inevitably impact the American economy given the extensive trade relationship between the two nations.



### **Implications for Taiwan**

For Taiwan, the steadfast support of the American public is an invaluable asset. However, Taiwan's readiness to collaborate with the United States in defense and its resolve to protect itself are decisive factors in determining the sustainability of U.S. support. Taiwan must demonstrate both the will and capability to defend its sovereignty. Historical precedents offer insights: during the Vietnam War, American public support for intervention was initially strong but eroded significantly over time. The United States must actively encourage Taiwan to strengthen its joint defense preparedness, fostering both the determination and capacity to protect its sovereignty. This strategy aligns most closely with U.S. strategic interests.

The U.S. should avoid maintaining strategic ambiguity regarding a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, as such ambiguity risks miscalculations by China about American resolve. Inconsistencies in U.S. policy toward China could also undermine its effectiveness. President Trump's reliance on tariffs as a means to pressure China demonstrated limited impact, as Chinese leader Xi Jinping governs without the constraints of public opinion or electoral accountability. Furthermore, China is not an economy solely dependent on the U.S. for survival. Should China perceive the United States as adopting an isolationist stance and unwilling to defend democratic freedoms, it would embolden Xi to "change the status quo." While American public opinion supports the defense of Taiwan, the success of such efforts hinges on the determination and leadership of U.S. policymakers to safeguard American interests and uphold its leadership in Asia.

(Dr. Chang is Professor, Center for General Education, Taipei Medical University.)

---

**Editor's Note:** The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or the position of the Prospect Foundation.



***Prospect Foundation** is an independent research institution dedicated to the study of cross-Strait relations and international issues. The Foundation maintains active exchanges and communications with many think tanks of the world.*

**Prospect Foundation**

No.1, Lane 60, Sec. 3, Tingzhou Rd., Zhongzheng District  
Taipei City, 10087, Republic of China (Taiwan)

Tel: 886-2-23654366 Fax: 886-2-23679193

<http://www.pf.org.tw>

