

Beyond the Midterms: Why American Strategy Outlasts American Elections

Yao-Yuan Yeh

Professor and Endowed Chair in International Studies, University of St. Thomas, Houston

Abstract

Every American election invites renewed speculation about the future of U.S. foreign policy, and the 2026 midterm elections are no exception. In Taiwan, much of the discussion has focused on whether Republican leadership changes and shifts in congressional politics will alter Washington's approach toward China and Taiwan. Such expectations, however, overstate the strategic consequences of electoral politics. Elections redistribute political authority, but they rarely redefine American grand strategy. Over the past decade, strategic competition with China has become increasingly embedded in the U.S. Congress, the national security bureaucracy, and bipartisan policy networks, making it less dependent on any single political leader or administration. This institutional perspective also helps explain why American strategy has remained broadly consistent despite partisan competition and leadership turnover. For Taiwan, the more important challenge is not predicting electoral outcomes in Washington but understanding the institutions that continue to shape U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: U.S. Foreign Policy, Republican Party, Political Authority, Strategic Continuity, Taiwan

I. Introduction

In Taiwan, few international political events receive as much attention as an American election.¹ Every U.S. election seems to trigger the same discussion: Will the United States become more supportive of Taiwan? Will a change in Congress produce

1. Emily Feng, "Here's why Taiwan is watching the U.S. election closely," August 19, 2024, *NPR News*, <<https://www.npr.org/2024/08/16/g-s1-14682/taiwan-us-election-china>>.

a different China policy? And if a new generation of Republican leaders emerges, will Washington's strategic priorities change as well? The 2026 U.S. midterm elections have revived these familiar questions.

They are reasonable questions, but they often rest on a questionable assumption—that elections naturally produce strategic change.² Watching American politics from afar, it is easy to equate changes in political leadership with changes in foreign policy. Election results are immediate and highly visible. Institutions are not. Presidential campaigns dominate headlines, while congressional committees, executive agencies, and bureaucratic processes receive far less attention. Yet these institutions often exert



Figure 1. Who will be Trump's Successor?

Source: ANI News, "US President Trump Names JD Vance and Marco Rubio as Potential Successors," May 5, 2025, *YouTube*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIM9hTt-f0s>>.

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2. Andrew Payne, "Elections and United States foreign policy," in David Skidmore, ed., *Research Handbook on American Foreign and Security Policy* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026), pp. 186-200; Patrick Porter, "Why America's grand strategy has not changed: Power, habit, and the U.S. Foreign policy establishment," *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2018, pp. 9-46.

a more enduring influence on American foreign policy than the politicians who temporarily lead them.

This distinction matters because the United States is undergoing two transitions simultaneously. One is political and highly visible: the Republican Party is gradually entering a post-Trump era, with a younger generation of leaders assuming greater prominence.³ The other is institutional and far less visible: strategic competition with China has become increasingly embedded in the routines of American government. These two developments are related, but they are not the same. Confusing political succession with strategic transformation has led many observers to overestimate the foreign policy consequences of electoral politics.

This tendency is particularly noticeable in Taiwan. Discussions of American politics often revolve around individual leaders—whether Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Marco Rubio, or J.D. Vance.⁴ Personalities matter, especially in a media environment that naturally focuses on elections and political conflict. But foreign policy is rarely made by personalities alone. It emerges from a much broader institutional process involving Congress, executive agencies, the national security bureaucracy, the armed forces, intelligence organizations, and an extensive policy community that extends well beyond any single administration. Presidents lead this system; they do not create it from scratch.

Viewing the 2026 midterm elections through this institutional lens yields a different conclusion. Elections certainly redistribute political authority. They shape legislative agendas, influence budget priorities, and determine who occupies key positions of power. What they do not necessarily do is redefine the U.S.' long-term strategic objectives. Once strategic priorities become embedded within institutions, they acquire a degree of continuity that is remarkably resilient to electoral turnover.

3. Gary Sasse, "What lies ahead for the Republican Party after Trump?" May 29, 2026, *The Hill*, <<https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/5900352-republican-party-2029-outlook/>>.

4. 張詠晴編譯,〈拜登、川普對台政策比一比,誰更挺台?〉, July 16, 2024, *CommonWealth Magazine*, <<https://www.cw.com.tw/article/5130930>>.



Figure 2. Strategic Competition with China

Source: Kristen Gunness, Shanshan Mei, & Jennifer Bouey, “Competing with China Explained: What Americans Need to Know,” September 13, 2024, *RAND Corporation*, <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/09/competing-with-china-explained-what-americans-need.html>>.

The Republican Party’s transformation illustrates this point. Much attention has been devoted to identifying Trump’s political successor or debating whether the party is moving beyond Trumpism. Those questions are politically important. A more interesting question, however, is whether the strategic priorities associated with the Trump years have already become institutionalized.⁵ If they have, then future Republican leaders are more likely to inherit an existing strategic framework than to construct an entirely new one.

This paper argues that the relationship between elections and strategy is best understood through the interaction of *political authority*, *institutional continuity*,

5. Jasen J. Castillo, John M. Schuessler, & Miranda Priebe, “Here’s Why Trump’s Foreign Policy Is Hard to Pin Down,” December 28, 2024, *MSNBC*, <<https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/trump-foreign-policy-isolationist-realist-rcna183877>>.

and strategic continuity. Elections determine who governs. Institutions shape how governments govern. Strategy defines the long-term objectives that governments pursue. Viewing the 2026 midterm elections through this framework not only offers a more balanced interpretation of contemporary American politics but also suggests a different way for Taiwan to think about its long-term relationship with the United States.

II. Elections Change Governments, Not Necessarily Strategy

One reason American elections receive so much international attention is that they are highly visible. Campaigns dominate television coverage, opinion polls generate daily headlines, and candidates spend months debating issues that appear to define the country's future. For observers outside the United States, it is natural to assume that such dramatic political competition will produce equally dramatic changes in foreign policy.

Sometimes it does. More often, it does not.

The problem is not that elections are unimportant. The problem is that they are frequently asked to explain developments that are actually driven by institutions. Elections determine who occupies political office. They influence legislative priorities, redistribute committee chairmanships, affect budget negotiations, and alter the balance of power between Congress and the White House. Those are significant changes. Yet they take place within a political system that was designed to prevent national strategy from changing every two or four years.

That institutional logic is easy to overlook because it is far less visible than electoral politics. Presidential debates attract millions of viewers. Defense planning does not. Leadership contests within political parties receive extensive media coverage. Congressional staff work, bureaucratic coordination, and interagency planning rarely do. The institutions responsible for sustaining American foreign policy generally attract attention only during moments of crisis.⁶ Ironically, their routine operations are

6. A. Trevor Thrall, "America's Foreign Policy Attention Deficit," January 19, 2018, *Cato Institute*, <<https://www.cato.org/blog/americas-foreign-policy-attention-deficit>>.

precisely what make American strategy comparatively stable.

This distinction becomes clearer when strategy is separated from policy. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but they describe different levels of political decision-making. Strategy concerns long-term national objectives. Policy concerns the instruments used to pursue those objectives.⁷ Governments routinely adjust policy in response to changing domestic politics, economic conditions, or international events. Strategy changes far less frequently because it reflects broader assessments of national



Figure 3. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump and U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House, Washington, D.C., November 2024

Source: Richard Fontaine, “The Trump-Biden-Trump Foreign Policy: American Strategy’s Strange Continuity,” January 20, 2025, *Foreign Affairs*, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/trump-biden-trump-foreign-policy>>.

7. Richard B. Doyle, “The U.S. National Security Strategy: Policy, Process, Problems,” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4, July/August 2007, pp. 624-629.

interests and the international environment. Different administrations may choose different tools while pursuing remarkably similar strategic goals.⁸

Recent American policy toward China illustrates this point. During the past decade, Republican and Democratic administrations have differed over tariffs, alliance diplomacy, industrial policy, export controls, and the language used to describe strategic competition. These differences have often dominated political debate. At the same time, a broader consensus has gradually emerged around the idea that China is the U.S.’ principal long-term strategic competitor.⁹ Once that assessment became widely accepted across Congress, executive agencies, and the national security community, electoral change became less likely to produce strategic reversal. Administrations continued to disagree over methods. They increasingly agreed on direction.

The same logic applies beyond the Indo-Pacific. American governments have frequently adopted different approaches toward Iran, Russia, or the Middle East. Yet these differences usually concern the management of strategy rather than its underlying purpose. Diplomatic negotiations, sanctions, military deployments, and alliance coordination may vary from one administration to another, but they generally remain tied to enduring strategic objectives that survive electoral turnover. Looking only at policy differences risks missing the continuity that exists beneath them.

This is why the 2026 midterm elections should be interpreted with caution. They will almost certainly influence domestic politics. Committee leadership will change. Legislative bargaining will become more difficult—or easier—depending on the electoral outcome. Presidential authority may expand or contract. None of these

8. Edward Wong, “On U.S. Foreign Policy, the New Boss Acts a Lot Like the Old One,” July 24, 2022, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/24/us/politics/biden-trump-foreign-policy.html>>; Richard Fontaine, “The Trump-Biden-Trump Foreign Policy: American Strategy’s Strange Continuity,” January 20, 2025, *Foreign Affairs*, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/trump-biden-trump-foreign-policy>>.

9. Timothy R. Heath, *U.S. Strategic Competition with China: A RAND Research Primer* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2021), *RAND*, <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA290-3.html>>.

developments is trivial. Yet it does not automatically follow that American grand strategy will be fundamentally rewritten. Elections change governments. They do not necessarily change the strategic assumptions upon which governments operate.

Understanding this distinction provides a more useful starting point for interpreting contemporary American politics. Rather than asking whether elections change strategy, the more important question is how strategic priorities become sufficiently institutionalized to persist across changing administrations. That question leads directly to the Republican Party's ongoing transformation, in which the relationship between leadership succession and strategic continuity is most evident.

III. Beyond Trump: A Party in Transition

Much of the international discussion surrounding today's Republican Party still revolves around Donald Trump. That is hardly surprising. Few American politicians have reshaped a major political party as quickly—or as thoroughly—as Trump has since 2016.¹⁰ His influence extends well beyond campaign rhetoric. It has altered the party's electoral coalition, redefined conservative priorities, and changed the way many Republicans approached trade, immigration, industrial policy, and China's rise.

Yet focusing exclusively on Trump now risks missing the more important story.

Political parties eventually outgrow the leaders who transform them. American history offers several examples. Jackson left office, but Jacksonian democracy remained influential.¹¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt did not personally sustain every part of the New Deal coalition. Ronald Reagan left the White House almost four decades ago, yet debates

10. Irie Sentner, "How has Trump transformed the Republican Party? Look at the platforms," July 17, 2024, *Politico*, <<https://www.politico.com/interactives/2024/republican-platform-trump-changes/>>; Jeff Greenfield, "How Trump is redefining the Republican party," July 22, 2018, *PBS NewsHour*, <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-trump-is-redefining-the-republican-party>>.

11. Joshua A. Lynn, *Preserving the White Man's Republic: Jacksonian Democracy, Race, and the Transformation of American Conservatism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2019), pp. 1-272.



Figure 4. Donald Trump and the Republican Party

Source: Jonathan Swan, “How Donald Trump conquered the Republican Party,” July 14, 2019, *Axios*, <<https://www.axios.com/2019/07/14/how-donald-trump-conquered-the-republican-party>>.

over taxation, regulation, and the role of government still bear his imprint.¹² Political leaders launch movements. Institutions determine whether those movements last.

The Republican Party appears to be entering that stage today. This does not mean that Trump has become politically irrelevant. Quite the opposite. His influence over Republican voters remains considerable, and his personal role in shaping the party cannot be ignored. But the more interesting question is no longer whether Republicans continue to follow Trump. It is whether many of Trump’s strategic assumptions have become part of the party itself.

12. Iwan Morgan, “Reaganomics and its Legacy,” in Cheryl Hudson & Gareth Davies, eds., *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 101-118.



Figure 5. J.D. Vance and Marco Rubio

Source: Diana Nerozzi & Adam Wren, “Vance is the frontrunner for 2028, Rubio privately confides,” November 7, 2025, *Politico*, <<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/11/07/rubio-vance-2028-republican-nominee-00640908>>.

On foreign policy, the answer increasingly appears to be yes. A decade ago, many of Trump’s positions were dismissed as highly personal departures from Republican orthodoxy. His emphasis on economic nationalism, his criticism of China’s trade practices, his skepticism toward globalization, and his insistence that allies assume greater security responsibilities were often described as products of Trump’s own political instincts.

Today, much of that agenda no longer depends on Trump personally. It has instead been absorbed by a Republican coalition whose leading figures approach foreign policy from different directions. J.D. Vance represents a more nationalist and selective view of American power,¹³ while Tom Cotton remains closer to the party’s

13. Farah Stockman, “Decoding JD Vance’s Brand of Nationalism,” July 28, 2024, *The New York Times*, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/28/opinion/jd-vance-nationalism.html>>.

traditional national-security hawks.¹⁴ Marco Rubio, by contrast, has demonstrated a more pragmatic approach since becoming Secretary of State, combining a consistently hard line on China with the diplomatic necessity of managing relations with Beijing.¹⁵ These differences are important, but they increasingly concern how American power should be exercised rather than whether China represents a long-term strategic challenge.

China illustrates this change most clearly. Within today's Republican Party, strategic competition with Beijing is no longer a controversial proposition. Debate continues over tariffs, industrial subsidies, export controls, investment restrictions, and military spending. Those disagreements are real. They concern priorities and implementation rather than first principles. The broader assumption—that China represents the U.S.' principal long-term strategic competitor—has become widely accepted across the party.

That shift matters because it changes how leadership transitions should be understood. Much of the current commentary asks who will inherit Trump's political movement.¹⁶ Will it be J.D. Vance? Marco Rubio? Another governor? Those questions are politically interesting, but they may not be strategically decisive. Whoever eventually leads the Republican Party will inherit an organization whose basic assumptions about China, industrial resilience, supply-chain security, and Indo-Pacific strategy have already become far more settled than they were ten years ago. Nor would Republican gains or losses in either chamber of Congress after the 2026 midterms fundamentally alter this strategic picture.

14. Burgess Everett, "The GOP's staunchest young hawk is having a moment," December 12, 2015, *Politico*, <<https://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/tom-cottons-world-216571>>.

15. Laura Kelly, "Rubio: US entering era of 'pragmatic foreign policy' with Trump win," November 6, 2024, *The Hill*, <<https://thehill.com/policy/international/4976329-marco-rubio-foreign-policy/>>.

16. Alex Leary, Meredith McGraw, & Natalie Andrews, "Who Is the Heir to the MAGA Movement? Trump Keeps His Options Open," August 9, 2025, *The Wall Street Journal*, <<https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/who-is-the-heir-to-the-maga-movement-trump-keeps-his-options-open-0f9e8c5c>>.

Seen this way, the Republican Party's current transition is less about replacing one leader than about consolidating a governing framework. Leadership will continue to evolve. Campaign messages will change. New personalities will emerge. Yet the party's strategic direction is likely to exhibit considerably more continuity than many outside observers expect. That continuity does not exist because elections have become less important. It exists because successful political movements eventually become institutions rather than campaigns.

IV. Strategy Changes More Slowly Than Politics

One of the easiest mistakes to make when observing American politics is to assume that every election produces a new foreign policy. Campaigns encourage that perception. Candidates promise change, criticize their opponents, and present themselves as offering a different vision of America's role in the world. The rhetoric is often dramatic because elections reward contrast.

Government works differently. Once campaigns end, presidents inherit institutions, alliances, budgets, military commitments, and strategic assessments that cannot simply be rewritten. Every administration has room to adjust priorities, but no administration begins with a blank sheet of paper. This is why American foreign policy often appears less volatile than American politics itself.

The evolution of U.S. policy toward China illustrates this point.

Only a decade ago, Washington still debated whether engagement with China could continue to shape the bilateral relationship. Today that debate no longer occupies the central place it once did. Republicans and Democrats continue to disagree over tariffs, industrial subsidies, export controls, investment screening, and alliance management. Those disagreements matter, but they take place within a much broader consensus: China is now viewed as the U.S.' principal long-term strategic competitor.

That consensus did not emerge because one president changed American strategy. Nor did it emerge because one election transformed Washington. It developed gradually.

Congress passed new legislation. Executive agencies expanded export controls. Defense planners adjusted force posture in the Indo-Pacific. Intelligence agencies revised their long-term assessments. Universities, think tanks, and industry increasingly framed China as both an economic partner and a strategic competitor. None of these developments alone defined a new grand strategy. Together, however, they changed the environment in which every future administration would operate. That institutional evolution explains why recent administrations have looked more similar than many observers expected.

Donald Trump approached China with a confrontational political style. Joe Biden placed greater emphasis on alliances and coordination with democratic partners. Their rhetoric differed. Their diplomacy differed. Their political coalitions certainly differed. Yet neither administration abandoned strategic competition.

Instead, both expanded restrictions on advanced technology, strengthened cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, invested in domestic semiconductor production, and treated economic security as an increasingly important component of national security. The policy instruments were not identical. The strategic direction remained remarkably consistent.

Iran provides a useful comparison. Successive administrations have disagreed sharply over sanctions, diplomacy, and the nuclear agreement. Those differences generated substantial political controversy in Washington. Yet beneath those debates, the broader strategic objective changed very little. Preventing Iran from fundamentally reshaping the regional balance of power remained a consistent priority regardless of which party controlled the White House.¹⁷ Once again, elections produced different policies, but not an entirely different strategic destination.

This comparison highlights a broader feature of American statecraft. Democratic politics encourages policy competition. Institutions encourage strategic continuity.

17. Hadi Kahalzadeh, “Containment, Resistance, and the MOU: The US–Iran Negotiations in Historical Context,” July 7, 2026, *Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*, <<https://quincyinst.org/research/containment-resistance-and-the-mou-the-us-iran-negotiations-in-historical-context/>>.

The two are not contradictory; they perform different functions. Elections allow voters to choose governments. Institutions ensure that governments operate within an established strategic framework unless compelling structural conditions demand otherwise.

This helps explain why foreign observers often overestimate the strategic consequences of American elections. Electoral outcomes are visible. Institutional adaptation is gradual. One dominates headlines; the other quietly shapes policy over many years. Yet it is usually the quieter process that leaves a deeper mark on American grand strategy.

For Taiwan, this distinction is particularly important. If strategic competition with China has become an institutional commitment rather than merely a presidential preference, then the long-term trajectory of U.S. policy is likely to prove more stable than election coverage often suggests. That does not mean Taiwan should ignore American elections. It does mean that Taipei should pay equal—if not greater—attention to the institutions that continue to shape Washington’s approach to the Indo-Pacific long after campaigns have ended.

V. Taiwan’s Washington Problem

Taiwan pays extraordinarily close attention to American politics. That is hardly surprising. Few countries have a greater stake in the direction of U.S. foreign policy, and few elections abroad receive more attention in Taiwan than those held in the United States. Presidential debates are widely reported. Cabinet appointments become headline news. Even congressional elections are closely followed by policymakers, journalists, and financial markets.

Attention, however, does not always produce understanding.

One recurring tendency in Taiwan is to interpret American foreign policy in terms of the political fortunes of individual leaders. A presidential election becomes a referendum on Taiwan policy. A change in congressional leadership is often viewed as the beginning of a new strategic era. Every transition in Washington generates



Figure 6. Taiwan, China, and the United States

Source: Ori Sela, “Tensions Around Taiwan: Summary of 2024,” *INSS Insight*, No. 1947, April 1, 2025, *Institute for National Security Studies*, <<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/taiwan-2024/>>.

predictions that American commitments are about to strengthen—or weaken.¹⁸

American politics is rarely that simple.

Elections matter because they redistribute political authority. Yet their strategic consequences depend on institutions that evolve much more slowly than electoral politics itself. Looking only at election results, therefore, provides an incomplete picture of how American foreign policy actually changes.

18. Brad Dress, “Taiwan braces for US election as China tensions rise,” November 2, 2024, *The Hill*, <<https://thehill.com/policy/defense/4965559-taiwan-worried-trump-administration/>>.

The evolution of U.S. policy toward Taiwan illustrates this point. During the past decade, support for Taiwan has expanded under administrations with very different political styles.¹⁹ Congress has passed legislation strengthening bilateral cooperation.

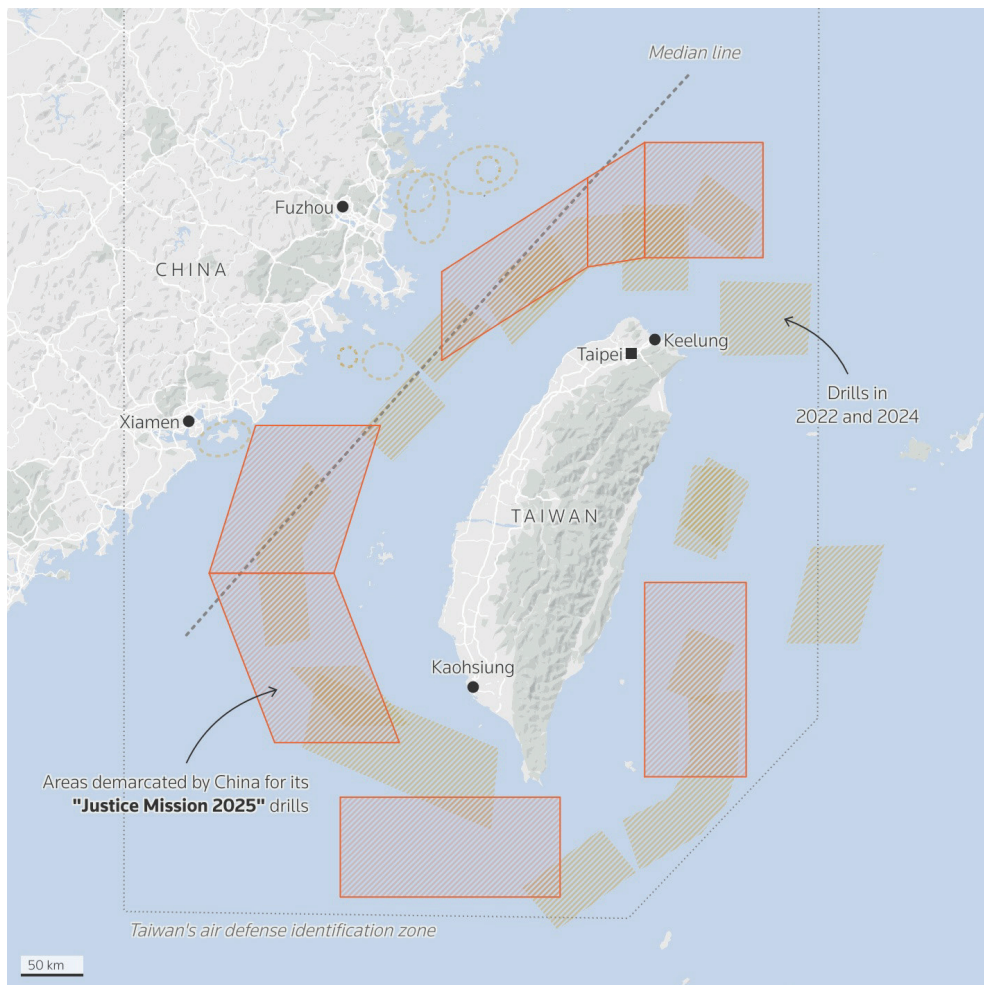


Figure 7. China's War Games around Taiwan

Source: Joe Cash, Yimou Lee, & Wen-Yee Lee, "China stages record drills designed to encircle Taiwan," December 28, 2025, *Reuters*, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-military-conduct-live-fire-exercises-around-taiwan-tuesday-2025-12-28/>>.

19. Shelley Rigger, "'The Six Assurances to Taiwan Act': Status quo, or something new?" August 11, 2025, *Brookings Institution*, <<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-six-assurances-to-taiwan-act-status-quo-or-something-new/>>.

Table 1. Arms Procurement Bills Proposed by Taiwan’s Major Political Parties

	Cabinet’s version	Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) version	Taiwan People’s Party’s (TPP) version
Draft name:	Special Act for Procuring Plans to Strengthen Defense Resilience and Asymmetric Warfare Capabilities (強化防衛韌性及不對稱戰力計畫採購特別條例)	Special Act for Strengthening National Defense and US Military Procurement (強化國防及對美軍事採購特別條例)	Special Act for Procuring Plans to Strengthen National Security and Asymmetric Warfare Capabilities (保障國家安全及強化不對稱戰力計畫採購特別條例)
Budget cap:	NT\$1.25 trillion	NT\$380 billion	NT\$400 billion
Implementation period:	Until end of 2033	Until end of 2028	Until end of 2033
Covered items:	• Building “T-Dome” and seven other key categories: including US military procurement, domestically developed missiles by the National ChungShan Institute of Science and Technology, commercial drones and command-and-control systems.	• Specific US military procurements (8 items only): including the M109A7 howitzers, High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and other existing systems.	• Specific US military procurements (six items only): including the M109A7 howitzers, five other arms sales, and some emergency procurement items.
Budget mechanism:	• One-time allocation, long-term strategy: An eight-year special budget to ensure flexibility in long-term arms sales negotiations and deliveries.	• Phased allocation with new rules: New military procurements must include US letters of offer and acceptance (LOA) before the Executive Yuan can propose new legislation for review.	• Reviewed annually, in phases: The Executive Yuan must submit a special report and secure approval from the Legislative Yuan before allocations can be made.

Source: “Military budget bill meetings begin,” March 23, 2026, *Taipei Times*, <<https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2026/03/23/2003854309>>.

Defense ties have deepened. Senior-level exchanges have become more frequent. Export controls, technology policy, and supply-chain security have increasingly linked Taiwan to broader American strategy in the Indo-Pacific. These developments did not emerge from one administration alone. They reflected a wider institutional process that continued across electoral cycles.

For Taiwan, this distinction matters because it changes the focus of diplomacy. Relationships with presidents and senior officials will always be important, but they cannot become the sole foundation of Taiwan's strategy toward Washington. Elections inevitably produce new leaders. Institutions provide continuity. Congress, executive agencies, defense organizations, think tanks, universities, business communities, and state governments all shape American policy in ways that extend beyond the lifespan of any individual administration.

This perspective also carries an important lesson for Taiwan itself. One reason American strategy has demonstrated considerable resilience is that broad strategic priorities have gradually become institutionalized. Political competition continues, sometimes intensely, but fundamental strategic assumptions increasingly survive electoral turnover. Taiwan faces a similar challenge. Democratic competition is both necessary and healthy, yet long-term national security requires a degree of political continuity that cannot be renegotiated after every election.

Simply put, a democracy exposed to sustained external pressure cannot afford to redefine its strategic priorities every four years.

That observation is particularly relevant as Taiwan confronts growing pressure from Beijing. Military modernization, civil resilience, supply-chain security, energy security, and closer cooperation with democratic partners all require sustained political commitment. None can be achieved within a single electoral cycle. They demand institutions capable of carrying long-term strategies across changing governments.

For that reason, Taiwan's greatest challenge may not be persuading the United States to remain committed to the Indo-Pacific. Increasingly, American institutions already recognize Taiwan's strategic importance. The greater challenge is ensuring that Taiwan demonstrates the same degree of strategic continuity at home.

Durable partnerships abroad ultimately depend upon durable political consensus at home.

VI. Conclusion

The debate surrounding the 2026 U.S. midterm elections reflects a broader tendency to interpret American foreign policy in terms of election outcomes. That tendency is understandable. Elections are visible, politically dramatic, and widely reported. Institutions are not. Campaigns produce clear winners and losers; institutional change unfolds gradually, often attracting little public attention. Yet it is usually this quieter process that shapes the long-term direction of American strategy.

The Republican Party's transition illustrates this point. Much of the public discussion has focused on whether the party is moving beyond Donald Trump or on identifying who might eventually inherit his political movement. Those questions matter. They are unlikely, however, to determine the future of American grand strategy by themselves. The more consequential development is that many of the strategic priorities associated with the Trump years have gradually become embedded in Congress, executive agencies, the national security bureaucracy, and the wider policy community. Once that occurs, leadership transitions are more likely to alter governing style than strategic direction.

The same pattern is visible in American policy toward China. Administrations continue to disagree over tariffs, industrial policy, alliance management, and diplomatic tactics. Those disagreements are real and politically significant. At the same time, a broader strategic consensus has emerged around long-term competition with China. That consensus did not arise because of a single election, nor is it likely to disappear after one. It has developed through institutional adaptation across multiple parts of the American political system.

For Taiwan, this distinction matters because it changes the way American politics should be interpreted. Elections deserve close attention, but they should not become the sole basis for judging the future of U.S.-Taiwan relations. A more reliable guide lies in the institutions that shape American foreign policy across changing administrations. Congressional support, defense cooperation, bureaucratic coordination, and bipartisan strategic thinking often provide a better indication of long-term policy than campaign rhetoric or electoral headlines.

The broader lesson extends beyond the 2026 midterm elections. Democracies are designed to produce political competition, but they are equally designed to preserve institutional continuity. The United States demonstrates that strategic consistency and electoral competition are not contradictory; they are complementary features of democratic governance. Elections determine who governs. Institutions shape how governments govern. Grand strategy provides the longer horizon within which both operate.

For Taiwan, understanding that distinction may prove more important than predicting the outcome of any future election in Washington.