

Biden's Policy toward Taiwan: Democracy Narrative and Strategic Competition

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Abstract

The Biden administration has adjusted its policy toward Taiwan to accommodate the policy implemented in strategic competition between the United States and China. In the context of U.S.-China strategic competition, and policy implementation-based democracy narrative, the purpose of maintaining the status quo is to prevent mainland China from resolving the Taiwan issue by force. This paper analyzes U.S.-Taiwan relations under the Biden administration and examines the policies and its impact in maintaining the status, which is guided by democracy narrative: repositioning Taiwan in alliance-partner network, attempting to separate U.S.-Taiwan relations from U.S.-China relations, and developing a policy framework for U.S.-Taiwan relations. The Biden administration keeps shaping the strategic environment for mainland China, enhancing Taiwan's own defense and asymmetrical capability, to raise the cost of unify by force.

Keywords

The Biden Administration, Democracy Narrative, Taiwan, Strategic Competition, China

1. Introduction

Democracy and shared common values are frequently mentioned in official formulation by U.S. governments after 2016. Especially since The Biden administration took over, democratic narrative toward Taiwan is highlighted, and Taiwan is seen as important assets and beacon in Asia. As a method of dissemination, democracy narrative offers another dimension which emphasizes Taiwan's political constitution and shared value which is identical to United States and its allies.

However, The Biden administration's policy toward Taiwan, built on demo-

cratic narrative, has an unclear outlook on maintaining the destination of maintaining status-quo of Taiwan Strait, because the policy implementing would be seen as a serious challenge from China side.

2. A More Comprehensive and Systematic Policy toward Taiwan

2.1. The Understanding on Taiwan Issue Reached by U.S. and China

In an effort to normalize relations between the two countries as soon as possible, China and the United States reached an understanding on the Taiwan issue, and U.S. diplomatic records (Foreign Relations of United States) show that the Carter administration, believing that the Chinese government was not committed to renouncing the using of force, acquiesced to the U.S. government's right to continue selling arms to Taiwan after normalization. The process of negotiating the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was successfully completed with the issue of shelving arms sales to Taiwan. However, it is only in archive documents Foreign Relations of United States where the understanding could be found and was definitely not reflected in the communiqué on establishing diplomatic relations. Two sides also had controversies on the meaning of "acknowledge", which Michel Oksenberg (1979) disagreed with the translation of "acknowledge" as "recognition" by Chinese. But once again, it was still kept low profile to in public. U.S. and China stuck to their respective formulations since 1979.

2.2. The Tension on Taiwan Issue between China and U.S.

Despite occasional publicized disagreements between the United States and China over Taiwan, the U.S. government appears to have abandoned efforts to manage the Taiwan issue's impact on U.S.-China relations by the Trump years.

When the U.S. government adopted a policy of engagement with China, both sides were able to manage the negative impact of the Taiwan issue on the U.S.-China relationship. When the engagement policy changes, a full range of U.S.-Taiwan relations is inevitable, which in turn irritates mainland China.

The Chinese government believes that the U.S. government is not in a position to decide how to resolve Taiwan issue, which sees Taiwan issue as leverage for to contain China. While U.S. government insists that their security commitments to Taiwan are solid and comply with the Taiwan Relations Act and Six Assurances made by the Regan administration to Taiwan, concerned Taiwan issue should be resolved peacefully, which shows the huge dispute between the two countries on Taiwan issue.

Although the Trump administration's and the Biden administrations' policies toward Taiwan reflect a tendency to cut the U.S.-China relationship from the U.S.-Taiwan relationship and develop the U.S.-Taiwan relationship independently, the U.S.-China relationship remains a key variable affecting any resolu-

tion of the Taiwan issue. It is the reason that The Biden administration still wishes to keep the communication channel open and reiterate to avoid conflict with China.

2.3. Democracy Narrative: A Gradually Clear Policy Direction

Both Trump and The Biden administrations elaborated Taiwan issue in their respective national security strategies. Compared with the Trump administration's policy toward Taiwan, the Biden administration's policy toward Taiwan is more systematic and democracy narrative driven. It keeps reaffirming "One-China" policy, developed unofficial relations with more official characteristics in democracy allies-partners network. In the context of the democratic narrative, the ambiguities in the policy toward Taiwan are further eliminated, and more fields of the policy toward are clear.

First, the Biden administration declares "One-China" policy has not changed but underlying that peace and stability of Taiwan Strait is critical to regional and international in National Security Report, which sets de facto preconditions for China on Taiwan issue. Second, the Biden administration's positioning Taiwan in democracy world, consistent with the Biden administration's judgment on the competition between Democracy and Autocracies in the report.

As Biden's *National Security Strategy* elaborates, U.S.-China relation is an era of (strategic) competition, and his administration seeks for a policy maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait (The White House, 2022b). But the rapid and substantial development on bilateral relationship between U.S. and Taiwan will keep harming the core interest of China, probably leading to misjudge. It would be more difficult and higher cost for the Biden administration to find the balancing point, where U.S. could avoid potential conflict with China and in the same time, developing a robust unofficial bilateral relationship with Taiwan.

From Chinese perspective, keeps reaffirming "One-China" policy while developing unofficial relations with in an official manner, and push Taiwan establishing variety relations in a democracy allies-partners network would lead to unification across the Strait unattainable.

2.4. The Reconstruction of Taiwan's Identity

The Biden administration is building Taiwan's identity within its Indo-Pacific strategy in geopolitics and the alliance-partnership system in ideology field, The Biden administration remains commitment to the U.S.-Taiwan robust unofficial relationship, but the unofficial U.S.-Taiwan relationship bears many official characteristics in policy implementation. Such tactical adjustments could impact the direction of strategic competition.

In National Security Strategy report, The Biden administration defined the pattern of strategic competition between the United States and China, labeled PRC as the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international or-

der (The White House, 2022b). The policy toward Taiwan adjusts in this context synchronously. Strategic competition is competition with a time horizon that requires the mobilization of a full range of resources, as a policy choice, the Biden administration reaffirmed the importance of alliances-partnership and shared values. At the same time, strategic competition also implicitly implies that it will distinguish winners from losers, reflecting the adversarial and even brutal nature of competition, which lead to management of conflict.

The Biden administration proposes that the United States is facing a fierce competition between democracies and autocracies and is in an era of strategic competition to shape the future international order, stating that “American leadership will be based on shared values and close cooperation with allies and partners”, and that “the next decade will be a decisive one”.

To out-competing China, the Biden administration’s policy toward China consists of: “to invest in the foundation of U.S.’s strength, to align efforts with a network of allies and partners, and competing responsibly with PRC.” (The White House, 2022a) Due to the strategic nature of competition, the Biden administration will focus on how to maintain U.S. technological superiority and use U.S. power strategically to address complex situations. Department of Defense has identified China as a pacing challenge and proposed an integrated deterrence approach to the PLA, with the Indo-Pacific being the theater for U.S. forces.

In February 2022, the Biden administration published the Indo-Pacific Strategy report, which classified Taiwan, along with Australia, Japan and other countries, as the United States’ closest allies and partners. Taiwan is partner in the Indo-Pacific region as a major democratic and technology powerhouse, which the fact sheet for U.S. Relations with Taiwan by Department of State elaborates.

Democratic narrative offers new forms of multilateral cooperation for Taiwan. As Taiwan’s diplomatic counteroffers continue to dwindle in the midst of mainland China’s diplomatic countermeasures, it is more difficult for the United States to assist Taiwan in finding international space within the UN system. The Biden administration developed bilateral U.S.-Taiwan relations within the network of democratic alliances and derived multilateral relations. The Biden administration has continued the U.S.-Taiwan Democracy Consultative Conference established under the Trump administration. This mechanism highlights the shared values of the U.S. and Taiwan, showcases Taiwan’s successful democratic institutional experience, and serves as a model for human rights and democracy in the region. The Biden administration has continued the dialogue mechanism, invited Taiwan representatives to the Democracy Summit in 2021, replacing the mechanism of sovereign state participation with an informal mechanism of ideology and values. Under this mechanism, Taiwan seeks for substantive economic and trade contacts and symbolic changes with other countries.

The label given to Taiwan as a democracy and technological powerhouse served for the U.S. and Taiwan’s substantive bilateral relationship, included in

The Biden administration's alliance-partner network. The label determines what kind of relationship the U.S. and Taiwan will develop and the extent of that relationship could achieve. At the same time, Taiwan's label will make it "one of us" and provide a values base for Taiwan to maintain and develop closer ties with other economies or sovereign states. The U.S.-Taiwan relationship has become part of U.S.'s relationship with its alliance and partnership. It is also a step forward of the U.S.-Taiwan relationship independent from the U.S.-China relationship.

3. Establish a Framework for the Independent Development from U.S.-Taiwan Relations

Although U.S.-Taiwan relations are still subject to the U.S.-China relationship, the independent development of U.S.-Taiwan relations has been confirmed as one of the elements of the U.S. government's policy toward Taiwan under the Trump administration. David Stilwell (2020), Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, addressed the U.S.-Taiwan Economic Cooperation Network conference, stating U.S.-Taiwan relations are not part of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship. He emphasizes that the both sides cooperate based on their own interests. United States was establishing a new bilateral economic dialogue with Taiwan.

3.1. Political Framework

Democratic narrative plays important role in constructing political framework, in the era of the completion between democracy and autocracies, more countries realized that charred common values has the identical importance with strategic interest. On April 9, 2021, department of state issued new guiding principles for U.S.-Taiwan Interaction, which emphasize Taiwan is a vibrant democracy entity. The guidelines emphasize that Taiwan's partnership identity and its important value to the democracy world. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink (2021) elaborated on the Biden administration's position on Taiwan, stating that Taiwan is a leading democracy, a technological powerhouse, a force for good. He assured to congress that under The Biden administration would advance binary cooperative efforts in a number of ways, including convening the second annual U.S.-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue, to build secure and resilient supply chains and counter economic coercion, and inviting Taiwan to Summit for Democracy.

"One-China" policy remains the same in Biden administrative but description has been changed slightly which attract attention. The Biden administration and other official statement, tacitly or deliberate distinguish the "One-China" policy and the "One-China" principle held by China.

The Congressional Research Service regularly publishes policy brief on Taiwan: "Taiwan: Political and Security Issues" (IF10275). From the updated version published on February 17, 2023, the brief adds new representation that The

U.S. one-China policy is distinct from the PRC's "One-China principle," the latter defines Taiwan as part of China. The brief further said U.S. just acknowledged, but did not endorse Chinese position that there is only one China in world and Taiwan is part of China in the U.S.-PRC joint communiqué (2022).

In May 2022, Department of State revised its fact sheet on U.S. relationship with Taiwan, remove the phrase "does not support Taiwan's independence" and "acknowledge Taiwan is part of China," prompting strong opposition from Chinese government. A week later, the statement "does not support Taiwan's independence" was reinserted into the factsheet, but "recognizes that Taiwan is part of China" remained absent.

Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met with the Chinese State Councilor Wang Yi on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September, reiterating that U.S. "One-China" policy had not changed. However, on September 26, the State Department issued a statement saying that "under the 'One-China' policy, the United States does not take a position on the sovereignty of Taiwan." According to the media, it is a rare public statement (Ching, 2022).

The examples above clearly show that the Biden administration has reaffirmed that the "one-China" policy remains unchanged, but highlight the U.S. government's clear and public non-stance on the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty, which such explanations were usually given in a private setting.

This may signal the Biden administration disclosure its policy assumption that Taiwan's status is undetermined, which leads to convergence with the position held by the U.S. Congress CRS Report (Lawrence, 2018), indicates that the executive branch, represented by the Biden administration, would follow a position in dealing with Taiwan policy that raises the growing possibility of increased tensions between the U.S. and China. While developing U.S.-Taiwan relations based on that assumption. This would certainly incur a strong reaction from China. The Biden administration is on the path to clarify some ambiguous presentation on Taiwan's sovereignty in three joint communiqués itself implies that the United States is repudiating the formulation, but is not yet in a position to publicly use words such as deny or disavow.

The potential conflict comes from the statement that "Taiwan is part of China" has not been included in the "One-China" policy statement, which is a key claim of the China on Taiwan issue. The Biden administration's avoidance of this issue could be seen as a test of China's reaction to the "undetermined status of Taiwan".

3.2. Legal Framework

The re-positioning of Taiwan is the starting point for policy adjustments towards Taiwan. The U.S. Congress has introduced a large number of bills on Taiwan over the past four years, creating a legal framework for the independent development of U.S.-Taiwan relations, to lift the legal constraints on U.S.-Taiwan official exchanges at all levels.

Some bills enrolled are binding administration to set up official interactions between the United States and Taiwan at all levels. Include Taiwan Travel Act (H.R. 535), which takes effect on March 16, 2018; the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019 (S. 1678), and Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, which take effect on September 15, to support the security of Taiwan and its right of self-determination.

Other bills which haven't been enrolled but still demonstrate the desire of congress to level up the binary relationship to official relationship. In the end, it would not be guideline for the administration, but still could affect their behavior. Such as: *Taiwan Assurance act of 2019*, an act to foster security in Taiwan. *Taiwan Representative Office Act*, to direct the Secretary of State to seek to enter into negotiations with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office to rename its office the Taiwan Representative Office, *Taiwan Envoy Act* (H.R. 5535, introduced in December 2019), This bill requires the President to appoint the director of the American Institute in Taiwan with the advice and consent of the Senate. The director shall have the rank and status of Ambassador at Large.

3.3. Supply Chain Framework

Integrating Taiwan's semiconductor industry into the Democratic supply chain, which could be trace back to Trump administration. Trump administration established Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD) with Taiwan in 2020, which focuses on issues such as supply chain and energy security. The Biden administration followed this mechanism and held the second and third dialogues, with the second dialogue focusing on semiconductor supply chain resilience, economic coercion, the digital economy, and 5G cyber-security. The third dialogue will focus on economic coercion, semiconductor supply chain resilience and energy transition security.

In February 2021, the Biden administration issued Executive Order 14,017, a comprehensive review of risks to the U.S. supply chain, directing his new administration to focus on four key product categories first within 100 days. Semiconductors and advanced packaging were at the top of the list. The Commerce Department claimed in the assessment that "the United States lacks semiconductor manufacturing capabilities. Advanced logic chips rely primarily on Taiwan, China, and mature node chips rely primarily on Taiwan, China, South Korea and China". In the policy recommendations, "encourage foreign manufacturers and material suppliers to invest in the United States, allied and partner countries and regions, build a diverse supplier base, and work with allies and partners on semiconductor supply chain resilience".

From 2014 to 2021, Taiwan's semiconductor companies have consistently maintained a market share of more than 60%, and more importantly, TSMC and other head companies have a market share of more than 70% in 7 nm advanced process chips (Project 2049, 2022).

In April 2022, the Biden administration proposed to establish a "Chip 4 Alliance" with South Korea, Japan and Taiwan (C4) to exclude mainland China

from the global semiconductor supply chain. Through the C4 alliance, the Taiwan authorities gain the opportunity to be able to dialogue with other sovereign states on an equal footing.

4. Raise the Cost of Unification

Raising the cost of posed on mainland China unifies by force is a policy option to effectively delay or avoid a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Both China and the United States have considered raising the cost of adversaries through their military deterrence on Taiwan issue. The Biden administration has attempted to continue to shape the strategic environment for mainland China in the Taiwan Strait, to compress the space for the PLA to operate.

4.1. Defense Commitments to Taiwan

It is becoming clear that the Biden administration has moved a step forward in clarifying its defense commitments to Taiwan. But in order to avoid misjudgments and to follow the “One-China” policy, Biden and his team expressed position on assisting Taiwan’s defense in case of mainland China use military ways to resolve the issue, or not taking a position on this issue. Biden has stated in public four times that he will assist in Taiwan’s defense, White house officials have since come out to say that U.S. policy toward Taiwan remains unchanged. But statements by National Security Assistant Jake Sullivan (2022) and Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell (2022) suggest that Biden’s comments were not a slip of the tongue. Sullivan said when the president of the United States wants to announce a change in policy, he will do it, but he hasn’t done it yet. Campbell said Biden would not walk back his comments and that the president’s meaning was clear (speaking for themselves). This hovering between clarity and ambiguity may be a reflection of the Biden administration’s concern for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, but the balance start to move to sending a relative clear position that U.S. would intervene if military actions occurred.

4.2. Strength Asymmetric Capability

Another method to raise the cost is to strengthen Taiwan’s asymmetric capability. Mainland China has an absolute advantage on force in case of conventional condition. To make the decision procedure on unify by force, an unconventional strategy is necessary, according to Ellen (2016). Both Taiwan authority and the Biden administration need a mature asymmetric capability of Taiwan. Offices from Biden administrative keep emphasizing that Taiwan should develop an asymmetric capability. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Planning, and Capabilities Mara Karlin (2022) has witnessed that case of Ukraine illustrates that Taiwan needs doing everything to build asymmetric warfare capabilities. While her mates, Jessica Lewis (2022), assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs, emphasized to congress that administrative has consistently urged Taiwan to procure the weapons needed for an asymmetric capability. The list of asymmetric warfare includes short-range air defense missiles, mines,

coastal patrol weapons and cruise missiles. Biden has approved nine batches of arms sales to Taiwan had seen that MK48 Mod6 torpedoes and HIMAS, which are capable of destroy high-value targets of the PLA from distance.

5. Conclusion

Democracy narrative to Taiwan matches the position set by The Biden administration in strategic competition with China, but Taiwan issue could still be a risk point in the competition. Both sides will maintain their respective positions: China will continue to condemn that U.S. sends the false signal to Taiwan. While the U.S. has repeatedly reiterated that it does not support Taiwan independence but opposes unilateral changes to the status quo. A cold peace is the least bad option acceptable to both China and the United States. But before reaching a cold peace, China and the United States may still experience intense, even near-conflict, competition.

In the strategic competition between major powers, the Biden administration needs to rely on channels of communication between China and the United States to avoid serious miscalculations and maintain the status quo. But there is no doubt that the continued increase in mainland China's willingness and ability to resolve the Taiwan issue will compress the Biden administration's room for maneuver in dealing with the Taiwan issue.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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