

TRENDS

THE U.S. AND THE INDO-PACIFIC UNDER TRUMP

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Signals, Symbols and Sales: Recent Trends in U.S. Policy towards Taiwan¹

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Since 1979, when Washington switched its official recognition of China from the Republic of China (ROC) government in Taipei to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing, U.S. policy has remained steadfast in its strategic interest in cross-strait stability. Each incoming president has had to carefully balance American support for Taiwan with the United States' changing and increasingly more intertwined relationship with China. In 2016, American and Taiwanese voters elected new presidents, both of whom campaigned to pursue more domestic-oriented policy agendas. Even before these elections, through which opposition parties entered the executive office and gained a sizable majority in the respective legislatures, 2017 was set to be a critical year for U.S.-Taiwan relations. With two new administrations in Washington and Taipei, Beijing's calculations were surely going to alter and would undoubtedly test the position of the U.S. towards Taiwan. Nevertheless, a volatile start to the policies of both China and Taiwan under President Trump has meant that several distinct avenues have become the primary mechanisms through which the United States implements and signals its policy objectives, more so than under the Obama administration.

¹ I would like to thank Richard C. Bush and Ryan L. Hass for their invaluable and constructive comments on the initial draft of this paper.

These avenues are: diplomatic measures, defense reassurances, and legislative messaging. This paper examines how U.S. policy under the Trump administration has unfolded through these avenues and what to look for in the immediate future that could indicate how the relationship will progress in the coming years.

Testing the waters

On December 2, 2016, then President-elect Donald Trump took a phone call from Taiwan's recently-inaugurated President Tsai Ing-wen. This was the first time an American president-elect had spoken directly with a sitting Taiwanese president, and the initial reactions from Washington, Taipei and Beijing differed drastically. Generally speaking, U.S. Taiwan watchers split into two camps regarding the phone call. One group applauded this historic step and hoped it would signal a new course for U.S. policy rooted in more overt and proactive support for Taiwan. The other side feared that the Trump transition team had naively dived in head first and did not have the capabilities to successfully maneuver the potentially choppy waters. In Taiwan, people's first response was also hopeful that Taiwan would become a priority for the new president and could gain the higher level of support from the United States that it had long sought. Beijing, in the meantime, remained quiet. In the six-week period from the phone call to Trump's inauguration, the trilateral relationship unfolded in ways that would dictate the relations between these three governments in the coming year.

Following the phone call, Donald Trump, during a handful of interviews, questioned the one-China policy and offered Taiwan as a potential bargaining chip within the U.S.-China relationship.² While Beijing was restrained in its response as far as Washington was concerned, by mid-December 2016 it invoked a more offensive strategy to signal its dissent to Taipei, starting with putting pressure on Taiwan's limited diplomatic allies. São Tomé and Príncipe, a small African island nation and one of Taiwan's 22 diplomatic allies, announced its intention to switch formal recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Beijing then focused on Washington, but instead of using sanctions or direct criticisms, it found ways to cultivate both President Trump and his close advisors to shift the new administration's views toward China and Taiwan.³ By early February, in a readout from a call between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump, the U.S. president "agreed, at the request of President Xi, to honor [the U.S.] 'one China' policy."⁴ By April 2017,

² Caren Bohan and David Brunnstrom, "Trump says U.S. not necessarily bound by 'one China' policy," *Reuters*, 11 December 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-china/trump-says-u-s-not-necessarily-bound-by-one-china-policy-idUSKBN1400TY>

³ Notably, China's Ambassador to the U.S., Cui Tiankai, established a connection with Jared Kushner, senior White House adviser and President Trump's son-in-law; Adam Entous and Evan Osnos, "Jared Kushner is China's Trump Card," *The New Yorker*, 29 January 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/jared-kushner-is-chinas-trump-card>

⁴ "Readout of the President's Call with President Xi Jinping of China," The White House, 9 February 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/readout-presidents-call-president-xi-jinping-china/>

Xi Jinping impressed Donald Trump at the Mara-Lago Summit, after which Trump praised his Chinese counterpart as “a very good man and I got to know him very well.”⁵ By the end of April, Tsai Ing-wen suggested in an interview with *Reuters* that she would be open to talking to President Trump again depending on “the U.S. government’s consideration of regional affairs.”⁶ When asked about whether he would take another call, Trump used the out provided in Tsai’s qualifying statement on regional affairs, but went a step further and said that he would want to speak to Xi Jinping first.⁷ Just as quickly as it emerged, Taiwan’s preliminary elation soon dissipated.

Of course, Beijing’s heavy hand against Taipei following the phone call was hardly new or a reversal in how it had already been handling relations with the Tsai administration. In her May 2016 inaugural address, President Tsai

outlined a framework through which her administration planned to conduct cross-strait relations. Beijing wanted her to say she would conduct relations “on the basis of the 1992 Consensus” just as Ma Ying-jeou had stated in his inaugural address in 2008.⁸ But, instead, she offered a more complex basis for how her administration would frame cross-strait relations and insisted on her objective to maintain the status quo.⁹ Beijing, however, was not satisfied and went on to declare Tsai’s speech an “incomplete test answer” and cease official communication lines by early summer 2016.¹⁰ Therefore, Beijing used the phone call as another excuse to continue to pursue a hardline stance

⁵ Stephen J Adler, Steve Holland and Jeff Mason, “Exclusive: Trump says ‘major, major’ conflict with North Korea possible, but seeks diplomacy,” *Reuters*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-exclusive/exclusive-trump-says-major-major-conflict-with-north-korea-possible-but-seeks-diplomacy-idUSKBN17U04E>

⁶ Jean Yoon and J.R. Wu, “Exclusive: Taiwan president says phone call with Trump can take place again,” *Reuters*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-president/exclusive-taiwan-president-says-phone-call-with-trump-can-take-place-again-idUSKBN17T0W3>

⁷ Jeff Mason, Stephen J. Adler and Steve Holland, “Exclusive: Trump spurns Taiwan president’s suggestion of another phone call,” *Reuters*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-taiwan-exclusive/exclusive-trump-spurns-taiwan-presidents-suggestion-of-another-phone-call-idUSKBN17U05I>

⁸ Ma Ying-jeou, “Full text of President Ma Ying-jeou’s inaugural address”, *Central News Agency (Taiwan)*, 20 May 2012, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201205200002.aspx>

⁹ In her speech, President Tsai alluded to the 1992 consensus by offering respect for the fact that in 1992 the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and Association Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), in the titular 1992 meeting in Singapore, “arrived at various joint acknowledgements and understandings” and her government would “conduct cross-Strait affairs in accordance with the Republic of China Constitution, the Act Governing Relations Between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation.”; Tsai Ing-wen, “Inaugural Ceremony of the 14th-Term President and Vice President of the Republic of China (Taiwan),” Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), 20 May 2016, <http://english.president.gov.tw/Page/252>; and Richard C. Bush, “Tsai’s inauguration in Taiwan: It could have been worse,” *Order from Chaos blog*, The Brookings Institution, 23 May 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/05/23/tsais-inauguration-in-taiwan-it-could-have-been-worse/>

¹⁰ “Full text of mainland’s Taiwan affairs authorities’ statement on cross-Straits relations,” *Xinhua*, 20 May 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-05/20/c_135375950.htm

against the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government. Thus, as the Trump administration softened its stance toward Beijing, China further squeezed Taiwan's international space. Organizations that had opened the doors to Taiwan as an observer under the Ma administration, such as the World Health Organization, barred Taiwan's participation in 2017.¹¹ By June, Taiwan lost another diplomatic ally when Panama also announced that it would recognize the PRC as the government representing China.¹² Around this time, the Chinese military also signaled its developing strength and resolve by sending its first indigenous aircraft carrier through the Taiwan Strait and conducting increased bomber flights around the island.¹³ Later, in January 2018, China unilaterally opened the northbound civil aviation route along the M-503 flight path. The launching of this air route triggered new concerns as it violated an agreement established in 2015 between Taiwan and China, which outlined that

¹¹ Chris Horton, "Blocked by China, Taiwan Presses to Join U.N. Agency's," *The New York Times*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/08/world/asia/taiwan-world-health-china.html>

¹² "Panama cuts ties with Taiwan in favour of China," *BBC News*, 13 June 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40256499>

¹³ Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Derek Grossman and Logan Ma, "Chinese Bomber Flights Around Taiwan: For What Purpose?," *War on the Rocks*, 13 September 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/chinese-bomber-flights-around-taiwan-for-what-purpose/>; Lawrence Chung, "Mainland carrier Liaoning and battle group enters Taiwan Strait," *South China Morning Post*, 2 July 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2100933/mainland-carrier-liaoning-and-battle-group-enters>

any changes in the air route should be discussed by both actors in advance.¹⁴

As relations between Beijing and Washington warmed up in the spring, and relations across the strait remained cool, U.S.-Taiwan ties slowly progressed below the surface. While certain actions or events moved the barometer slightly to one side or the other through the diplomatic, defense and legislative avenues, ultimately the U.S.-Taiwan relationship has remained stable even amid increased tension across the strait.

Incremental diplomatic steps

In November 2017, Taiwan became the third Asian partner to join the U.S. Global Entry Program, which allows mutual participation for Taiwan and U.S. passport holders in each side's trusted travel programs for expedited entry. This was a small, but important achievement that Taiwan had actively been pursuing since joining the Visa Waiver Program in 2013.¹⁵ Since July 2017, and as part of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) launched in June 2015, the U.S. de-facto embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), and Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) hosted several training courses on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, women entrepreneurs in tech, and

¹⁴ Chris Horton, "Airliners Have Become China's Newest Means of Pressuring Taiwan," *The New York Times*, 19 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/world/asia/china-taiwan-airliners.html>

¹⁵ "Taiwan Joins Global Entry," American Institute in Taiwan, *News & Events*, 26 October 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/taiwan-joins-global-entry/>

expanding digital inclusion.¹⁶ Furthermore, in November, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Assistant Administrator, Jane Nishida, partook in the Taiwan Environmental Engineering Conference, as part of the joint International Environment Partnership, which was launched by the U.S. EPA, Taiwan's EPA and MOFA in 2014.¹⁷ In June, at the 60th anniversary celebration of the Fulbright Program in Taiwan, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Laura Stone, who was herself a former Fulbright scholar, was in attendance and spoke publicly.¹⁸ Having a

sitting (or acting) deputy assistant secretary of state in Taiwan was an unusual occurrence and was likely a small, yet significant signal of support. By March 2018, Alex Wong, the newly appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, traveled to Taiwan and garnered much more attention than his predecessor by participating in an event with Tsai Ing-wen.¹⁹ These events indicate that certain aspects of the diplomatic relationship endured and even progressed in the Trump administration.

James Moriarty, Chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan, spoke on several different occasions in Washington, DC in fall 2017. In each case, he used similar language to the previous speeches given by officials during the Obama administration, underscoring Taiwan as "a vital and reliable partner in Asia."²⁰ Additionally, he outlined that cross-strait stability and Taiwan's security were critical components for regional security. Moriarty also reaffirmed U.S. support for Taiwan's expanded role in the international community and to properly defend itself through arms sales. However, he called on Taiwan to address and boost its current defense expenditures in order to complement American military

¹⁶ "Remarks by AIT Acting Director Robert Forden at the Global Cooperation and Training Framework Workshop," American Institute in Taiwan, *News & Events*, 4 December 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/remarks-ait-acting-director-robert-forden-global-cooperation-training-framework-workshop-bridging-digital-divide-asia-paci/>; "Opening Ceremony of Global Cooperation and Training Framework Workshop, "Building a Bright Future for Women Entrepreneurs in Tech," American Institute in Taiwan, *News & Events*, 14 November 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/opening-ceremony-global-cooperation-training-framework-workshop-building-bright-future-women-entrepreneurs-tech/>; "Remarks by AIT Director Kin Moy at the GCTF Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Workshop," American Institute in Taiwan, *News & Events*, 5 July 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/remarks-ait-director-kin-moy-global-cooperation-training-framework-humanitarian-assistance-disaster-relief-workshop/>

¹⁷ "AIT Deputy Director Robert Forden's remarks at Opening of the Taiwan Environmental Engineering Conference", American Institute in Taiwan, 8 November 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/remarks-ait-deputy-director-robert-forden-joint-opening-session-taiwan-environmental-protection-technology-exhibition-environment/>

¹⁸ David G. Brown and Kevin Scott, "China Increases Pressure, Tsai Holds the Line," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 19, No. 2, September 2017, <http://cc.csis.org/2017/09/china-increases-pressure-tsai-holds-line/>

¹⁹ Chris Horton, "In Taiwan, U.S. Official Says Commitment 'Has Never Been Stronger'," *The New York Times*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/world/asia/taiwan-china-alex-wong.html>

²⁰ "Remarks by AIT Chairman James Moriarty at Brookings Institution," American Institute in Taiwan, *News & Events*, 19 October 2017, <https://www.ait.org.tw/remarks-ait-chairman-james-moriarty-brookings-institution/>; Susan Thornton, "Taiwan: A Vital Partner in East Asia," Remarks at the Brookings Institution, 21 May 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/05/242705.htm>

support. Finally, following China's decision on the M-503 flight path, Brian Hook, State Department Policy Adviser to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, was the first Trump official to speak on the issue, stating that the U.S. was concerned that Taiwan wasn't consulted before the decision and opposed unilateral actions to alter the status quo.²¹ This subtle gesture assured Taiwan that the U.S. would not stand idly by if China unilaterally initiated slight actions across the Strait.

Military sales and reassurances

On June 29, 2017, the U.S. announced a \$1.4 billion arms sale package to Taiwan, the first for the Trump administration, which included torpedoes and missiles (and various accompanying components) as well as technical support for an early warning radar system.²² In the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's press release, it outlined the obligatory text that this sale "serves U.S. national, economic and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and enhance its defensive capabilities."²³ While such words are

unlikely to stop China from publicly expressing dissent, they help reiterate the U.S. commitment to support Taiwan's defense capabilities, and also signaling to Taiwan that it must put forth its own efforts to modernize its defense capacity.

In terms of defense official statements, U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis provided comments at the 2017 Shangri-La Security Dialogue in June, during which he reiterated that the U.S. "remains steadfastly committed to working with Taiwan and with its democratic government to provide it the defense articles necessary" and stands for "the peaceful resolution of any issues in a manner acceptable to the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait."²⁴ This was the first time a Secretary of Defense mentioned Taiwan in a Shangri-La Dialogue speech since 2013, and in previous statements, Taiwan was mentioned in the context of its relationship with China, whereas Secretary Mattis focused solely on U.S. support in this instance.²⁵

sales/taipei-economic-and-cultural-representative-office-tecro-united-states-mk-48-mod

²¹ Rita Cheng, Yeh Su-ping and Kuan-lin Liu, "U.S. opposes China's unilateral launch of new flight routes," *CNA*, 9 January 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201801090016.aspx>

²² Aria Bendix, "Trump Administration Approves Its First Arms Sale to Taiwan," *The Atlantic*, 29 June 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/06/trump-administration-approves-its-first-arms-sale-to-taiwan/532239/>

²³ "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in the United States - MK 48 Mod 6AT Heavyweight Torpedo (HWT)," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *News Release*, 29 June 2017, <http://www.dsca.mil/major-arms->

²⁴ James Mattis, "The United States and Asia-Pacific Security," Remarks at IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2017 First Plenary Session, 3 June 2017, <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri-la-dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2017-a321/plenary-1-6b79/mattis-8315>

²⁵ Chuck Hagel, "Secretary of Defense Speech," Remarks at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (Shangri-La Dialogue), 1 June 2013, <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1785>; Leon E. Panetta, "Secretary of Defense Speech," Remarks at Shanri-La Dialogue, 2 June 2012, <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1681>; Robert M. Gates, "Secretary of Defense Speech," Remarks at

Again, another small, but important signal. This statement was also a nod to Taiwan's democratic success as well, indicating that any cross-strait solution must be considered and accepted by the Taiwanese electorate. Furthermore, in a House Armed Services Committee hearing, PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris (who is slotted to become the U.S. Ambassador to Australia) reaffirmed this stance saying that the U.S. "must continue to help Taiwan defend itself," and then went one step further, warning China that Washington must "demonstrate U.S. resolve that any attempt by China to force reunification on the people of Taiwan is unacceptable."²⁶ In summary, U.S. military officials continue to signal America's commitments to support Taiwan in its drive to strengthen its own defensive posture against a potential mainland threat.

Resurgent congressional strides

Historically, the Congress has taken a more active role in U.S. policy supporting Taiwan, especially when it seems that executive support is lacking. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which underpins U.S.-Taiwan relations, is quintessential in how the Congress views itself as the

true guarantor of Taiwan. There have always been friends of Taiwan among the members of Congress, but in the last couple of years, several prominent senators and representatives have become increasingly vocal. Under the Trump administration, these voices have translated into several pieces of legislation, which have garnered attention despite lacking enforcement measures or changing the status quo.²⁷

Each year, the Congress must pass the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in order to fund the U.S. military. This one-thousand-plus page document contains mandatory expenditure and budget allocations, as well as various sections through which the Congress encourages or suggests certain actions to be taken by the Department of Defense. Especially in recent years, as passing bills has become more difficult in Washington's politically polarized environment, the NDAA has become a place to attach smaller, slightly more contentious issues, because passing the military's budget is deemed a congressional priority. For the 2018 NDAA, port calls in Taiwan became one of those issues. In July 2017, the House of Representatives passed language that required a report by the Department of Defense to assess "the feasibility and advisability regarding ports of call by the United States Navy at ports on the island of Taiwan" and the United States "receiving ports of call by the Republic of China navy in Hawaii, Guam,

the International Institute for Strategic Studies (Shanri-La—Asia Security), 5 June 2010, <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1483>

²⁶ "Statement of Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Pacific Command," House Armed Services Committee, 14 February 2018, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180214/106847/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-HarrisJrH-20180214.pdf>

²⁷ I am greatly indebted to Richard Bush for helping me understand the nuances of legislative language.

and other appropriate locations.”²⁸ The Senate bill upped the ante and required the Department of Defense to reestablish port calls and invite Taiwan to an American military exercise.²⁹ And yet, the final bill that was signed by President Trump weakened the language to a “sense of Congress,” meaning that the amendment merely encouraged the Department of Defense to consider reestablishing port calls between the two navies.³⁰ Prior to the final bill, it was reported that Cui Tiankai, China’s ambassador to the U.S., sent a letter to the House and Senate armed services and foreign relations committees’ leadership expressing the country’s discontent with the port call section (as well as other legislation that is discussed below).³¹ Language often shifts and can get watered down during the conference reconciliation process, through which House and Senate passed bills with different language are resolved for final legislation to be presented to the president. This means that it is difficult

²⁸ “H.R.2810 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018: Placed on Calendar Senate,” 115th Congress, 18 July 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text/pacs?#toc-H51126743253E48D790246E7EEB24BE99>

²⁹ “H.R.2810 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018: Printed as Passed,” 115th Congress, 18 September 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text/pap?>

³⁰ “H.R.2810 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018: Enrolled Bill,” 115th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text/enr?>

³¹ Josh Rogin, “China threatens U.S. Congress for crossing its redline’ on Taiwan,” *Washington Post*, 12 October 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/10/12/china-threatens-u-s-congress-for-crossing-its-red-line-on-taiwan/>

to know for certain whether or what role China’s interference may have played in this instance. But, ultimately, while the Congress aimed to send a signal to Beijing through stronger language on Taiwan, the NDAA stipulations on port calls proved to be a purely symbolic move.

The “Taiwan Travel Act” and the “Taiwan Security Act” are two other recent congressional bills that have made the rounds in Taiwanese media. The Taiwan Travel Act was signed into law by President Trump on March 16, 2018. Meanwhile, the Taiwan Security Act has been introduced in both the Senate and House but has not made any noticeable progress. The Taiwan Travel Act, introduced by Republican Steve Chabot from Ohio, is, again, a sense of Congress bill that encourages high-level official visits between Taiwan and the United States. The bill does not require the White House to send higher-profile officials to Taiwan, and such visits were already allowed and practiced, albeit always done so in a strategic manner. In 1992, George H.W. Bush sent Carla Hills, the U.S. Trade Representative, which was the first time a sitting cabinet-level official went to Taiwan. The Clinton and Obama administrations followed suit, but each president avoided sending a national security or defense official.³² The Taiwan Security Act explicitly directs the Defense Department to carry out senior military officer exchanges and invite Taiwan to

³² In 2000, President Clinton sent his transportation secretary, Rodney Slater, while President Obama sent Environmental Protection Agency administrator Gina McCarthy in 2014; Rebecca Shabad, “EPA chief’s Taiwan trip infuriates Beijing,” *The Hill*, 15 April 2014, <http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/203538-china-outraged-over-epa-chiefs-visit-to-taiwan>

participate in certain military exercises.³³ But again, this bill has not moved since its introduction by Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas. While recent legislation might not actually change U.S. policy, it holds a strong symbolic meaning that illustrates a resurgence of support towards Taiwan in Congress. Whether or not this change in sentiment comes from an anti-China perspective or from a pro-Taiwan stance, U.S. Senators and Representatives will likely continue to use the legislative process to push the executive on Taiwan.

What to look for next

As tension between the United States and China grows, the focus on Taiwan is likely to increase in Washington. While Taiwan has tried to stay out of the limelight in an effort to discourage the likelihood of becoming a bargaining chip within the U.S.-China relationship, certain upcoming events will inevitably bring the island to the forefront. In June 2018, the American Institute in Taiwan will open the doors of its new building complex in Taipei, originally announced in 2004, with a total cost estimate of \$300 million.³⁴ The time and expenses allocated for the new complex signal the U.S. commitment

to maintain its presence in Taiwan. The ribbon-cutting ceremony slotted for June 12 will provide an opportunity for the Trump administration to send its first high-level official to Taiwan. No matter the level or portfolio of the potential representative, China will certainly oppose such a visit. Nevertheless, the level and portfolio could also provide an indication of the amount of support and power that some of the more Taiwan-friendly officials yield within the American administration. If the Trump administration sends a national security official, it will signal that the U.S. is less risk-averse to China's opposition than under previous administrations.

In November 2018, both Taiwan and the United States will hold elections; Senate and House races for the United States and the 4-in-1 local elections in Taiwan. While both sets of elections do not necessarily reflect the overall national trends, they still have the opportunity to provide an indicator of where political parties stand in the lead up to the 2020 presidential elections. Moreover, both the Tsai and Trump administrations have recently shuffled key cabinet positions. President Tsai replaced the top positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, National Security Council and Mainland Affairs Council. Similarly, Donald Trump has plans to change his Secretary of State, National Security Advisor and CIA Director. These personnel shifts could impact U.S.-Taiwan relations, as Joseph Wu, Tsai's new Foreign Minister and close confidant, was Taiwan's representative to the U.S. under Chen Shui-bian, while John Bolton, the

³³ "S.1620 - Taiwan Security Act of 2017," 115th Congress, 24 July 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1620/text>

³⁴ "AIT and TECRO Sign Lease for New AIT Building Site in Neihu," American Institute in Taiwan, *Press Release*, 22 December 2004, <https://web-archive-2017.ait.org.tw/en/pressrelease-pr0458.html>; Kinling Lo, "Ex-diplomat confirms that US marine force will guard de facto embassy in Taipei," *South China Morning Post*, 17 February 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2071823/ex-diplomat-confirms-us-marine-force-will-guard-de>

incoming U.S. National Security Adviser, has publicly urged Trump to renegotiate the U.S. One China policy.³⁵

Tension in the U.S.-China relationship has led to a more bipartisan outlook on ways to confront China and its influencing campaigns, which have garnered more media attention in recent months. While foreign policy is usually a moot issue in midterm elections, certain members of Congress have taken tough stances against China and are likely to increase their support of Taiwan as leverage against the communist PRC. Therefore, legislation and congressional hearings that are critical of China and supportive of Taiwan could become more prevalent in the coming year. In the Tsai administration, a DPP success in the local elections would provide her greater flexibility in her potential 2020 reelection efforts. If the DPP performs poorly, either to a resurgent Kuomintang (KMT) or the growing, deeper green New Power Party, then Tsai might feel pressure to move away from her current cross-strait policies rooted in patience and practicality. And, any tension between Taipei and Beijing will undoubtedly get Washington involved. Despite off-hand comments or tweets by President Trump, the trend among high-ranking administration officials shows that Washington does not have any plans for a grand bargain or to abandon Taiwan. It is hard to determine

whether President Trump has an actual strategy for Taiwan or whether he is simply responding to unfolding events and developments. And with the recent personnel changes in the administration, a genuine U.S. strategy on Taiwan might still be a distant possibility. But, there are people within the U.S. government, be it in the diplomatic core, military or Congress, who will continue to support Taiwan. In the coming year, it is likely that the U.S. relationship will be tested, either from Beijing's actions or domestic political issues within both states. Nevertheless, key officials in Washington and Taipei must continue to find ways to incrementally strengthen their ties and especially in a manner that can provide real benefits to their citizens. The hard part will be implementing these policies amidst the growing influence of Beijing; this will require steadfast resolve in the American commitment to Taiwan.

³⁵ Natalie Johnson, "Former Ambassador John Bolton: Trump Needs to Renegotiate 'One China' Policy," *The Washington Free Beacon*, 27 February 2017, <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/john-bolton-to-trump-renegotiate-one-china-policy/>