

Should the United States Abandon Taiwan?

Is it time for the United States to rethink its Taiwan policy and walk away from Taiwan? Prominent Americans in influential publications insist that it is.¹ The argument is not unprecedented. In a long and often discordant history of dealings between Washington and Taipei, there have been repeated calls for severing this uncomfortable and dangerous relationship. Taiwan has been characterized as a strategic liability, an expensive diversion, and most often, an obstacle to more important U.S.–China relations. In the past, a prosperous, strong, and self-confident United States chose to ignore such calls. Today, however, China is rapidly becoming more powerful, and many fear the United States teeters on the brink of decline. Is U.S. support for Taiwan about to end? Would it be a good idea?

Taiwan remains the single issue which could spark war between the United States and the People's Republic of China, a war that might quickly go nuclear but would be devastating even were it to remain conventional. Apart from being a potential trigger for war, Taiwan impedes improvement in U.S.–China relations because of suspicion and mistrust. Beijing firmly believes that Washington seeks to keep the PRC weak and divided to obstruct China's rise. Meanwhile, Americans are adamant that resolution of the cross-Straits impasse happen peacefully and with the assent of the people of Taiwan, although the United States is uncommitted to any specific resolution.

Nancy Bernkopf Tucker is Professor of History at Georgetown University and at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. She also is a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the author of *Strait Talk*. Bonnie Glaser is a Senior Fellow with the Freeman Chair in China Studies at CSIS and also a Senior Associate with the CSIS Pacific Forum.

Copyright © 2011 Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Washington Quarterly • 34:4 pp. 23–37
DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2011.609128

Taiwan remains the single issue which could spark war between the U.S. and China.

China, therefore, is the most critical variable in determining future U.S. policy toward Taiwan. There will occasionally be times when U.S. officials are angered by Taiwan's policies or distracted by crises at home and abroad. But if anyone in the U.S. government thinks about severing ties with Taiwan, or significantly reducing them, it is because of China. Diplomats, statesmen, and

politicians in and out of government—as well as businessmen, scholars, and the military—agree that good relations with the PRC will be vital in the new Pacific century. The big questions are whether sacrificing Taiwan would improve those relations, whether conditions are ripe for such a determination, and in what ways a change would affect other U.S. interests, including American friends and allies in the region. Careful examination of these variables leads us to conclude that the United States should neither abandon nor reduce its commitments to Taiwan, but strengthen them.

What Would Sacrificing Taiwan Gain?

Would abandoning or reducing support for Taiwan secure smoother U.S.–China relations? Those in China and the United States who call for a change in Taiwan policy insist there would be significant benefits. The decision by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger to trade Taiwan for normalization with Beijing facilitated a momentous improvement in U.S.–China relations, setting a powerful precedent.² To choose China over Taiwan once again, it is asserted, could help Washington resolve differences with China over maritime rights, nuclear proliferation, cyber security, and the uses of space. This line of thinking argues that even issues not directly connected with Taiwan policy could be easier to reconcile if what China deems a core interest were satisfied.

Beyond breaking the U.S.–Taiwan bond, Beijing has denied any desire to push the United States out of Asia. It has reaffirmed Deng Xiaoping's injunction to “hide its light and bide its time, while getting something accomplished” (*taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei*).³ It has repeatedly put development and peace first. However, China's superior economic performance during the recession, surging global trade and investments, and developing military might led Beijing during 2010 to implement a series of assertive initiatives which caused widespread anxiety in its neighborhood and internationally. As China's power grows, its allegiance to Deng's maxim becomes more dated and stale.

A decision to jettison Taiwan, or even cut back significantly on U.S. support, would prove to an increasingly confident China that Washington has become

weak, vacillating, and unreliable. The 2009 U.S.–China Joint Statement reflected Beijing’s estimate that Washington could be intimidated or misled, as it juxtaposed a reference to Taiwan as a Chinese core interest with concurrence that “the two sides agreed that respecting each other’s core interests is extremely important to ensure steady progress in U.S.–China relations.”⁴ Analysts who argue that Washington can safely appease Beijing because “territorial concessions are not *always* bound to fail” are, without evidence, assuming improbably modest Chinese objectives (emphasis added).⁵

Relying on the sacrifice of Taiwan to fulfill Chinese ambitions ignores more than intentions, it also overlooks internal dynamics in China. Beijing confronts constant domestic turmoil. Corruption, income inequality, and environmental degradation have tarnished the accomplishments of the government and party. Fears among the leadership concerning mounting social unrest, spurred by the Jasmine Revolutions in the Middle East, produced harsh restrictions of the media and the Internet along with the imprisonment of artists, underground church members, protesting peasants, lawyers, and human rights activists. Regaining Taiwan is unlikely to provide a broad and enduring balance to internal unhappiness.

Beijing also confronts militant nationalism which, though fostered by the government, is still difficult to control. Any suspicion that authorities are not adequately safeguarding Chinese interests and securing international respect could threaten regime stability. Accordingly, a U.S. sacrifice of Taiwan, while gratifying, could not thoroughly slake a continuing need for Beijing to demonstrate its power. Indeed, the sacrifice might promote new appetites and necessitate fresh efforts to satisfy that need.

Accommodating China’s demands on Taiwan, moreover, would not necessarily cause Beijing to be more pliable on other matters of importance to the United States. Beijing’s positions on issues such as Korea and Iran are shaped by China’s national interests and are not taken as favors to Washington. Beijing’s determination to preserve stability in its close neighbor and ally North Korea would continue to prevent China from increasing pressure on Pyongyang to give up nuclear weapons. Resolving China’s Taiwan problem would also not mean greater cooperation in preventing Iran from going nuclear given Beijing’s almost universal opposition to muscular sanctions, its growing energy needs, and desire to promote Chinese influence in the Middle East.

Risks of Appeasement over Taiwan

At the same time, Barack Obama and his administration would incur serious costs should they seek to fix U.S.–China relations by walking away from Taiwan. The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979 and Ronald Reagan’s Six Assurances

of 1982 created a framework for Washington–Taipei interaction after the United States withdrew diplomatic recognition in 1979.⁶ Although neither measure involved a legally binding expectation that Washington come to Taiwan’s rescue—particularly if it requires the use of force—they do provide for the supply of defensive weapons and maintaining a U.S. capability in the region to help Taiwan. They have prevented successive administrations from pressuring Taiwan into cross-Strait negotiations or undertaking mediation, lest Washington become responsible for implementing agreements and managing the consequences of failure.

Various U.S. interests support continuing arms sales to, and close economic relations with, an autonomous Taiwan. For instance, the U.S. defense industry profits from, and so encourages, Taiwan’s weapons procurement. Diplomats, the Pentagon, scholars, and other analysts have argued that arms sales help Taiwan defend itself, strengthen morale among Taiwan’s population, deter Beijing, insure Taipei has the confidence to negotiate with China, and that—if talks go wrong—Taiwan could fight until U.S. forces arrived. Weapons manufacturers also focus on the money and the jobs to be had for Americans.

F-16 fighter aircraft illustrate the critical significance of defense contractors in sustaining the Taiwan relationship. George H. W. Bush, ignoring commitments to Beijing as well as objections from within his administration, decided to sell 150 fighters to Taipei during the 1992 presidential election campaign, hoping to insure re-election by providing a \$4 billion contract and 5,800 jobs to General Dynamics’ operations in Texas.⁷ In 2011, a bipartisan group of 45 U.S. senators advocating new F-16 sales and upgrades of existing aircraft not only warned President Obama that Taiwan would be forced to ground some 70 percent of its fighters by 2020 without U.S. action, but that Lockheed Martin’s F-16 production line would shut down without orders for Taiwan. Industry analysts estimate this would mean the loss of some 11,000 jobs in 43 states.⁸

Another side to U.S. abandonment of Taiwan is the trajectory of events that would follow such a momentous alteration of U.S. policy. Would it help or hurt U.S. interests that Taiwan, almost certainly, would not be able to sustain its de facto independence, and would be compelled, in some form, to accommodate China’s unification agenda? That alone could be profoundly disturbing to American liberals as well as conservatives for whom Taiwan’s vibrant democracy has appeared to be a vanguard for political development in Asia.

China has promised it would not station forces on Taiwan, use the island to project power into the Pacific, interfere with critical commercial and military sea lanes, or control Taiwan’s affairs apart from foreign and military relations. It has pledged to facilitate Taiwan’s presence in international organizations and be generous in multiplying and deepening economic ties. But as the application of China’s “one country, two systems” formula in Hong Kong has demonstrated,

nurturing democratic institutions under a communist umbrella is all but impossible. So if China were to be perceived as coercive, unreasonable, or unjust, Taiwan's fate would undermine U.S.–China relations, nullifying the original purpose of abandonment.

Taiwan's Weakening U.S. Support

If Washington decided to abandon Taiwan, it would have to begin by undoing the basic building blocks of the existing U.S.–Taiwan relationship. Rescinding Reagan's informal assurances would be awkward, but altering the TRA would require congressional action and spur a major debate on China policy. This debate is just what a wide spectrum of prominent Americans claim to want. But these same people believe they already have the answer: that Washington's involvement with Taiwan is frivolous, that arms sales should end, and that the TRA should be repealed.

Former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Bill Owens, for instance, told readers of the *Financial Times* in 2009 that the TRA has become “outdated” and that the entire U.S. approach to the PRC requires rethinking. “The solution,” Owens insisted, “is to approach the U.S.–China relationship not with hedging, competition or watchfulness, but with co-operation, openness and trust.”⁹ Similarly, Admiral Joseph Prueher, former ambassador to China and commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, along with members of a study group at the Miller Center of the University of Virginia, observed that “Our involvement with Taiwan is a frequent point of contention with the Chinese, particularly in respect to arms sales, and one that should be re-examined.”¹⁰ As Charles Glaser added in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*, “the United States should consider backing away from its commitment to Taiwan. This would remove the most obvious and contentious flash point between the United States and China and smooth the way for better relations between them in the decades to come.”¹¹

Developments in the United States in recent years have weakened wider support for Taiwan.

These scholars and former officials are not alone. It is clear that, although Taiwan's dependence on the United States has not diminished, developments in the United States in recent years have weakened wider support for Taiwan. The United States is mired in a stumbling economy and multiple disastrous wars. As much as international problems demand Washington's attention, it is job

creation and economic recovery that take primacy with the American people. The United States is riven by a fierce partisanship which preempts efforts to look ahead and plan for America's changing global role. The 2012 presidential election already dominates politicians and the media, meaning that Taiwan issues short of violence will not attract much attention. If China becomes a campaign question, the focus will be economics, not Taiwan.

Even when the citizenry does consider more than pocketbook issues, it is consumed by debates over bringing U.S. soldiers home, minimizing further overseas commitments, and vanquishing terrorism. There is little energy or interest left for Asia, a region that apart from the Korean peninsula is not currently in turmoil—the Japan earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster have not placed major political or military demands on Washington. Barack Obama entered the White House with personal ties to Asia and the recognition that the 21st century will be a Pacific century. But competing demands on the White House have lessened Asia's immediacy.

The U.S. Congress, once a loud advocate for Taiwan, has become much less voluble.

Tellingly, the U.S. Congress, which was once a loud advocate of support for Taiwan, has become much less voluble. Capitol Hill rarely celebrates Taiwan as a doughty survivor of the Cold War anymore. Old friends, unhappy that Taiwan has sought to improve relations with China, have soured toward Taipei. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), for instance,

although a founder in 2002 of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus, resigned as co-chair in 2009, lamenting Taiwan's decision to cooperate with Beijing, rather than oppose the repressive regime.¹²

The waning of congressional attention to, and enthusiasm for, Taiwan has taken place gradually as memories of China's 1989 Tiananmen massacre have faded, the PRC's economic links to the United States boomed, and Taiwan's presence on Capitol Hill ebbed. More than 20 years after Tiananmen, the horror has dissipated, and many Americans think of Tiananmen Square only as a tourist destination. China's military modernization, its burgeoning international role, and its enormous economic power command attention and respect. Concurrently, the boost that Tiananmen and U.S. disillusionment with China gave to Taiwan has also diminished. In fact, the very democracy that is Taiwan's strongest bond with the United States has meant that Taiwan's goals and interests are no longer articulated by a single voice, and are not clear to busy members of Congress. Instead, multiple organizations—governmental and non-governmental—render different and conflicting claims on U.S. friendship and support.¹³

Ironically, Taiwan has also suffered because of its improved relations with the executive branch of the U.S. government. After 1996, the Clinton administration struck a bargain with Taipei: if it would stop seeking to overturn administration policies by mobilizing the Congress, the executive branch would be more accessible and responsive. Initially a clever and productive strategy, it had unforeseen consequences as Taiwan's lobbying decreased and Taiwan's legendary clout—second only to the Israel lobby—dwindled. Nevertheless, although influential members like Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) oppose arms sales to Taiwan, others such as Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) object to ending those same sales and abandoning Taiwan.

To alter Taiwan policy, the Obama administration would have to confront congressional Taiwan caucuses comprising 29 senators and 145 representatives. The House has affirmed that the TRA remains “the cornerstone of U.S. relations with Taiwan,” and 30 senators reminded Obama that “Taiwan is one of our strongest allies in Asia.”¹⁴ Anticipating the January 2011 visit of China's President Hu Jintao to Washington, members told President Obama that since Taiwan is “a strong democracy, a close trading partner, and an historic ally,” he should make clear to Beijing that “the United States will support Taiwan's security, and continue to provide Taiwan with defensive arms.”¹⁵

More concretely, hearings held in June 2011, for the first time in seven years, by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on “Why Taiwan Matters” may mean revived activism. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), committee chairwoman, has promised to introduce legislation to enhance the TRA, reviving elements of the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act that Congress did not pass in the 1990s. A cluttered congressional schedule, the upcoming presidential election, and the absence of intense congressional concern make passage of such initiatives unlikely.

Has the Time Come?

However difficult it would be to jettison Taiwan, and however uncertain the ultimate benefits might be, there are those who argue that changing conditions in Asia require new policies. Among them are critics of improving trends in cross-Strait relations and those who, happy or not about those trends, believe closer cross-Strait ties make unification inevitable.¹⁶ They are joined by those who deem Taiwan's government derelict in self-defense, and Taiwan's people weak-willed and self-indulgent. Others who thought that normalization with China in the 1970s would have long since eliminated an autonomous Taiwan are relieved that the end is finally in sight. There are even some who argue, conversely, that U.S. support would, and should, erode, were cross-Strait reconciliation to stall.

The changes motivating critics have been noteworthy. China–Taiwan negotiations since 2008 have yielded more than a dozen agreements covering a broad spectrum of economic issues. Most important has been the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) that cut tariffs, while boosting trade, and might facilitate commercial agreements with other states. This rapid economic integration of Taiwan and China has had potentially threatening strategic and political dimensions. Taiwan’s President Ma Ying-jeou, for example, has pursued cross-Strait cooperation with energy and determination, neglecting competing priorities such as defense, domestic development, and relations with the United States. U.S. officials have expressed irritation at the Ma administration’s lack of transparency and candor on issues like ECFA. To skeptics, it is Taiwan that has abandoned the United States, not Washington giving up on Taipei.

Ma has failed to meet the goals he set for Taiwan’s defense, whether the reason be to protect cross-Strait talks, economic necessity, or local politics. His defense budget has repeatedly fallen short of the three percent of GDP he pledged in 2008, and actual spending has dropped. U.S. officials have privately questioned Taiwan’s

commitment to self-defense. Some believe Ma doesn’t really want to buy large orders of expensive equipment, even though he has regularly asked that sales be made. Most complain that Taiwan’s government and people are complacent about the threat of a Chinese attack, count too much on a U.S. rescue, and seek weapons sales for political symbolism not security.

Although the trajectory for cross-Strait relations is promising, there are reasons to worry.

Avoiding conflict with China if cross-Strait relations sour would be a significant

incentive to abandon Taiwan. Although the trajectory for relations looks promising, there are reasons to worry. The PLA’s capabilities to coerce, attack, and even invade Taiwan have made vast strides. Since Ma assumed the presidency in 2008, China’s missile deployments opposite Taiwan, for example, have increased to more than 1,500 despite his calls to remove them. The U.S. Defense Department reported to Congress in 2010: “The PLA is developing the capability to deter Taiwan independence or influence Taiwan to settle the dispute on Beijing’s terms while simultaneously attempting to deter, delay, or deny any possible U.S. support for the island in case of conflict. The balance of cross-Strait military forces continues to shift in the mainland’s favor.”¹⁷ U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates specified in June 2011 that China persists in preparing for a Taiwan contingency, and is developing anti-access as well as area-denial capabilities to deter U.S. intervention, including accurate long-range

cruise and ballistic anti-ship missiles, stealth aircraft, and cyber and anti-satellite capabilities.¹⁸

Although China's leverage over Taiwan has certainly increased, it would be wrong to conclude that all initiatives originate with Beijing, and that China has prevailed whenever there have been differences. In fact, Taiwan has come out ahead on many fronts. The "early harvest" tariff cuts in the ECFA that went into effect in January 2011 are weighted in favor of Taiwan. Taipei drove a hard bargain and gained agreement on eliminating tariffs over three years on 539 Taiwanese products going to the mainland (valued at \$13.84 billion), but cutting tariffs on just 267 Chinese items sold to Taiwan (valued at \$2.86 billion). Then, it increased its advantage to 557 export items at the point of implementation.¹⁹ Further, Beijing acquiesced in conducting the negotiations despite Ma's explicit depiction of ECFA as a springboard for signing free-trade accords with other countries.

Since the conclusion of ECFA, Taipei has launched talks with Singapore aimed at reaching a free-trade type agreement that could be the first of many which would help Taiwan to diversify its economic relationships and break through its isolation from regional trade liberalization. Under Ma's rule, Taiwan has also achieved a tacit diplomatic truce with the mainland, meaning none of the 23 states that have formal relations with Taipei have switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing. In fact, Beijing has reportedly rejected pleas from Panama and Paraguay to establish diplomatic ties in order to avoid harming Ma's domestic reputation and re-election prospects. Taiwan has also succeeded in becoming a full member or observer of eight international governmental organizations and two international NGOs during Ma's tenure. China remains wary that Taiwan could use its expanded international space to promote its sovereignty and the existence of two Chinas in the international community, but it dares not block Ma from making progress on this crucial pledge to Taiwan voters. Ma's policy of mutual nondenial—each side not repudiating the jurisdiction of the other—has also gained traction.

Of even greater salience, Taiwan has successfully controlled the content and pace of cross-Strait negotiations. Beijing is eager to move past economic agreements and begin discussions of political questions so that it can accelerate unification, but Taipei has so far refused. Instead, cross-Strait discussions have been guided by Ma's principles of beginning with easy issues and gradually progressing to harder ones, tackling economic problems before discussing more sensitive political and military differences.

Finally, abandoning Taiwan at a time when its economy is soaring—GDP growth was almost 11 percent in 2010—and its trade and investment ties to the United States are expanding would appear to be a bad idea. Taiwan is the ninth largest trading partner of the United States, and the United States is Taiwan's

third largest, with two-way trade rising 32 percent in 2010.²⁰ The United States is the largest foreign investor in Taiwan. The IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook for 2011 ranked Taiwan sixth overall.²¹ According to the U.S.–Taiwan Business Council, an estimated 70 percent of technology exports from China actually come from Taiwan-invested companies. Taipei, moreover, has cut corporate tax rates from 25 to 17 percent to induce U.S. companies to set up shop in Taiwan.²² Quality-of-life issues also make Taiwan an important base for U.S. Asian operations, with social stability, good schools, and a growing network of rapid and smooth transportation links. Particularly at a time when the U.S. economy remains in the doldrums, the United States should not impede access to economic opportunities in Taiwan.

U.S. Friends and Allies

Washington's long-term support for Taiwan also has significance for U.S. allies and friends. Asian countries which look to the United States to balance China's rising power may not want Washington to squander resources and energy on Taiwan, but were it to conversely ignore Taiwan's security, they would see their own safety threatened. U.S. credibility, therefore, is at stake. U.S. inconstancy

A U.S. decision to abandon Taiwan would be particularly alarming to Japan.

could convince American allies and friends to rely less on Washington, undertake an arms race, and/or bandwagon with China. After the Clinton administration dispatched two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area around Taiwan in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the region's confidence in the United States soared and a wave of counterbalancing against China occurred. Japan, Singapore, the

Philippines, and other nations all bolstered their security ties with the United States.

Forsaking Taiwan would likely have the opposite effect. A U.S. decision to abandon Taiwan—leading to unification of an unwilling Taiwan with China—would be particularly alarming to Japan. Tension between China and Japan remains high, and the resolution of chronic economic, security, and history problems in the foreseeable future appears unlikely. Dependent on sea lanes of supply and communication which pass close to Taiwan, Tokyo would consider itself to be more vulnerable, and it would be. Japan would also be outflanked should China decide to use Taiwan as a military platform. Contested claims to oil fields and islands in the East and South China Seas would be more difficult to defend. If Japan began to doubt U.S. reliability, that could deal a fatal blow to

the U.S.–Japan alliance. Moreover, adding to Japan’s dismay, South Korea, increasingly reliant on its burgeoning economic ties with China, might calculate that if the United States can sever ties to Taiwan, Seoul could be safer renouncing its security alliance with Washington and aligning with Beijing.

The current urge to seek protection against a potentially powerful and abusive China has made the United States more welcome across Southeast Asia. Aware that they cannot effectively hedge against China without U.S. collaboration, Southeast Asian nations have quietly repaired rifts and reinvigorated cooperation with Washington. They welcomed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s declaration in Thailand in 2009 that “the United States is back” in Asia. Although they don’t share Tokyo’s view of Taiwan’s geostrategic importance, they do worry about freedom of navigation and resource claims in the South China Sea. They would likely interpret a shift in U.S. policy away from Taiwan as a signal of U.S. surrender to Chinese interests, and eventually follow suit.

Maintain, and Improve, Taiwan Ties

In the 1940s, a vicious debate over losing China tore at the fabric of U.S. politics. Although China had never been America’s to lose, diplomats, scholars, and politicians involved in U.S.–China relations suffered. Neither they nor their attackers could have imagined a time when prominent Americans would publicly advocate giving away the Republic of China on Taiwan.

So should and will the United States abandon Taiwan? To date, Washington has not decided to jettison Taiwan. And it should not. However frightening or seductive China is, appeasing it by sacrificing Taiwan would not be good policy. Doing so might simplify and improve U.S.–China relations, but only temporarily. China would respond to appeasement as have virtually all governments: it would conclude that a weaker United States lacking vision and ambition could be pressured and manipulated. Both friends and rivals regionally and globally would decide that the United States was not to be trusted.

But, if the United States will not sever ties, should it nevertheless reduce its commitments to Taiwan? For example, should the United States curtail or forego arms sales? This might appear a compromise, avoiding both a sharp break and the maintenance of a difficult status quo. The problem is that such an approach would have largely the same consequences as abandonment: Beijing would still see it as a demonstration of weakness, and would seek to take advantage. Ending arms sales while pledging to defend Taiwan should China launch an unprovoked attack, as some have suggested, is unworkable because Taiwan would soon lack the capability to hold out until U.S. forces arrive.²³ Alternatively, selling arms,

but making clear that the United States would not intervene, would undermine deterrence since China knows it can overwhelm Taiwan's limited capability.

There is no doubt that the American people are tired of risk, war, and foreigners with problems, but they also believe in democracy and freedom. The United States played a pivotal role in building Taiwan's democratic system, celebrating it as a role model for Asia in general and China in particular. China may be economically capitalist as much as communist, but politically it remains a communist autocracy. Its people are denied human rights, political participation, and free expression. The contrast is stark, and the need for the United States to remain engaged with Taiwan is clear, but this is not enough. Talk of the United States abandoning Taiwan has to be staunchly opposed before it undermines morale in Taiwan and respect for laws and commitments in the United States.

The Obama administration should stop equivocating and move forward with arms sales. There will never be a good time to sell weapons to Taiwan. Diplomacy with China as well as congressional routines and requirements invariably intervene—what former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Randall Schriver has called “the tyranny of the calendar.” Upgrading existing aircraft would be welcome, but Taiwan's aging and shrinking air force also needs new planes. Were the United States to wait and the F-16 C/D production line to close, Taiwan would have no other source. Washington might well be faced with the complicated dilemma of whether to sell even more advanced F-35s. Washington ought to reassert its longstanding position to Beijing that sales do not promote Taiwan's separation from the mainland but, in the current phase of cross-strait relations, create an environment for improved China–Taiwan relations.

Indeed, in the past two years, the United States has sold almost \$13 billion in weapons to Taiwan, and cross-strait relations are in the best shape in decades. In the absence of U.S. backing, Taipei would likely be too insecure and Taiwan's leaders too vulnerable politically to negotiate with China. Arms sales, therefore, facilitate cross-strait compromise and should not be anathema to Beijing. The United States should also accelerate dialogue with Taipei to promote increased U.S.–Taiwan trade, reduce Taiwan's growing isolation from regional and global trading blocks, and prevent yet more dependence on China. Refusing to talk about a broad range of economic issues through the only available dispute settlement mechanism, the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), because of minor, if politically thorny, problems like U.S. beef exports to Taiwan is a mistake. And progress should be made on commonplace but important requests from Taipei to join the U.S. visa waiver program and conclude a bilateral extradition agreement.

Higher-level contact between U.S. and Taiwan officials ought to occur routinely. Even if presidential meetings are not possible, dialogue between leaders should be facilitated by video conferences and regular correspondence. Cabinet-level visits to Taiwan, five of which occurred during the Clinton administration alone, could quickly be resumed. The prolonged and ill-considered hiatus in those visits during the George W. Bush and early Obama years is self-defeating. Such trips are important symbolically, but they also improve communication and raise awareness of common interests. Taiwan's representatives also should be granted better access to U.S. officials in Washington and not be barred from buildings such as the Department of State. There is no formal agreement that requires such restrictions; they are entirely self-imposed.

Washington cannot sustain the U.S.–Taiwan relationship unilaterally. Taipei has to assign priority to strengthening ties with Washington, even as it improves relations with Beijing. This will require tackling difficult domestic political obstacles in Taiwan and should be a bipartisan endeavor. It will be increasingly important to conduct relations in an environment of trust and candor.

There are risks to a strategy which strengthens rather than abandons U.S. ties to Taiwan. If Washington continues to support Taiwan, it must simultaneously find ways to convince Beijing that the United States does not seek to prevent an accommodation between Taiwan and China. The United States does not secretly promote independence or block progress in cross-Strait relations. Rather, U.S. policy aims at sustaining peaceful conditions in which Taiwan and China can reach a long-term *modus vivendi* by themselves.

Although the Six Assurances and the Taiwan Relations Act attempted to keep the focus of U.S.–Taiwan relations on the United States and Taiwan, China has always been a critical variable and its importance is growing. But those who worry that Taiwan policy will set back U.S.–China relations ought instead to persuade China that, in the absence of U.S. support, Taipei would likely lose confidence and put negotiations with the mainland on hold. An abandoned and isolated Taiwan might, in desperation, declare independence or even revive efforts to produce nuclear weapons, not pursue unification as Beijing assumes. So, in fact, U.S. support is not harmful, but helpful to China's interests.

The course of cross-Strait relations does not lead inexorably in any one direction. Taiwan's options remain open. The United States wants Taiwan stable, peaceful, and democratic for the people of Taiwan, as a model to others in East Asia, and as assurance of U.S. credibility and dependability. The United

Arms sales facilitate cross-Strait compromise.

States should not abandon its principled dedication to freedom of choice, but should strengthen it.

Notes

1. Bill Owens, "America must start treating China as a friend," *Financial Times*, November 17, 2009, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/69241506-d3b2-11de-8caf-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1RXebUtOH>; "A Way Ahead with China," Miller Center for Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 2011; Charles Glaser, "Will China's Rise Lead to War?: Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011); Bruce Gilley, "Not So Dire Straits," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (January/February 2010): pp. 44–60, with responses by Vance Chang, "Taipei Is Not Helsinki" and Hans Mouritzen, "The Difficult Art of Finlandization," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (May/June 2010): pp. 128–133, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66403/vance-chang-hans-mouritzen-and-bruce-gilley/to-the-finland-station?page=show>.
2. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "Taiwan Expendable? Nixon and Kissinger Go to China," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005): pp. 109–135.
3. Dai Bingguo, "Stick to the Path of Peaceful Development," *Beijing Review*, no. 51, December 23, 2010, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2010-12/27/content_320120.htm.
4. "U.S.-China Joint Statement," Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, November 17, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>.
5. Glaser, "Will China's Rise Lead to War?" pp. 87–88.
6. "Taiwan Relations Act," Public Law 96-8, 96th Congress, January 1, 1979, <http://www.ait.org.tw/en/taiwan-relations-act.html>. There are several versions of the Six Assurances. For the most accurate, see <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2007/10/president-reagans-six-assurances-to-taiwan-and-their-meaning-today>.
7. On the F-16 issue in 1992, see Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 181–192.
8. Senator Robert Menendez, Letter to President Obama, May 26, 2011, <http://menendez.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=07c1ba2e-c59d-4fff-b14d-1d6834b3a19d>; Bob Cox, "For Lockheed Martin's F16, a dwindling list of likely buyers," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 29, 2011, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/05/29/114949/for-lockheed-martins-f16-a-dwindling.html>.
9. Owens, "America must start treating China as a friend."
10. "A Way Ahead with China." Others among the signatories were Admiral Timothy J. Keating (USN, ret.), former Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, and James Shinn, former National Intelligence Officer for East Asia and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs.
11. Glaser, "Will China's Rise Lead to War?" pp. 80–91.
12. Nadia Tsao, "Rohrabacher to leave Taiwan Caucus position," *Taipei Times*, March 15, 2009, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2009/03/15/2003438534>.
13. Kerry Dumbaugh, "Underlying Strains in Taiwan-U.S. Political Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, renewed RL33684, April 20, 2007, pp. 17–19, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33684.pdf>.
14. Senator James M. Inhofe, Letter to President Obama, March 30, 2009, http://inhofe.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressRoom.JimsJournal&ContentRecord_id=58cacfb0-802a-23ad-4d53-3424fdcf0393&Region_id=&Issue_id=

15. Josh Rogin, "Senate Taiwan Caucus resurfaces in time for Hu visit," *ForeignPolicy.com*, January 14, 2011, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/14/senate_taiwan_caucus_resurfaces_in_time_for_hu_visit.
16. Robert Sutter, "Taiwan's Future: Narrowing Straits," National Bureau of Asian Research Analysis, May 2011; Gilley, "Not So Dire Straits."
17. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C., 2010), p. I, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf.
18. "Media Availability with Secretary Gates en route to Singapore," June 2, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4830>.
19. "ECFA 'early harvest' list tariff cuts come into effect," *Taipei Times*, January 2, 2011, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2011/01/02/2003492456>.
20. "Top U.S. Trade Partners," International Trade Administration, http://www.trade.gov/mas/ian/build/groups/public/@tg_ian/documents/webcontent/tg_ian_003364.pdf.
21. "The World Competitive Scoreboard 2011," IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook 2011, <http://www.imd.org/research/publications/wcy/upload/scoreboard.pdf>.
22. "Taiwan Profile—Economy and Trade," U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, <http://www.us-taiwan.org/taiwan.html>; "2011 Taiwan White Paper," American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, May 2011, p. 70, http://www.amcham.com.tw/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=813&Itemid=377.
23. Charles Glaser, "Disengaging From Taiwan: Should Washington Continue Its Alliance With Taipei?—Glaser Replies," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011): p. 182.