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## ANALYZING BIDEN'S APPROACH TO TAIWAN: PATTERNS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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*The study examines the US policy stance towards Taiwan during the Biden administration. By studying the broad contours of the policy, the article examines patterns of continuity or change in the policy of successive US administrations towards Taiwan. Within this context, the study analyzes how Taiwan has configured the US-China and cross-strait relations. Furthermore, given the disputed status of Taiwan, the study seeks to determine the prospects for stability or instability in the Asia-Pacific region. Incorporating structural realism as a theoretical framework, the article adopts a qualitative research methodology, using content analysis as a research tool. It employs primary and secondary data using archival research. Rhetorical euphoria has made Taipei a flashpoint in increasing US-China hostilities. The article argues that the US and China ignore the 'peaceful resolution' of the Taiwan dispute entailed in their historic agreements. The Shanghai Communiqué (1972), the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) and the Six Assurances in the U.S-China Joint Communiqué (1982) all laid emphasis on Taiwan's peaceful unification. Contrarily, Taipei's greater international integration, diplomatic and military protocol, and initiatives like the Taiwan Policy Act have revitalized Taiwan in Biden's Indo-Pacific security agenda. The US Taiwan Policy Act has alarmingly replaced 'minimum defense' with 'asymmetric deterrence' in order to defend Taiwan.*

**Keywords:** *US Taiwan policy, Sino-US rivalry, Asia-Pacific security, policy continuity.*

### **1. Introduction**

This study examines Biden's policy stance on Taiwan, including an overview of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. In reviewing Biden's approach, the article seeks to determine the patterns of continuity or change in the policies of successive US administrations towards Taiwan. Within this context, the study explores the prospects for stability in the Indo-Pacific region, given the Sino-US rivalry over Taiwan. The article explores how the disputed status of Taiwan has been configured in US-China rivalry and cross-strait relations. Incorporating structural neo-realism as a theoretical framework, the article

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employs qualitative research methodology, using content analysis as a research tool for data analysis.

Analyzing the latest developments in the Taiwan Strait, the article argues that rhetorical euphoria has made Taipei a flashpoint in increasing US-China hostilities. The article further argues that the United States and China have tended to ignore the 'peaceful resolution' of the dispute as entailed in their historic agreements. The Shanghai Communiqué (1972), the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) and the Six Assurances in the U.S-China Joint Communiqué (1982) (Office of the Historian 1972a, 1972b; Zablocki 1979). All laid emphasis on Taiwan's 'peaceful unification' with the mainland. In contrast, this study argues that Taipei's greater international integration, diplomatic and military protocol, and initiatives like the Taiwan Policy Act have revitalized Taiwan in Biden's Indo-Pacific security agenda. Furthermore, the Taiwan Policy Act is a clearer reflection of broader US security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The Taiwan Policy Act represents a rapid shift from America's previous commitment to 'minimum defense' to the new 'asymmetric deterrence' to defend Taiwan.

The study employs the theoretical perspective of neo-realism to reflect on Taiwan's bandwagoning behavior in cross-strait relations. Bandwagoning refers to the reliance of a weaker state, such as Taiwan, on the dominant power, the US, to counterbalance the assertiveness of a stronger regional power, such as China. Taipei relies on 'the US's trustworthy and valuable commitment of support' to defend Taiwan. As the dominant power in the strategic equation, the US maintains the order of stability by minimizing the chances of conflict in cross-strait relations. However, bandwagoning tends to draw Taiwan (the small recessive power) close to the dominant power of the US for military, economic and strategic support. The client-patron relationship works in favor of the dominant power at the expense of the recessive power, preventing conflict resolution. Subservience to the dominant state's authority becomes the norm for the conduct of state relations between the two powers.

The article is divided into three sections: the first section is entitled 'US Indo-Pacific Strategy: The Taiwan Factor,' the second section is titled 'Biden's Taiwan Policy: Pattern of Continuity or Change,' and the third section focuses on 'China's Policy towards Taiwan'.

## **2. US Indo-Pacific Strategy: The Taiwan Factor**

The US key security interests are anchored in the American strategic presence and security of its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. The US Indo-Pacific strategy points to fundamental challenges and alarming trends. First, it indicates the growing sphere of influence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) – based on economic, diplomatic, military and technological might. Second, it points to the threat of instability, as the PRC's harmful bullying of its neighbors poses a threat to American allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Taiwan. Other US security interests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century include strengthening of the liberal world order, respect for international law, human rights and freedom of navigation as key goals shared with other allies in the region. The US Indo-Pacific strategy targets the People's Republic of China's (PRC) behavior as 'coercion' and 'aggression' in the Taiwan Strait, posing a threat to Taiwan and to America's broader security concerns for stability in the Indo-Pacific region (The White House 2022).

As a potential flashpoint in Sino-US rivalry, Taiwan is receiving increasing attention from scholars seeking to understand the prospects for stability in the Indo-Pacific region in the twenty-first century. As the US increases its defense assistance, training and military equipment to Taiwan, Beijing has viewed such developments with keen suspicion. China views US military transfers to Taiwan as inimical to and reversal of the fundamental understanding that the US had with China when it launched the US-China diplomatic dialogue. China has never denounced the possible use of force to integrate Taiwan into the mainland. With Xi Jinping securing a historic third term as president of the People's Republic of China, the assertive Chinese presence around the Taiwan Strait has added volatility to the already vulnerable status quo in the Asia-Pacific region.

The official protocol granted to Pelosi's visit exacerbated regional tensions over Taiwan. The Taiwan issue came to the fore with greater intensity after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit caught the global eye. Earlier, in July 2022, US President Joe Biden had reiterated no change in the US policy stance on Taiwan in a telephone conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Both sides expressed their mutual determination to oppose any unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine the peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Following Pelosi's visit, the Chinese threat alert increased against Taiwan in the intricate balance of the Indo-Pacific region (Financial Times 2022a). Possessing the world's second largest army, Beijing vowed to intervene militarily, increasing the volatility multifold, if the US supported Taipei in its unilateral independence bid. Hence it is important to take a quick look at the latest developments and explore the nature, intensity and fundamental character of the Biden administration's policy stance on the flashpoint of Sino-US antagonism over Taiwan.

So far, the US influence has barred both parties from a direct military confrontation in the Indo-Pacific region. The potential threat of US military intervention keeps the mainland from a direct onslaught on Taiwan. Simultaneously, the US influence has deterred Taipei from the declaring unilateral independence from China (Yuan 2000). Furthermore, the stability built on the status quo in the Indo-Pacific promoted economic growth and the development of trade and business relations for both states across the Taiwan Strait, while allowing Taipei to build a strong democratic and more vibrant society (Department of State 2023). However, in the absence of cross-strait political relations, stability became a zero-sum affair with the Sino-US military build-up making the Taiwan Strait the world's most volatile region.

Moreover, the Taiwan issue also depends on the Taiwanese presidential election. According to Volodzko (2022), the KMT is seen as a less hostile party to than the currently ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The KMT's performance in the last local government elections has been impressive. Furthermore, the relationship between China and Taiwan is not just characterized by hostility and mistrust. Complex interdependence prevails in Sino-Taiwan bilateral trade, economic and cultural ties and people-to-people relations. China will feel the need to develop economic relations with Taiwan for its powerful semiconductor industry (Cronin 2022). China's industrial and manufacturing base requires the chips used extensively in the production of electronic devices. The American measure to curb the exports of chips to China has forced Beijing to find new sources of chips imported from Taiwan.

### 3. Biden's Policy Stance on Taiwan: From Strategic Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity

This section reviews Biden's Taiwan policy to determine patterns of continuity or change in the policies of successive US administrations. This section argues that Biden's approach to Taiwan marks a shift away 'from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity' in the national security objectives for the Indo-Pacific. It further argues that the US Taiwan Policy Act denounces the previous commitment to 'minimum defense' and shifts to 'asymmetric deterrence' in order to defend Taiwan. It goes on to argue that the US National Security Strategy aims to integrate Taipei into multilateral institutions, granting Taiwan a renewed international stature.

Taiwan is phenomenally important to US security interests in stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The island has a strategic location. It allows Taipei to monitor Chinese warships and fighter jets entering the Pacific (Maizland 2022). The dispute over the island has acted as the pivot in shaping Sino-US hostilities and cross-strait relations since the Second World War. An intricate balance of power has prevailed in the Taiwan Strait since the Second World War. Since the inception of the dispute in 1949, the Taiwan Strait has seen numerous crises involving the US, China and Taiwan. Taken together, the crises in the complex history of the dispute in the Indo-Pacific have contributed to Sino-US hostilities. For example, the US initially sided with Taiwan in its war with China in the 1950s (Wilson Center n.d.). The US fleet positioned in the Taiwan Strait sought to protect Taipei from a likely attack from China. During the First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954–1955), Beijing's artillery bombardment targeted the outlying islands close to Taiwan (Halperin 1996). As it lost some of the islands, Taipei moved its forces and residents to safer areas in Taiwan. In the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis (1958), China targeted Kinmen and Matsu, outlying islands close to the mainland, in a month-long artillery shelling (Halperin 1996). The US arms enabled Taiwan to resist the mainland's aggression on these islands. On the eve of Taiwan's presidential election in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996, Beijing launched missiles into the waters to mark protest. The US sent aircraft carriers to prevent further escalation in the region.

Such fluctuations in crises have set the stage for Indo-Pacific politics. Sino-US rivalry has up-surged lately in the backdrop of the latest trends following the Congressional House leader's visit to Taipei. Apparently, to offer US diplomatic 'reassurance of support to Taiwan' against growing Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, the official visit generated much international euphoria with varying interpretations (Hsieh 2020). Scholars such as Oriana Skylar Mastro, a research fellow at Stanford University, interpreted the attached diplomatic and military protocol as the US show of deterrence to dissuade Chinese aggression against Taiwan (Columbia University 2020). Counterproductively, intense US-China hostilities ensued, marking predictions of direct US military intervention to defend Taiwan. The visit hyphenated the volatility of the status quo in the Indo-Pacific region, fueling hostilities in cross-strait relations. Beijing responded by conducting joint military drills around the island and canceled eight official military dialogues and cooperation channels with the US (Washington Post 2022). Taiwan faced unprecedented provocations, including ballistic missile launches over the island, air and naval operations across Taiwan's territorial waters and increased cyberattacks (Haenle and Sher 2022). There were regular air intrusions across the median line regularly (BBC News 2022). China conducted additional fire drills in the Bohai Sea and south of the Yellow Sea (*Ibid.*).

Broadly speaking, the traditional US policy approach in recent years has portrayed 'strategic ambiguity' to maintain the stability in the Indo-Pacific region (Pascal 2021). Much like Bush to Obama and Trump, Biden has shown a commitment to 'One China' (MOFA 2022). The Biden era has markedly deviated from the traditional US policy to Taiwan. Compared to previous US administrations, Biden's Taiwan policy opts for 'strategic clarity' allowing for 'asymmetric deterrence' and greater institutional and multilateral international integration of Taiwan. The presence of Joe Biden in the White House has seen a change in America's usual rhetoric on China, characterized by the policy of 'strategic ambiguity' – deployed to discourage Taiwan from proclaiming independence and China from invading the island (Blackwill and Zelikow 2021). In a series of impromptu remarks about Taiwan, Joe Biden reiterated that the US would defend Taiwan in case of an invasion – a historic shift, at least in rhetoric, in Washington's policy of keeping China guessing about whether the US would defend Taiwan in case of Chinese invasion. Deviating from the previous approach that has prevailed since 1979, the Biden administration has moved towards overt strategic clarity, clearly outlining the US commitment to defend Taiwan (Hsieh 2020; Chen and Baldock 2022). Three factors account for the shift in Washington's Taiwan policy. First, Biden's public posture has become louder, clearer, and more overt – stating more forcibly to defend Taiwan.

In a public statement, Biden declared to shield Taiwan militarily in the event of Chinese war (Jacobs *et al.* 2022). In a televised CBS interview, when asked if the US intends to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, the president replied: 'Yes, if in fact there was an unprecedented attack' (Brunnstrom and Hunnicutt 2022). The episode contributed to the overall ominous trends in US-China relations (MOFA 2022).

Second, the Taiwan Policy Act signifies another illustration of proof in this regard.<sup>1</sup> Framed under the auspices of the original Taiwan Relations Act, the Taiwan Policy Act nevertheless violates the fundamental gist of the original legislation (Zablocki 1979). To deter Beijing's growing military presence in the Taiwan Strait, the Taiwan Policy Act provides for US\$4.5 billion in military equipment and defense transfers to Taiwan for 'asymmetric deterrence'. The Taiwan Policy Act reversed previous restrictions on major defense transfers to Taiwan – in violation of the original spirit of the Taiwan Relations Act. Taiwan Policy Act designates 'Major Non-NATO Ally Status', authorizing thereby additional transfers of military equipment and technology to Taiwan. In the *Taiwan Security Assistance Initiative* section, the new legislation (US Senate 2022) directs the US Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense to establish new initiatives designed to accelerate the modernization of Taiwan's defense capabilities necessary to 'deter or, if necessary to defeat an invasion of Taiwan by the People's Republic of China.'<sup>2</sup> The full range of such asymmetric weapons includes weapons such as long-range precision fires, integrated air and missile defense systems, anti-ship cruise missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, coastal defense, anti-armor, undersea warfare, survivable swarming maritime assets, manned and unmanned aerial systems, mining and countermining capabilities, Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities; Command and control systems; Recruiting, training, and equipping of regular army and reserve forces, apart from informational campaigns; Critical infrastructure, and cyber security (News 2022).

Third, in Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy, Taiwan has acquired a renewed impetus independent of the cross-strait equation (Copper 2021a). This is all the more evident in

the Taiwan Policy Act passed in September 2022 on the initiative of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Copper 2021b).

As US-China rivalry over Taiwan intensifies in policy and in practice, Washington has straitened alliances and partnerships along the Indo-Pacific rim to contain China's growing military strength. Taipei's increasing military reliance on Washington, along with Beijing's growing military capabilities, necessitate restraint on the potential flash point of Taiwan, evident all the more from Pelosi's visit to Taipei (Haenle and Sher 2022). Although Biden, in his Bali meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in November 2022, denied any US plans for a Cold War with China, revitalizing partnerships against China, seeking Taiwan's independence, supporting 'two China's or One China, One Taiwan', and limiting China's growth and sphere of influence (Zablocki 1979). However, the US's Indo-Pacific alliances in QUAD, Seven Eyes and other multilateral and bilateral forums suggest otherwise. As the strategic competition intensifies, experts become increasingly wary of potential confrontation. Taiwan is a litmus test for the success of the US-dominated liberal world order and Indo-Pacific strategy of the twenty-first century (White House 2022). China's rising military and economic profile adds to Taiwan's insecurities. Without nuclear weapon of its own, Taipei has bandwagoned with the US, relying on the latter's military presence to forestall Chinese expansionist designs in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait in particular (Kuo 2021). Waxing its bet on the US against China, the US pursues deterrence more than diplomacy to dissuade Beijing from forcible unification (Maizland 2022). Hence Taiwan bandwagons with the US in crisis escalation to reduce the adversity of cross-strait relations. The US-Taiwan relations are 'robust' but 'unofficial' in nature (Department of State 2023). The Shanghai Communiqué (1972) and the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) together define the Sino-US bilateral terms of engagement on Taiwan.

### *3.1. Shanghai Communiqué and Taiwan Relations Act*

The Shanghai Communiqué and the Taiwan Relations Act provide an overview of 'the baggage of history' in the Sino-US bilateral policy framework on Taiwan. US-China diplomatic relations were restored following the admission of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the UN in 1971. The Shanghai Communiqué (1972) offered US-China bilateral terms of future engagement based on the fundamental understanding of 'One China' (Department of State 2022). The fate of the Shanghai Communiqué rested on China's conditional agreement to the US decree endorsing 'diplomatic non-recognition' and 'military withdrawal' from Taiwan. As a pre-condition for the normalization of relations, the framework of the Shanghai Communiqué (1972) remained contingent on the US withdrawing all kinds of military forces from Taiwan (Wilson Center 1972). On its part of the deal, China resorted to verbal and written assurances of 'peaceful unification' with Taiwan. However, China refused to renounce the use of force against Taiwan in a written assurance. In line with the same spirit, Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the US in 1995 drew intense criticism from Beijing, as a violation of the Shanghai Communiqué's (1972) in terms of engagement with China.

The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA-1979 PL 96-8) offers a framework for the US policy towards Taiwan. The basic provisions of the policy framework deviate from the original provisions of the US bilateral framework with China stipulated in the Shanghai Communiqué (1972). The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), the US indigenous framework, allows the US to maintain 'unofficial relations' with Taiwan (Department of State

2022). According to the provisions of the policy framework, the US decision to establish diplomatic relations with China a) is based on the expectation that ‘the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means’ and b) any efforts to determine the future of Taiwan other than peaceful means, such as boycotts or embargoes, will be considered as ‘a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States,’ and, more importantly that c) the US will provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character and will maintain the US capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or social or economic system of the people of Taiwan’ (Department of State 2022).

Accordingly, the Taiwan Relations Act conditions the provision of unofficial US diplomatic and military support to Taiwan. The framework provides military assistance of a ‘minimum nature’ to enable to defend itself against mainland China. The similarity of democratic values, economic and commercial links, technological advances and people-to-people contacts has sustained the unofficial nature of cross-strait contacts (Department of State 2022). The Taiwan Relations Act offers a middle ground between forging ties with the PRC and abandoning Taiwan (*Ibid.*). The PRC's refusal to give of a written assurance of non-use of force against Taiwan led to the US commitment to defend Taiwan. With unification with China in limbo, Taipei has relied on US security assurances to regulate cross-strait relations so far. The similarity of democratic values, economic and commercial links, technological advancement and people-to-people contacts has sustained an enduring partnership between the US and Taiwan (*Ibid.*). The relations between the two states have continued to expand under a wide range of multifaceted engagements (*Ibid.*).

### 3.2. The Taiwan Policy Act 2022

The Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 has serious implications for cross-strait relations and the Asia-Pacific region. Firstly, the act has enhanced Taiwan's asymmetric warfare capability against mainland China (US Senate 2022).<sup>3</sup> The security assistance initiative provides US\$4.5 billion over four years to modernize Taiwan's military (News 2022). An additional US\$2 billion loan secures non-repayable military ammunition for upgrading war-fighting capabilities. The act also entails micro-management of the US military aid to Taiwan. It binds Taipei only to US e for military purchases, restricting cash transfers for independent military purchases or search for alternative sources. The US retains the authority to enforce end-transfer restrictions on Taiwan's military purchases. The end-tail regulations prevent military autonomy in Taiwanese defense build-up, making it subservient to the US military command and control systems.

Secondly, the US has gradually intensified its bilateral engagement with Taipei. The policy initiative, according to (Wu 2022), stems from the ‘Ensuring America's Global Leadership and Engagement Act’ (EAGLE Act, 2021). The Taiwan Policy Act has become the embodiment of increased US-Taiwan bilateral interaction. For example, the Taiwan Policy Act provides for the Taiwan Representative Office (TRO) to substitute the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO). Located in Washington DC, the Taiwan Representative Office (TRO) has operations all over the US. The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), funded by the US State Department, performs consular services similar to other diplomatic missions.

Accordingly, the US-Taiwan relationship continues to grow, encompassing strong commercial and economic ties, people-to-people contacts, democratic values, and tech-

nological advancement, trade and investment, health, science and increased educational contacts. The US-Taiwan Education Initiative, launched in December 2020, has worked in tandem with American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO). The new education initiative offers joint opportunities to citizens of both states. The US has granted Taiwan the Visa Waiver Program since November 2012. Washington receives the seventh largest contingent of Taiwanese students each year for a high-quality education.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the US and Taiwan have strong commercial, financial, and trade ties.<sup>5</sup> Taiwan is a highly developed economy, producing an estimated \$786 billion in goods and services in 2021. The US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue seeks to enhance economic and commercial ties, including supply chain security and resilience, investment screening, health, science and technology, and digital economy. The US and Taiwan are also engaged in joint scientific cooperative endeavors in areas including meteorology, nuclear science, environmental protection, thoracic cancer research, atmospheric research, and public health and preventive medicine (Department of State 2022). A US-Taiwan Technology, Trade, and Investment Collaboration framework was launched in 2021 to develop commercial programs and strengthen critical supply chains. The US Department of Commerce launched the US-Taiwan Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) that resumed regular meetings under AIT and TECRO. A Science and Technology Agreement signed in 2020 aimed to enhance scientific cooperation and joint research. Global Cooperation and Training Framework was established in June 2015. Also, AIT and TECRO established a platform to showcase Taiwan's technical expertise to the world. Under the framework, Taiwan and its partners offer technical training in fields as diverse as public health, supply chain resilience, energy, women's rights, and disaster relief.

Thirdly, the Taiwan Policy Act commits the US to greater support for Taiwan's international influence (Wu 2022). The US supports Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement. At the same time, the US encourages Taiwan's meaningful participation in organizations where its membership is not possible. Taiwan and the United States are members of several international organizations and bodies, including the World Trade Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, and the Asian Development Bank.

Fourthly, Taiwan has traditionally relied upon US security assistance to defend itself against China. The US has pursued a dual policy towards Taiwan in the Asia-Pacific region. While Washington has abstained from supporting outright Taiwanese independence, the US tightrope balancing against China offers the rationale to provide tangible military support to Taiwan. Deterrence, embedded in the idea of 'strategic ambiguity' rather than 'clarity' is what suits the traditional US policy line on Taiwan. The Biden administration, however, provides for renewed deterrence and security commitment to defend Taiwan. The US has maintained close military ties with Taiwan, as evidenced by the Taiwan Policy Act. A greater degree of US military support to the cross-strait conflict may become a double-edged sword. Biden's new security strategy could embolden Taiwan's political elite to push for outright independence. Hence Biden's Taiwan policy could excite unilateral moves towards independence by Taiwan.

This section has argued that the US has maintained diplomatic relations with China while maintaining unofficial contacts intact with Taipei. The Biden administration has



adopted a clear-cut approach to Taiwan, disentangling the dispute from the previous US approach of the 'One China' policy. In the Biden administration, Taiwan has acquired a new status on its own merits based on strategic, economic and diplomatic grounds as an integral part of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. Taipei has relied on US security assistance and resort to bandwagoning and hedging against Beijing. Hedging involves risk management strategies, balancing and bandwagoning closely between the US and China. However, Taiwan may need to consider more risk-averse foreign policy options to avoid a more contested and conflict-prone situation in Sino-US relations.

#### 4. Xi's Policy Stance on Taiwan

By analyzing Congressional leader Pelosi's visit to Taipei and recent trends in Biden's Indo-Pacific security strategy, this section seeks to determine China's policy response to Taiwan. It argues that Xi's policy entails a transformation in China's traditional policy approach. It argues further that Xi has adopted a more assertive Taiwan policy in contrast to his predecessors – such as Mao's approach of keeping Taiwan out of sight for one hundred years in order to build up the political and economic stability on the mainland (Liao n.d.). Xi vows to forge Taiwan's unification with the mainland without further delay for an indefinite period of time.

Empirical illustrations support the assertion that Xi has adopted an aggressive policy stance. Tangible evidence supports the claim that Xi's revisionist designs include 'unification with Taiwan' as part of the fulfillment of the 'China Dream' (Hu *et al.* 2020). Three structural factors influence China's Taiwan policy: trilateral relations between the United States, Taiwan, and China; the bilateral interactions between China and Taiwan; and domestic politics in China and Taiwan. Each of these factors is dynamic, but moving in the direction of a hardened, more hostile policy. China's National Rejuvenation Programs 2050 view Taiwan as part of Xi's 'China Dream,' in line with Chinese unification claims on Hong Kong, Macau and Tibet, as well as Taiwan (Hu *et al.* 2020; Berglee 2016). China has territorial claims to four main components of 'One China': Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Tibet.

This is also evident in China's approach to international diplomacy: Beijing has made the 'One China' policy a basis for expanding diplomatic relations with other states. Taipei's lack of international recognition has factored favorably into Beijing's claim on Taiwan. So far, only fourteen states have granted recognition to Taiwan, including the Vatican. Furthermore, China adopted anti-secession laws in 2005 that give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) the right to intervene militarily to prevent Taiwanese secession from the mainland. In another instance, China has positioned missiles within striking distance of Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait (Financial Times 2022b). Military deployments to newly constructed Chinese islands are another example of preparations in this regard. At the same time, the PLA is developing Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2-AD) strategies to counter the US military intervention in the region.

Moreover, China also closely monitors Taiwan's political developments and diplomatic engagement. The process of unification has been hampered by internal divisions within Taiwan. However, in what is known as the 1992 Consensus, at the Hong Kong Talks – a landmark event for Taiwan and China held in 1992 – both sides agreed to recognize the 'One China' policy, although there was disagreement over the legitimacy of the ROC or PRC claim to rule China (Liao n.d.). Within this context, China viewed

with disdain the election of Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as Taiwan's president in 2000, supporting Taiwanese sovereignty and formal independence. Beijing was delighted when KMT-backed President Ma Ying-jeou, favoring closer ties with China, came to power in 2008. Setting aside political disputes, President Ma Ying-jeou opted to discuss multiple commercial deals with China of a non-controversial nature. In April 2005, the leaders of Taiwan's main opposition party, the KMT and the Communist Party of China met for the first time since 1949. More recently, DPP's Tsai Ing-wen won the presidential race on an anti-China platform. The DPP government finds it difficult to accept the 1992 consensus, making the declaration of independence or reunification as the core split issues within Taiwan.

While Beijing suspended all official communications with Taiwan, US President Donald Trump broke with decades of US diplomatic precedent the same year and spoke directly to the new president Tsai Ing-wen on the phone. The Trump administration approved \$1.4 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. Prompting China's anger over the military deal, new US legislation further irked Beijing by allowing the US to send senior officials to Taiwan (Reuters 2022b). The diplomatic engagement of US officials with Taiwan has violated the original spirit of the Sino-US treaty agreements. Moreover, the Trump administration approved the sale of spare parts for F-16 fighter jets and other military aircraft worth up to \$330 million to Taiwan, prompting Chinese warnings of suspicion of cooperation with the US.

Pelosi's visit to Taipei was a landmark event in the already tense Sino-US relations over Taiwan. Although the visit was not without a precedent, as members of Congress have frequently traveled to Taiwan, such as Newt Gingrich's visit to Taiwan in 1997.<sup>6</sup> However, the paraphernalia of official diplomatic protocol attached to the House leader's visit marked an unprecedented, unusual status awarded to previous official US visits (Embassy of the PRC 2022). In August–September 2020, US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and Under Secretary of State Keith Krach visited Taiwan (Copper 2021b). The US-Taiwan policy has disturbed the traditional-intricate balance in Sino-US understanding over Taiwan. Empirical evidence of this is the Taiwan Travel Act, passed in March 2018, which provides official legal protection to US officials visiting Taiwan.

Neither the US nor China viewed the high-profile visit of the US House Speaker in a vacuum. As an immediate response to Pelosi's trip, China initiated massive military exercises around Taiwan's periphery, cancelled exchanges with the US and announced sanctions against the Speaker and her family. Tensions surmounted in the South China Sea as China resorted to retaliatory protests of military drills close to Taiwan (Aljazeera 2022). Chinese frigates targeted Taiwan, putting its security on high red alert. At Asia's premier security meeting – the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe expressed abject readiness to save 'One China' by reviving mainland claims on Taiwan' (Morning Post 2022). Asserting One China as 'China's dead end,' Chinese warnings of dire consequences escalated the crisis, further indicating China's readiness to employ an iron-fisted approach to defending Taiwan (VOA 2022). The military general resolved to fight to the last breath in defense of Taiwan (*Ibid.*). Beijing blamed the US for manipulating facts in multilateral diplomatic forums against China (*Ibid.*). Leading to Taiwan's counter-drilling exercises, the Shangri-La Dialogue focused on joint US-Taiwan strategies to defend Taiwan (*Ibid.*). The First Island Chain

of the South China Sea is being guarded by the PLA Naval and Air fleet for surveillance purposes, along with the naval presence of Malaysia. In the Second Island Chain of the South China Sea, Japan, Saipan, Guam and Indonesia have a naval presence.

In a nutshell, the House Speaker's visit has raptured the traditional US policy line of granting official recognition and diplomatic relations to Taiwan. Terming the visit as interference in China's internal affairs, China terms unification as indispensable for unity and security (NDTV 2022). Beijing marked the visit as a violation of the Shanghai Communique and the Taiwan Relations Act. Beijing accused the US of 'provocation' and 'breaking the standstill' prevalent since World War II (Reuters 2022a). In 1949, Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took hold of power in Beijing, defeating Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist Party, which had retreated to the island of Taiwan. Moreover, the visit contributed more to the orchestration and aggravation of hostilities across the Taiwan Strait in the Indo-Pacific region. Given the broader context of the history of the dispute, it can be discerned with empirical evidence that President Biden's repeated assurances of support to defend Taiwan reflect a shift in the US strategic thinking on Taiwan. By exacerbating Chinese sensitivities on the One China policy, Biden's Taiwan policy has aggravated cross-strait tensions and Sino-US hostilities over Taiwan. Adding to the overall ominous trends in Sino-US relations, the visit served as a reminder that Taiwan is the root cause of US-China hostile relations in the Indo-Pacific region.

The US policy approach to Taiwan reflects on its broader security calculations of stability in the Asia-Pacific region. However, Biden's policy approach has remained paradoxical in serving the broader US wider security objective of promoting stability in the Indo-Pacific region. First, Biden's policy approach is based on the extending political, military and diplomatic support to Taiwan. However, by supporting Taiwan and robustly bolstering military ties with the island, Biden has damaged the peaceful resolution of the dispute over Taiwan.

Second, the ends justify the means of any rational foreign policy approach, as Biden's approach to Taiwan has further strained the already tense cross-strait relations on several fronts. For example, the official protocol attached to the trip manifested the Biden administration's disregard of the spirit of democratic norms of promise-keeping by violating the Shanghai Convention (1972) and the Taiwan Relations Act (1979). The means failed to contribute to the promotion of 'peace', inducing 'provocation' and damaging the 'standstill' prevalent in the Taiwan Strait since the Second World War.

Third, each side in the dispute has blamed the other for escalating tensions, with the US accusing China of being the aggressor and China accusing the US of provoking and aggravating hostilities. Although resentment is pervasive on both sides, with each seeking to bring the other to a standstill of initial commitment, a realistic view reveals that both Trump and Biden's administrations neglected the 'Joint Communiqué of the US and China – 1982.' Referred to as 'the 2nd Shanghai Communiqué,' the pact disdained the US from selling more military equipment to Taiwan than it had sold before 1979, in order to allow the original spirit to prevail – that of a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

Fourth, the US has failed to acknowledge Chinese sensitivities about Taiwan. Since the Second World War, the US State Department has regarded Taiwan as a key partner in the Asia-Pacific region. China seeks to be awarded the recognition of its new status as 'the Middle Kingdom' in the region. The strong Chinese response indicates Beijing's

greater assertiveness in this role in cross-strait relations. Chinese strategic calculations foster such a role preventing US moves to support Taiwanese independence in the Indo-Pacific region. Chinese President Xi Jinping has promised national rejuvenation. Xi's foreign policy goals cannot afford to ignore unification for too long. With hardliners pressing in for a timeline on the agenda, the Biden administration has deterred louder in verbal and physical dissuasion from outright Chinese assault for unification. Hence the Biden administration has become more sensitive to Chinese moves and has resorted to less ambiguous positions in cross-strait relations. Three instances may indicate a tipping point in US-China relations over Taiwan. First, when Beijing believes that Taiwan has become unavoidably diverse from unification. Second, Beijing terms the policy of 'peaceful reunification' as an abject failure. Third, when Beijing considers the right time to annex Taiwan through forcible unification, the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds a decisive factor in this regard (Scobell 2022).

Biden's Taiwan policy fails to acknowledge the spirit of the US agreements with China on Taiwan. Urging peaceful resolution of the disputes, the US agreement on official relations with China hinges on the 'Taiwan unification policy' through peaceful means. The Shanghai Communiqué (1972), the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) and the 'Joint Communiqué of the US and China' (1982), referred to as 'the Second Shanghai Communiqué,' have collectively shaped the intricate troika of relations between the US, China and Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> Within the broader perspective, Biden's policy approach has urged the resolution of cross-strait differences through peaceful means. Although the US has called for peaceful conflict resolution, Washington's extension of robust defense capabilities to resist Chinese coercion appears to be a contradiction in terms. The US has tended to repel any resort to force or any other form of coercion, compromising the social and economic integrity of Taiwan.

## 5. Conclusion

This section has argued that the official protocol accorded to Pelosi's visit has raptured the fragile paradigm of stability in the Asia-Pacific region. It has further argued that a tactical level divergence in the interpretation of official US-China protocols has strained the Sino-US convergence of interests over Taiwan. The article argues that in the aftermath of Pelosi's visit, Beijing has shown restraint in cross-strait relations, adopting neither an overly ambitious nor a sublime policy response. China has so far avoided an assertive policy stance for fear of a backlash that would push Taiwan further towards the US. However, the Taiwan Policy Act and the protocols for US official visits may irk Beijing and encourage China to become more assertive in cross-strait relations and resort to military aggression for the unification of Taiwan.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Taiwan Policy Act is framed within the existing framework of the Taiwan Relations Act and approved by the Senate Special Committee on Taiwan.

<sup>2</sup> See provisions of the Taiwan Policy Act 2022; the official document has revised fundamental statutes entailed in the erstwhile Taiwan Relations Act.

<sup>3</sup> See provisions of the Taiwan Policy Act 2022; the official document has revised fundamental statutes entailed in the former Taiwan Relations Act.

<sup>4</sup> The Fulbright Program has supported Taiwanese students to study and teach in the US since 1957.

<sup>5</sup> The US is Taiwan's second largest trading partner, whereas Taiwan is the US's eighth largest trading partner. US exports of goods and services to Taiwan are estimated to support 188,000 American jobs in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Newt Gingrich was the last speaker to visit Taiwan in 1997.

<sup>7</sup> The US Congress approved the Taiwan Relations Act, signed on April 10, 1979, in the wake of the US extension of recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC). While ending relations with the Kuomintang of the Republic of China (ROC), the Act managed to secure the US fundamental interests in Taiwan despite the termination of formal relations between the two. Drafted by lawmakers from both parties in the Congress, the act balanced diplomatic relations with mainland China while refusing to cut ties with the Kuomintang in Taiwan. The Act explicitly declared peace and stability as the US global security interest in the Asia-Pacific region.

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