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## Taiwan Policy Under the Biden Administration

By: Russell Hsiao

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All the major US media networks now [forecast](#) that former Vice President Joseph Biden—the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party—has won the 2020 presidential election and will become the 46<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. In a full-blown dash out of the gate in preparation for assuming the highest political office, President-elect Biden has already taken the step of forming his [agency review teams](#), including for defense and foreign policy. As the president-elect and his transition team take a fine-tooth comb to review the agencies—as well as policies of the current administration—one area they will certainly look at is Taiwan policy. In part because of the high-profile and openly confrontational tack taken by the Trump administration in its approach to China policy, Taiwan has been in the headlines almost constantly over recent years. In turn, this has created a misperception that adjustments in US policy towards Taiwan were driven primarily by policy towards China. It is of course the prerogative of any incoming administration to review the policy and practices of its predecessor. In this special issue of the Global Taiwan Brief, we asked several of our research fellows and advisors to weigh in on what they think will be—and what they think *should* be—the priorities for the incoming Biden administration.

But before diving into the expert assessments of what we might have to look forward to over the next four years under the Biden-Harris White House, it is worthwhile to take a look at how we got to where we are today.

Despite expectations—and perhaps [overstated concerns](#)—of a fundamental change in US Taiwan policy, four years of the Trump administration did not alter the legal framework and policies that form the basis of US policy towards Taiwan—which remains firmly rooted in the [Taiwan Relations Act](#) (TRA) and the [Six Assurances](#). The US “One-China Policy” remains intact—although it has arguably been stretched. Indeed, its elasticity has always

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been a durable feature of the US-Taiwan-China relationship and a function of Beijing's actions.

As President Ronald Reagan made clear in a 1982 [memo](#) that has been recently declassified, the US commitment to Taiwan's self-defense is "conditioned absolutely upon the continued commitment of China to the peaceful solution of the Taiwan-PRC differences." As China's actions have grown increasingly aggressive *vis-à-vis* Taiwan and the world, especially in recent years, the United States has had to take a hard look at updating its policies and practices to better reflect objective reality. Justifying the adjustment in the administration's approach to Taiwan policy over the past four years, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs David Stillwell noted in a major [Taiwan policy speech](#) in late August 2020:

*"What we are doing [...] is making some important updates to our engagement with Taiwan to better reflect these policies and respond to changing circumstances. The adjustments are significant, but still well within the boundaries of our "One-China Policy." [...] We feel compelled to make these adjustments for two reasons. First, because of the increasing threat posed by Beijing to peace and stability in the region, which is a vital interest of the United States. [...] The second reason we have been focusing on our engagement with Taiwan is simply to reflect the growing and deepening ties of friendship, trade, and productivity between the United States and Taiwan."*

Also instructive of just how views of Taiwan are changing in the United States, it is noteworthy that the *de facto* US ambassador to Taiwan and long-time diplomat, AIT Director Brent Christensen, pointed out at GTI's [2020 annual symposium](#): "I believe the US-Taiwan partnership underwent a subtle but powerful shift this year. This is the first time in my memory that influential voices [...] began to discuss the US-Taiwan partnership more on its own merits than solely in the US-China context." So what are some of the visible manifestations of these adjustments in the Trump administration's upgraded engagement with Taiwan and the content of US Taiwan policy in general?

1. A phone call between the President-elect Trump and Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文).
2. Regularizing the arms sales process to Taiwan.
3. Routinizing and publicizing naval transits through the Taiwan Strait.
4. Resuming cabinet-level visits and interactions by senior officials such as the US national security adviser and the secretary-general of Taiwan's National Security Council.
5. President Trump's signing of two landmark Taiwan-related bills.
6. Permitting the president of Taiwan high-profile visit-like transits through the United States.
7. Declassification of internal policy documents that guide US policy towards Taiwan, such as President Reagan's memos on the Six Assurances and arms sales to Taiwan.
8. High-level public support for expanding Taiwan's international space, as demonstrated by the campaign to include the island in the WHO.
9. Elevating the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) to include new official partners and hosting the forum in different regions of the world.
10. Launching the New Economic Prosperity Dialogue.

These actions all objectively reflect the upward trajectory in US-Taiwan relations during the Trump administration. While agency certainly matters for how policy is conducted, there are structural components of the US-Taiwan relationships that have a bearing on how policy will be conducted. This is especially true in the case of Taiwan policy given the centrality of the TRA—a domestic law that establishes the legal framework for the unofficial relations with Taiwan. That US-Taiwan relations have withstood and even thrived under precarious conditions since the change in diplomatic recognition—despite expectations of the contrary—is a strong testament to the robust, flexible legal and policy framework provided by the TRA and the Six Assurances. These measures mandate reciprocal American and Taiwanese obligations and commitments that have

helped to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait for the past 40 years.

While any potential political transition injects a degree of uncertainty into policy, it is important to remember that the pro-Taiwan legislation signed into law over the past four years—including the [Taiwan Travel Act](#), [TAIPEI Act](#), [Asia Reassurance Initiative Act](#), and the various [National Defense Authorization Acts](#)—was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the US Congress, some even with unanimous consent. These accomplishments are remarkable political feats for a deeply divided Congress and should provide reassurance that Taiwan policy continues to enjoy robust bipartisan support in the United States. Moreover, that the president signed these bills into law—giving them the full political force of the US government—is a rare and powerful demonstration of unity in US policy.

Perhaps more importantly, these pieces of legislation help to broaden and deepen the foundation of US-Taiwan relations by reinforcing key commitments in the Taiwan Relations Act and Six Assurances and even expanding them in certain ways. More specifically, they extend the policy role and oversight function exerted by Congress as a co-equal branch of government, ensuring that American interests and values as defined by the TRA and these complementary laws are faithfully implemented by the executive branch, regardless of who may occupy the White House.

It is no exaggeration to say that the US-Taiwan relationship is stronger now than it has ever been since 1979. While agency is a factor in this improvement, it is also—and perhaps even more—a function of wider and increasing recognition of Taiwan’s geostrategic importance and shared democratic values, growing trust between Washington and Taipei, and a significant shift in the US’ China policy. These bonds will only grow stronger with care and good management by both Washington and Taipei.

It is the prerogative of any incoming administration to review the policy and practices of its predecessor—this is a necessary and constructive process to ensure that any policy is continuously updated to reflect current realities. However, a shift back to conducting policy with a [creeping deference](#) to how Beijing sees “One China” would be dangerous. Despite the many difficulties that

marred the Trump administration’s broader policies, Taiwan policy has been one of its clear bright spots. As such, it behooves the incoming administration to continue to expand on these policies, working to demonstrate that the US approach to Taipei and Beijing is bipartisan and enduring, and that the US commitment to Taiwan’s democracy does not change with elections.

An old idiom applies: Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater.

**The main point:** As the incoming Biden administration reviews the policies and practices of the departing administration, one area it will certainly look at is Taiwan policy. It behooves the incoming administration to demonstrate that the US approach to Taipei and Beijing is bipartisan and enduring by continuing the positive elements of the Trump administration’s Taiwan policy.

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## Biden and the Future of US-Taiwan Relations: A Shared Vision for a Democratic Future

By: J. Michael Cole

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Four years ago, Taiwan, like other smaller states that depend on US security assistance for their survival, was looking on with some degree of apprehension as American voters elected Donald Trump, an outlier from the Republican Party, as president. For many, Trump’s [transactional and “America first”](#) style was a source of anxiety, fueling [fears](#) that the author of “The Art of the Deal” would have no compunction about abandoning Taiwan if that meant securing a good trade deal with China.

While those fears [never completely dissipated](#), the Trump administration nevertheless turned out to be more supportive of Taiwan than any other before it, Republican or Democratic. From regular arms sales to visits by senior US officials, bipartisan support in Congress to the inclusion of Taiwan in multilateral fora, the administration’s level of engagement won plaudits among the Taiwanese, many of whom were willing to

ignore the less savory, populist elements of Trump's personality and governing style.

The extent to which this policy shift was attributable to President Trump himself or to developing trends in the US approach to China and Taiwan is debatable. What is certain is that during the past four years, Taiwan has benefited from unprecedented and vocal support from the United States. It is therefore no surprise that, following a volatile election earlier this month, news that Trump's challenger, Joe Biden, had defeated the idiosyncratic firebrand [caused some alarm](#) in some Taiwanese circles who seek continuity on US China policy, if not further deepening, in US-Taiwan ties. For many, Biden is seen as part of the "establishment," a Democrat whose past service had been as part of administrations that had proven both reluctant to engage Taiwan and keen to facilitate—often by putting on their moral blinders—China's integration into the global system (the "China engagement" crowd). Furthermore, allegations surrounding [potentially problematic business deals](#) between Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden, and troubling Chinese entities like the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC, 中國華信), raised [alarm](#) about the possibility of undue Chinese influence at the White House (while those may have been overstated, those links must nevertheless be addressed thoroughly).

Given the [hardening public opinion toward China](#) (an increasingly global phenomenon) and growing bipartisan agreement that the permissive, if not myopic, US China policy that characterized past administrations [has largely failed](#), it is unlikely that when President Biden enters the Oval Office on January 20 next year, he will overturn the Trump administration's policy. The composition of the Senate, where the Republicans have retained a higher number of seats and could still obtain a majority, will also serve as a check on appointments who may be seen as being "too soft" on China. China's assertiveness and deepening authoritarianism under Xi Jinping (習近平), moreover, will make it difficult for a president who vows to recommit the US to the values of liberalism and democracy to ignore the [threat that China poses to the international system](#). Consequently, there is a high likelihood that continuity, rather than a return to the *status quo ante*, will characterize the Biden administration's policy toward Taiwan, even if the tone of the incoming administration's ap-

proach to China becomes less confrontational.

Biden's views on China have undoubtedly hardened. During the election campaign, he [described Xi](#) as "a thug," a leader "who doesn't have a democratic bone in his body" and who has "a million Uighurs in concentration camps." Meanwhile, Biden went on the record [congratulating](#) President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on her re-election in January 2020 via Twitter and called for greater engagement with the successful Asian democracy. On Taiwan, the real test for President Biden will be whether the promising rhetoric translates into actual policy by building upon—and in certain areas expanding—the engagement that has occurred under his predecessor.

In an [article](#) in the March/April issue of *Foreign Affairs* titled "Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing US Foreign Policy After Trump," Biden wrote:

*"During my first year in office, the United States will organize and host a global Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world. It will bring together the world's democracies to strengthen our democratic institutions, honestly confront nations that are backsliding, and forge a common agenda. Building on the successful model instituted during the Obama-Biden administration with the Nuclear Security Summit, the United States will prioritize results by galvanizing significant new country commitments in three areas: fighting corruption, defending against authoritarianism, and advancing human rights in their own nations and abroad."*

No such initiative can afford to ignore Taiwan, and officials in Taipei and Washington must ensure that Taiwan is invited to participate in the Summit. The foundations of US-Taiwan democracy promotion and the fight against corruption and authoritarian influence have already been laid. In fact, under President Trump, the United States has collaborated with Taiwan—both at the official and unofficial level—on several initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and good governance in the Indo Pacific, [promoting media literacy](#), fighting corruption, and defending [religious freedom](#), among others. Many of those fora, which also addressed issues such as [disease control](#) and [law](#)



[enforcement](#), occurred as part of the [Global Cooperation and Training Framework](#) (GCTF), a joint project between Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US Department of State/American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the success of which encouraged other states (among them Japan and Sweden) to eventually participate. While GCTF was launched under the Obama administration, it only truly took off after Trump entered office and Tsai had assumed the presidency in Taiwan.

Echoing Biden, his pick for vice president, Kamala Harris, [told](#) the Council on Foreign Relations in August 2019 that:

*“China’s abysmal human rights record must feature prominently in our policy toward the country. We can’t ignore China’s mass detention of more than a million Uighur Muslims in “reeducation camps” in the Xinjiang region, or its widespread abuse of surveillance for political and religious repression. We can’t ignore Beijing’s failure to respect the rights and autonomy of Hong Kong’s people and the Hong Kong government’s excessive use of force against peaceful protestors [...] Under my administration, we will cooperate with China on global issues like climate change, but we won’t allow human rights abuses to go unchecked. The United States must reclaim our own moral authority and work with like-minded nations to stand up forcefully for human rights in China and around the world.”*

It is also revealing that under a Trump administration which didn't often speak the language of democracy and liberalism, various US non-governmental organizations—among them Freedom House, the [National Endowment for Democracy \(NED\)](#), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI)—substantially increased their engagement and collaboration with their Taiwan counterparts, chief among them the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD), a Taiwanese government-sponsored NGO. Furthermore, both [IRI](#) and [NDI](#) have revealed plans to open regional offices in Taiwan in the near future. The will to engage Taiwan is therefore alive and well, and the foundations for continued collaborative work are existent. We expect that President Biden, who unlike his predecessor speaks the language of democracy and liberalism, and who has vowed to rebuild

the global democratic alliance, will choose to include Taiwan as part of that worthy effort. US leadership in this sphere, moreover, should encourage other nations to follow suit by deepening their own interactions with the Asian democracy.

Besides democracy promotion, it is also expected that the Biden administration will seek to repair its relationship with multilateral agencies, such as UN specialized bodies, which deteriorated under President Trump and, in some cases (such as the World Health Organization amid the COVID-19 pandemic), resulted in the US [pulling out](#) altogether. While resuming an influential role within those organizations and seeking repair where repair is needed—including a necessary reduction of the influence which authoritarian states like China have amassed within them—it is also hoped that the Biden administration will further collaborate with likeminded countries in efforts to ensure Taiwan's meaningful participation, which has been curtailed due to Chinese interference.

On matters of security, there is a high likelihood that Biden's National Security Council (NSC) and Department of Defense will be headed by [individuals](#) who, just a few years ago, would have been considered hawkish on China. Although the “[pivot](#)” or “rebalance” to Asia first emerged as a concept under President Obama, it wasn't until the Trump administration that [US Navy patrols](#) truly began to challenge an increasingly assertive People's Liberation Army (PLA) in contested areas such as the [South China Sea](#) and the [Taiwan Strait](#). Given the destabilizing effects of Chinese behavior in the region and a desire for a continued US leadership in the Indo Pacific, it will be very difficult for the incoming administration to draw down the US military presence and collaboration with regional allies and partners. As such, freedom of navigation patrols and passages in the SCS, East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait will likely continue to serve as a deterrent against overly aggressive behavior by Beijing.

With the State Department and the Pentagon, the Biden administration must also continue to ensure that Taiwan is provided with the military capabilities it needs to deter and defend itself against PLA aggression. To this end, it is expected that the new administration will continue consultations with Taipei and retain the practice of [de-bundling and normalizing arms](#)

[sales](#) to Taiwan—a legacy of the Trump era. The US military should continue to provide training assistance to Taiwan, and where possible, expand areas for joint or multilateral training. Intelligence sharing, both at the military and civilian level, should also be expanded commensurately with the growth in burden-sharing.

On the diplomatic side, it is unlikely that the Biden administration will seek to establish official diplomatic ties with Taiwan or to adopt an official “Two-China Policy” recognizing both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Nor is this necessary for the time being. However, like his predecessor, President Biden should continue to expand US engagement with Taiwan within the scope of its “One-China Policy,” the [Taiwan Relations Act \(TRA\)](#), and [Six Assurances](#), calibrating such efforts in response to efforts by Beijing to isolate Taiwan and undermine its sovereignty. This policy approach would come short of “provoking” China by altering the status quo while conditioning Beijing into reducing its hostile behavior toward Taiwan. The Biden administration should also encourage other democracies to follow suit, under the logic that a more united front would make it more difficult for Beijing to punish countries that decide to engage Taiwan.

On the trade side, the Taiwanese side hopes that Washington will resolve the logjam at the United States Trade Representative (USTR) and move forward on a [bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan](#), especially after the Tsai administration, at a considerable domestic cost, [lifted](#) a longstanding ban on US meat products containing the steroid ractopamine. Besides economics, trade agreements between the US and smaller countries have important political ramifications which, in Taiwan’s case, would contribute to its resilience amid Chinese efforts to undermine its sovereignty. The Biden administration may also seek to re-engage with [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#) member states, a trade bloc—then known as the TPP—which his predecessor [pulled out](#) of three days after being sworn in. Such efforts should be accompanied by signals of support for Taiwan’s inclusion in the trade bloc.

Taiwan is beyond question the most successful demonstration of US-style democracy in Asia. The values espoused by the people in both countries are indispensable tools to reverse increasingly worrisome trends in

democracy worldwide. With Democrats in Washington and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan, the stars are aligned for a bright, bilateral future.

**The main point:** Despite initial uncertainty surrounding a Biden administration’s potential approach to Taiwan, a new emphasis on democracy promotion in Washington could result in unprecedented opportunities for engagement with the democratic island nation.

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## Taiwanese Perspectives on the Next US Administration’s Taiwan and Cross-Strait Policies

By: Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao and Alan H. Yang

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The US presidential election is complete but the result has not yet been finalized. The next administration of the US government will not have a honeymoon period as there are many urgent difficulties ahead. In addition to reconciling with a highly polarized society and regaining the support and trust from the American people, the new administration has to effectively tackle an increasingly severe global pandemic—which have become key issues for domestic stability and safety. In terms of foreign policy, there are critical issues such as formulating a new strategic guideline for the US-China trade war and redirecting China policy—either towards confrontation or cooperation—that will serve as a crux to the debate of whether there will be an outbreak of a so-called “new Cold War.” In either case, it is imperative for the next administration to also earn the trust of America’s allies and regional partners to secure its international leadership role in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond—including with Taiwan.

### **Three Pillars: Values, Trust, and Prosperity**

The people in Taiwan are concerned about how a new US administration may handle cross-Strait relations differently from the current administration. In order to assure allies and partners in the region, we believe that

the new US administration should prioritize efforts to maintain the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. This is not only in the interests of the United States but also the needs of regional stakeholders. In terms of dealing with cross-Straits relations for the incoming administration, we suggest that the new administration consider rebuilding a regional strategy that triangularize values, trust, and prosperity as the three pillars to show its concrete and clear commitments to enhance US presence and deepen its contribution to the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

First, the values-based pillar should focus on deepening democratic values and promoting freedom, liberal democracy, good governance, and human rights in the region. Second, the trust-centered pillar should prioritize and reassure existing partnerships. In doing so, in addition to strengthening mutual trusts between the United States and its allies and partners, it will also consolidate US leadership to promote regional stability and international peace. Third, the prosperity-targeted pillar needs to prioritize and confirm regional development with sustainability and progress for the purpose of aligning US interests with regional and global interests. If Taiwan, a thriving democracy, is annexed and loses its autonomy, it will definitely become a major breach for the US-led rules-based regional order in the Indo-Pacific region. That is why the majority of Taiwanese people appreciate what Secretary Michael Pompeo [said in the interview](#) on November 12, 2020, stating that “our [US] commitments to Taiwan are clear and they will be maintained,” and “Taiwan has not been a part of China.”

In the past few years, the US Senate and the House of Representatives have demonstrated a strong political consensus for supporting Taiwan and resisting China’s aggression. A slight majority of the public in the United States also seems to believe that China should [take responsibility](#) for the outbreak of COVID-19. Under the current context, we believe that resisting China’s aggressive behaviors will remain a key feature of the next US government’s foreign policy. However, the approach will probably differ from the one of the previous administration and shift from unilateral confrontation to multilateral joint restraint—and the speed and means may also be slightly slower and different.

In terms of US-Taiwan-China relations, the above-men-

tioned three pillars should serve as a reference point for the next US administration as it frames its policy towards Taiwan and China. First, consolidating a solid partnership with like-minded countries should be imperative. The US partnership with Taiwan is not only based on similar values of global liberal democracy but also respect for human rights. Moreover, Taiwan exists as a vivid reference for protecting universal rights of public health during the global pandemic of COVID-19. On the contrary, as China has always been reluctant to democratize and increasingly disregards human rights, in particular in the case of Hong Kong and Xinjiang, the next administration needs to continue strengthening the values-laden partnership with democratic Taiwan and continue the meaningful support to Taiwan through institutional efforts and acts endorsed by the previous administration and the Congress and other innovative and constructive policies envisioned in the near future.

Although decoupling between the two biggest global economies will unlikely be the key focus of the next US administration, the next president can no longer have an unrealistic illusion about how engagement policy through various exchanges will gradually make China behave better. Under a grand strategy of jointly resisting China’s malign behaviors, the United States should attach importance to the position that Taiwan—as a pivotal middle power—within an “island chain strategy” that can contribute to the emerging security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region.

It is perhaps no coincidence that China aggressively showed its military muscles in Taiwan’s southwestern airspace and waters during the US presidential election, disrupting cross-Straits peace and undermining regional stability. The international community has clearly witnessed China’s bullying of Taiwan. The United States should take note that even during such a difficult time—during the trade war between China and the United States—Beijing’s external expansionist behavior has never abated. This is a clear sign that Taiwan is not the only target of China’s aggression. Its imperialist expansion extends to the South China Sea and neighboring countries in the Indo-Pacific. If the means in the next administration are slightly different, the pace of China’s military disturbance to Taiwan may also be slowed to cater to the new US countermeasures,

which in turn may relieve some strategic and military pressure for Taiwan with observable aftereffects.

Over the years, Taiwan has repeatedly demonstrated to the United States and the broader region that the [island democracy—not China](#)—embodies the values that should guide the future development of the Indo-Pacific. The next US administration should also recognize and appreciate this fact. The mutual trust between Taiwan and the United States has consolidated and deepened as a consequence of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) steadfast diplomacy and Taiwan hopes that the next US administration can follow its own values-based foreign policy and further consolidate mutual trust between two countries.

Regarding the prosperity pillar, the next US administration should attach more importance to Taiwan's [economic vitality](#) and facilitate its contribution to the making of greater regional integration in the midst of the US-China trade war and the consolidation of the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Especially in the face of the [recent signing of RCEP](#), China's influence [over the region](#) will be reinforced. The United States needs to actively promote a free and open regional trade structure and facilitate Taiwan's participation in the CPTPP and ASEAN regional networks by advocating for Taiwan as a strong regional stakeholder with shared values and similar commitment to contribute to the economic growth and regional prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. In particular, [Taiwan's New Southbound Policy](#) (NSP), which has been in implementation for the past four years, has proven to have made significant contributions to the economic development, social innovation, technology, medical and public health, education, agriculture, and social stability of Southeast and South Asian countries.

Rebuilding a regional strategy will not be easy. However, if the new administration is able to triangularize values, trust, and prosperity as the three pillars of this new approach, it will help contribute to the perception of a more committed and thus stronger United States in the Indo-Pacific.

It is critical that the international community does not let the Taiwan Strait become a colosseum where the strong do what they want and the weak suffer what they must. We therefore strongly call upon the next

US administration to consider moving towards a posture of strategic clarity with regards to cross-Strait relations. In the meanwhile, Taiwan will equally try its best to assure the United States that it will make its best efforts to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. With these principles in mind, the future Taiwan-US relations is expected to be a win-win situation.

**The main point:** The next US administration should promote values, trust, and prosperity as the main pillars of its approach to Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region.

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## Next President's Priorities for the Partnership with Taiwan

By: Shirley Kan

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The Trump and Tsai administrations have repaired the US-Taiwan relationship, and the question is whether Biden's administration will reverse gains in the strong partnership. After years of concerns raised by Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) as well as US delays in arms sales and other means of minimizing contacts, these last four years have presented Taiwan with a window of opportunity to strengthen its security. Taiwan faces uncertainty no matter who won the US presidential election. Nonetheless, there likely will not be a major rollback of progress, returning to weaker engagement. What should be the next president's priorities for the partnership to advance US interests?

### Strategic Interests

Indicators of any continuity of policy are whether the Biden administration will:

- safeguard US strategic interests by strongly countering the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA); [1]
- sustain security assistance to Taipei with urgency, without delays that start in the first year in defer-



ence to engagement with Beijing, like how President Obama did not propose major Foreign Military Sales (FMS) in 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016;

- engage Taiwan in the network of allies and partners, not a Sinocentric approach;
- cooperate with Taiwan in its own right, not a subset of policy on the People's Republic of China (PRC).

In the debate over “strategic ambiguity,” Trump has not articulated a different commitment to Taiwan's self-defense. Indeed, he was not clear in an interview in August, when he claimed that China knows what he would do if it invades Taiwan.

Biden also is unlikely to give a new US defense commitment, but he should improve on Trump's non-answer by consulting with the Congress and American people to fill in the gaps for why the United States supports Taiwan. As a Senator who voted for the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), Biden should explain its obligations in the current context.

The TRA gives no absolute guarantee on defense, because [Congress intended](#), *inter alia*, to subject any future decision on war to action by Congress, not only the President. The TRA embodies ambiguity for clear or flexible decision-making, as needed.

Trump's [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS) of 2017 includes one statement about Taiwan. The NSS stated: “We will maintain our strong ties with Taiwan in accordance with our “One China” policy, including our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide for Taiwan's legitimate defense needs and deter coercion.”

Biden should issue a new NSS in 2021 that fills in the strategic objective and interests concerning Taiwan. That NSS would guide the next National Defense Strategy.

The United States has geo-strategic interests in a strong Taiwan that, *inter alia*, is the inter-locking piece to fortify US allies to the north and south, and safeguards security in the Taiwan Strait, East China Sea, and South China Sea. A secure, democratic Taiwan is a force for freedom to bolster US leadership and the rules-based

international order against the CPC's attempts to undercut that order.

Biden should act with more consistency than Trump's approach to allies and partners. Other specific steps of Biden's White House should include:

- reaffirm President Reagan's [Six Assurances](#) after Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell reiterated them, in contrast to then-Assistant Secretary Daniel Russel's failure to reaffirm the Six Assurances at a congressional hearing in 2014;
- make early use of the special channel between both National Security Councils (NSC), including a meeting between new national security advisors;
- welcome a US stop-over in 2021 by President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and continue the Trump administration's practice to hold official discussions during the stop-overs.

### **Military Cooperation**

(1) Biden should continue Trump's regular notifications to Congress of FMS, not re-using past “packages” to delay sales. Trump has [proposed FMS](#) that totaled: USD \$1.4 billion in 2017, USD \$330 million in 2018, USD \$10.7 billion in 2019, and USD \$5.6 billion so far in 2020.

If Biden proposes FMS, they are likely to have lower dollar values but would not necessarily signal a weaker stance. The trend has shifted away from expensive, major systems like Abrams tanks and F-16V fighters sold in 2019. Arms sales are placing priority on asymmetric warfare. The crux of the current challenge is Taiwan's urgent, effective implementation of its Overall Defense Concept (ODC).

(2) The Pentagon and Ministry of National Defense (MND) need to minimize divergence about the ODC and reach a consensus about MND's implementation of the concept. The administration's latest [released remarks](#) on Taiwan's defense stopped referring to the ODC by its abstract title and called specifically for MND to field a credible, resilient, mobile, distributed, and cost-effective force for deterrence, as stated by Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense [David Helvey](#) in October.

As originally conceived, the ODC sought to shift warf-

ighting from attrition warfare to asymmetric warfare, to focus on the littoral zone and landing beaches, and to prioritize force protection and asymmetric capabilities over conventional means, as then-Chief of General Staff Lee Hsi-min (李喜明) explained to this author in 2018. Admiral (retired) Lee co-authored an article earlier this month, in which he further explained that the ODC applies geographical, civilian, and asymmetric advantages to deter the PLA. [The ODC](#) aims to deny the PLA's amphibious invasion.

(3) Another discussion is needed to dampen divergence about Taiwan's defense budget. Helvey said that the budget is "[insufficient](#)." On a bipartisan basis, successive US administrations have assessed that Taiwan needs to raise resources and reallocate priorities within the defense budget to deter an existential threat. MND's proposed budget for 2021 totals NTD \$366.8 billion (about USD \$12.5 billion), or 1.8 percent of GDP.

(4) The Biden administration might use my proposed [Military Assistance Plan \(MAP\)](#) as the bilateral mechanism to ensure accountability by action officers. The MAP should agree on select military interoperability to be proactive before any crisis, and on expanded training and combined exercises, such as for marines and special forces.

(5) The US and Taiwanese Air Forces should cooperate in 2021 to relocate Taiwan's F-16 fighter squadron that trains at Luke Air Force Base (which is shifting to train F-35 fighter pilots) to Tucson Airport (both in Arizona).

(6) Another priority is to help Taiwan improve the readiness, recruitment, and retention of its reserve force. An option is to promote engagement with MND by the Mobilization Assistant to the Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

(7) The Pentagon should reset military-to-military contact while continuing the current administration's visits by US generals and admirals. Military engagement needs a reset to ensure that MND's leadership becomes more willing to talk with US officials. Tsai discussed [national security](#) on October 31 and directed the NSC and Foreign Ministry to engage more with the US side but failed to mention MND's key role.

(8) The two sides need to discuss Taiwan's divestment of legacy systems, especially to decommission Mirage

fighters that are expensive to maintain. MND has more than [2,500 outdated](#) aircraft, tanks, naval ships, and other equipment that are more than 30 years old, Defense Minister Yen Teh-fa (嚴德發) said on November 4.

### ***Diplomatic and Political Cooperation***

(1) The Biden administration will likely strengthen efforts to deal with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. Washington should cooperate closely with Taipei on international sanctions against Pyongyang and monitoring of its missile launches with Taiwan's long-range surveillance radar.

(2) As led by the NSC, the Trump administration initiated high-level attention to Pacific island countries, including support for US-associated states and Taiwan's diplomacy. The United States has an enduring presence in the Pacific, and the US military sacrificed for peace and freedom. Exemplifying brave actions, in 1943-1944, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division won a key battle in Tarawa and trained in Hawaii to fight later battles in Saipan and Tinian. Today, INDOPACOM requires access to allies to secure the legacy of peace against the PRC's malign influence.

The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) govern US ties with the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau, which also are called the Freely Associated States (FAS). The Republic of China (Taiwan) has diplomatic ties with four Pacific island countries: Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu. In July, Taiwan announced the re-establishment of its representative office in the [US territory of Guam](#).

Biden should work with Congress to renew the COFA that are to expire in 2023-2024. US policy should continue to align with Taiwan's promotion of democracy and good governance, and explore benefits if Taiwan sets up a [sovereign wealth fund](#) (SWF) that invests in infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific.

(3) The Biden administration should continue the long-standing albeit spotty policy of mutual Cabinet-rank visits and support for Taiwan's international space, particularly promotion of the "[Taiwan Model](#)" in fighting COVID-19. Washington should welcome Taipei's Minister of Health and Welfare to visit and discuss vaccines and treatments.

(4) US leadership in support of Taiwan should involve more allies and partners, beyond those in the Indo-Pacific. An option is to enhance trans-Atlantic consultations with NATO and countries in the European Union. The Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) should be expanded worldwide.

(5) Biden's administration should explore how to help remedy the lack of cross-Strait dialogue, after the Trump Administration's surge of assistance for deterrence. Tsai discussed [national security](#) in late October and called for [cross-Strait talks](#).

### **Economic Cooperation**

(1) Biden's policy should address anemic economic engagement, along with Taiwan's re-commitment again to international rules and scientific standards on beef and pork. The US Trade Representative (USTR) should resume talks under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which have been suspended since 2016.

(2) Biden should work with [Congress and USTR](#) on a bilateral trade agreement, without waiting to set his overall policy on trade. The USTR should approach this agreement similar to the state-by-state promotion of the [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#).

(3) The Biden administration should follow up on broad topics in the new Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue. The Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment will initiate this [bilateral dialogue](#) on November 20.

**The main point:** Biden's administration should proactively act on priorities to sustain the strong partnership while clarifying US interests in a secure, democratic Taiwan.

[1] This author precisely translates “中國共產黨” as “Communist Party of China (CPC)” (which the CPC officially uses) and avoids ambiguous association of the CPC with “Chinese” culture or people.

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## **Taiwan Policy under Biden: The First Six Months, The First Year, and Beyond**

By: Michael Mazza

*Michael Mazza is a senior non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute, a visiting fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, and a nonresident fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States.*

The new Biden administration will have its hands full from day one. Even as it focuses its energy on finally getting a handle on the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration will have to recalibrate its China policy, making numerous decisions about which aspects of the Trump administration's approach to keep and which to jettison. Beyond China, it will have to meaningfully strengthen alliances and security partnerships worldwide, make a decision about how best to rein in Iran's nuclear program going forward, and work quickly to preserve (or not) the New START arms control agreement with Russia. Taiwan policy, on the other hand, should not require significant deliberation in the early going.

The US-Taiwan relationship is arguably on firmer footing than it was four years ago, with more robust security, economic, and diplomatic ties. Importantly, the Trump administration achieved that firmer footing not by embracing a disruptive approach, but rather by operating in a fashion consistent with precedent and with the “One-China Policy.” Although the Biden administration is bound to make adjustments, “stay the course” should be the order of the day.

### **The First Six Months**

Staying the course requires both maintaining valuable Trump administration initiatives and continuing to incrementally improve bilateral ties. One challenge in the early going will be the time required to staff up a new administration, which will limit the administration's ability to implement brand new policies during the first half of 2021. Even so, there are a number of “light-lift” steps the incoming Biden team can take to demonstrate to Taiwan, China, and US partners in Asia that the United States will continue to prioritize a robust US-Taiwan relationship and Taiwan's security.

On the diplomatic and economic front, the State De-

partment should prioritize holding the second iteration of the Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue with Taiwan. First [announced](#) in August, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [revealed](#) last week that the first talks were scheduled to occur on November 20 in Washington, DC. Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Keith Krach, who traveled to Taipei in September to attend the funeral of Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), will lead the US side.

In moving quickly to plan a second set of talks to be held in Taipei, the Biden administration could kill two birds with one stone. Even dispatching an acting undersecretary would suffice to convey that the White House is taking the [Taiwan Travel Act](#) to heart and that it will continue to pursue the high-level visits that the Trump administration prioritized late in its one and only term. Maintaining the new economic dialogue, moreover, would demonstrate that the Biden administration recognizes the importance of US-Taiwan economic ties and would keep hope alive for a possible bilateral trade agreement.

Also on the diplomatic front, the State Department should continue to prioritize multilateral engagement including Taiwan via the [Global Cooperation and Training Framework](#) (GCTF). Launched during the Obama administration as a joint US-Taiwan program, the GCTF now includes the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association as a co-sponsor as well. GCTF, according to the American Institute in Taiwan, “serves as a platform for Taiwan to share its expertise with partners around the world.” After a record-high seven workshops in 2019, there was only one during 2020 (in a virtual format, of course), presumably due to COVID-19. With AIT continuing to work at full-speed, getting a workshop on the books for the first half of 2021 should be doable. Possible topics include ensuring election integrity, managing COVID-19 vaccine rollout, and the use of big data and artificial intelligence in addressing public health challenges.

In the security realm, early movement on arms sales would be valuable and feasible. The Trump administration announced in June 2017 its first sales, which included [upgrades](#) to naval electronic warfare systems, [air-to-ground missiles](#), [torpedoes](#), and shipborne [surface-to-air](#) missiles. The Biden administration’s first sale need not necessarily be so grand. Approval of

Taiwan’s outstanding [request](#) for 1,240 TOW (Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided) anti-armor missiles—assuming the Ministry of National Defense still wants them—would be an uncontroversial place to start. During the first half of 2021, the fact of a sale would arguably be more important than its contents, as it would demonstrate the Biden administration’s commitment to continue the Trump administration’s approach of regular, rather than bundled, arms sales to Taiwan.

President Biden should also direct the Department of Defense to maintain the current pace of US naval vessel transits through the Taiwan Strait. Now is not the time to back away from the Department’s insistence that US vessels and aircraft will sail and fly wherever international law allows, especially when doing so can offer visible support for a democratic partner facing an existential threat.

### ***The First Year***

Having established its disinclination to walk back advances in the bilateral relationship achieved during the Trump years, the new Biden administration should look for meaningful ways to further deepen ties before 2021 comes to a close.

As the new president begins to put his stamp on Asia policy, he will likely seek to address a key shortcoming of his predecessor’s approach: the lack of a trade agenda for the region. Although leaders across the region may hope the Biden administration will ultimately join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)—the rejiggered Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement negotiated by President Obama—that seems unlikely for now. Hillary Clinton ran on [withdrawing](#) from the TPP during the 2016 presidential election, and although President-elect Biden has said he would consider a [re-negotiated deal](#), it is not at all clear that there is an appetite in the Democratic Party or in the Senate, even if it remains in Republican control, for new multilateral trade agreements.

In order to regrow political support for such agreements, the Biden administration should start small. To that end, there may be no better place to start than Taiwan. The American and Taiwanese economies are more complementary than competitive, an agreement



would not lead to significant job losses in the United States, and a deal could be used to begin to lay out a coordinated international approach to the tech competition with China. A US-Taiwan bilateral trade agreement (BTA) would be relatively easy to negotiate and could borrow from the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to speed the process. A BTA would likely not lead to large economic gains for the United States, but it would set baselines for future bilateral and perhaps even multilateral trade agreements. Economics aside, such an agreement would draw the United States and Taiwan closer together and perhaps spur other countries to pursue their own trade deals with Taiwan, all of which would contribute to deterring Chinese aggression. President Biden should announce by the end of 2021 that he intends to launch BTA negotiations with Taiwan.

The Biden administration should also strive to hold a bilateral naval exercise with Taiwan by the end of 2021. This would be a significant new venture, but not one entirely without precedent. After all, the United States Air Force trains Taiwan's F-16 pilots in [Arizona](#). Training together in international waters should not be considered a bridge too far. It is, rather, a natural next step for the United States and Taiwan.

While a combined naval exercise would have symbolic import, it would have substantive significance as well. The United States sells Taiwan plenty of military hardware, but spends far less time helping Taiwan's armed forces improve their "software"—the professionalism, competence, and creativity of Taiwan's sailors, soldiers, pilots, and marines. The Taiwan Relations Act [describes](#) "any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means [...] a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States." Should China ever decide to use force against Taiwan, the Taiwanese and American militaries could find themselves fighting alongside each other to ensure Taiwan's continuing freedom. Yet the two militaries do not prepare to fight together, a lapse that may give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) more confidence it can prevail in a conflict. The Biden administration should make rectifying this deficiency a priority.

### ***The Longer Term***

That late 2021 naval exercise should not be a one-off. Over the coming years, the new president's Department of Defense should begin building a calendar of regularly scheduled exercises. Initially, engagements might focus on non-combat operations like search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, communications, cross-deck helicopter operations, and underway replenishment. Over time, naval exercises should take on more complex operations, including surface and anti-submarine warfare. Eventually, all four of each country's service branches should be training together regularly at sea, in the air, and on the ground—if not in Taiwan then in the United States.

Finally, the Biden administration should pursue and seek to deepen bilateral discussions about Taiwan's security with treaty allies and other partners. With at least some partners, these discussions do happen, though largely behind closed doors. Occasionally, outside observers get a peek at those conversations. Most recently, the [joint statement](#) on Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2020 included an entire paragraph on Taiwan:

*"The Secretaries and Ministers re-affirmed Taiwan's important role in the Indo-Pacific region. [...] The United States and Australia highlighted that recent events only strengthened their resolve to support Taiwan. They reiterated that any resolution of cross-Strait differences should be peaceful and according to the will of the people on both sides, without resorting to threats or coercion."*

In the years ahead, the Biden administration should strive to place Taiwan on the agenda for all of its Indo-Pacific and European 2+2 meetings, working towards public affirmations similar to that following AUSMIN 2020. In private, the United States and its partners should have frank discussions about how they would react in the event that China uses force against Taiwan. What might US intervention look like? What would the United States expect or hope for from its allies and partners? How do those allies and partners perceive their own interests vis-à-vis a Taiwan Strait conflict and what types of support, if any, are they prepared to offer to Taipei and Washington?

These consultations will ensure that the United States and its friends will be better prepared to act quickly in the event of a crisis. Just as importantly, such talks, of which Beijing will inevitably become aware, will contribute to deterring China from resorting to force in the Taiwan Strait.

**The main point:** The Trump administration put the US-Taiwan relationship on firmer footing not by embracing a disruptive approach, but rather by operating in a fashion consistent with precedent and with the “One-China Policy.” Although the Biden administration is bound to make adjustments, “stay the course” should be the order of the day.

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## The Future of US-Taiwan Economic Relations: Lessons from the Past

By: Riley Walters

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When attempting to answer the question “How might US-Taiwan economic relations change over the next four years?” a good place to start is to look at how US-Taiwan relations have changed in the last four years. While there’s no doubt in my mind that the overall relationship has been net positive over the last four years, the Trump administration has failed to take more initiative towards building on the US-Taiwan business and trade relationship—including failing to launch negotiations for what seems like an ever-elusive US-Taiwan [free trade agreement](#) (FTA). Recent changes in the US-Taiwan economic relationship, however, should encourage more action by the next administration.

### Looking Back

In late 2016, the US-Taiwan economic relationship looked bright. There was growing support for Taiwan to potentially join the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) (TPP), either at the invitation of the US or Japan. In October of that year, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) held its tenth Trade and Investment Framework [Agreement](#) (TIFA) dialogue with Taiwan’s

Ministry of Economic Affairs. Officials at the event—the leading forum for US-Taiwan trade officials since 1994—discussed ways to improve bilateral trade and investment. Then, just two months later, then President-elect Donald Trump spoke on the phone with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文)—sending a wave of optimism throughout Washington about the future of US-Taiwan relations.

However, it quickly became evident that any optimism about the trade relationship may have been misplaced. President Trump removed the US from TPP negotiations on his first day in office (much to the chagrin of Japanese officials whom have carried forward the trade pact). Little did we know that the 2016 TIFA dialogue would also be the last of its kind. And after four years, US officials have still made no effort towards free trade negotiations, despite [regular appeals](#) from Congress and Taiwan’s efforts to remove long-contested barriers to negotiations.

Despite the apparent lack of US-Taiwan economic engagement on an official level, US-Taiwan business relations have improved quite significantly over the last few years. Between 2016 and 2019, US exports of [goods and services](#) to Taiwan increased by 10 percent to USD \$43 billion, while imports of goods and services from Taiwan increased by 34 percent to USD \$62 billion. Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have been positive as well. As of September 2020, Taiwan has become the US’ [9<sup>th</sup> largest](#) trading partner.

There were of course some black marks on the bilateral business relationship—like Foxconn’s [oversold investment](#) in Wisconsin. But there were even more bright spots—including [TSMC’s](#) announced investment into Arizona and [Microsoft’s](#) decision to build its first overseas cloud-computing data center in Taiwan.

As Taiwan continues to position itself as a hub for trade, investment, and the digital economy, as well as a gateway into Southeast Asia through its New Southbound Policy, there are surely to be more opportunities for enhancing business relations going forward.

But while business relations have been positive over the last four years, Taiwan was never a top priority for the Trump administration’s trade negotiators. Since coming into office, the Trump administration’s priorities for trade included renegotiating the North Ameri-

can Free Trade Agreement, taking an aggressive trade policy towards China, and signing other preferential trade agreements—with the United Kingdom, Japan, and [Kenya](#) taking priority. These, as well as other trade policies (such as trade disputes with the European Union), meant there were no additional resources for trade negotiations with Taiwan.

USTR—with the use of its “301 tariff [exclusion team](#),”—found itself reviewing tariff exclusions for US companies that might go out of business due to the US-China trade war instead of negotiating more trade deals. For the negotiations the administration did prioritize, it was evident that US officials were only prioritizing these because they were some of the US’ largest trading partners (Canada, Mexico, Japan) that they failed to strike a trade deal with after leaving TPP negotiations.

Of course, it is important to recognize that US officials have held particularly critical views on the US-Taiwan trade relationship that pre-date the Trump administration. Unlike with other major trading partners, US officials have a [long-held view](#) that trade negotiations with Taiwan would neither yield significant economic benefit nor would they necessitate a comprehensive trade deal to resolve outstanding trade issues.

But now, Taiwan has become one of the US’ largest trading partners without a preferential trade agreement (besides China and the European Union).

On top of US officials’ apparent lack of desire for a trade deal, USTR and the US Department of Agriculture have also had an issue with Taiwan’s import ban on US pork and beef for over [a decade](#). While there has been no TIFA dialogue recently, there was an even longer hiatus between 2007 and 2013 because of the [pork and beef](#) issue. It’s fair to assume that when the Trump administration came into office, they decided that these dialogues were going nowhere and to put an end to them altogether.

And yet, just a few months ago now, President [Tsai announced](#) that her administration will be taking steps to remove many of these restrictions on US pork and beef imports.

Her decision, while [controversial at home](#), won the praise of some of the US’ top officials at the time, including the Secretary of Commerce [Wilbur Ross](#), Sec-

retary of State Mike Pompeo, and even Vice President [Mike Pence](#). According to [Secretary Pompeo](#), “The US welcomes President Tsai Ing-Wen’s August 28 statement that Taiwan will move quickly to lift restrictions on imports of US pork and beef. This move opens the door for even deeper economic and trade cooperation. Kudos to President Tsai for her leadership.” However, USTR has remained silent on the issue.

For years now, President Tsai has [signaled](#) that her administration is ready to begin free trade negotiations. The recent announcement of the removal of pork and beef restrictions is a clear message for the next US administration that she is serious.

Another area of opportunity for US-Taiwan relations is the recent announcement of a [bilateral economic dialogue](#) headed by the US Department of State. The new Economic Prosperity Partnership [dialogue](#) will focus primarily on technology issues and include discussions on semiconductors, healthcare, energy, and more. This is a welcomed development in the US-Taiwan economic relationship, as there has been a need to expand the [economic partnership](#) for years.

Nevertheless, it’s fair to say that even with this new initiative the last four years of official US-Taiwan economic engagement is too little, too late.

#### ***Four More Years of Lackluster Economic Engagement?***

First, failure by US trade officials to respond to the Tsai administration’s removal of pork and beef restrictions with credible action will reflect poorly, not just on the US-Taiwan relationship, but on the Tsai administration as well. Previously, Taiwanese officials were hesitant to base trade negotiations on [preconditions](#) like removing these restrictions. A lack of US response will confirm their suspicions.

Second, failure to follow through with regular meetings of the new bilateral economic dialogue will send a message (particularly to those in Beijing) that the US isn’t serious about expanding its economic relationship with Taiwan. It’s great that the State Department is taking the initiative to build the US-Taiwan economic partnership, but it would be a shame if US engagement did not include the USTR and other agencies as well for regularly scheduled meetings.

And finally, even though Taiwan is a member of the World Trade Organization, able to negotiate its own trade deals, and an important link in many industrial and technology supply chains, Taiwan will continue to be left out of regional and bilateral trade deals—such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—if the US isn't helping bring Taiwan into the fold.

It is difficult to say whether we'll get another four years of the same kind of uninterested USTR. A new USTR may still prioritize other issues, like renegotiating a US-China deal or pursuing a trade agenda focused on sectoral agreements.

But if there is a lesson to be learned from the last four years, it is that developing the US-Taiwan economic relationship and finally pursuing a US-Taiwan FTA is one issue the next administration cannot ignore.

**The main point:** While US-Taiwan business relations improved over the last four years, US trade negotiators have failed to take advantage of the improving economic relationship.