

Addressing the Taiwan Question: The U.S. Role¹

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ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN ROLE IN TAIWAN

Even before World War II was halfway over, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had determined that Taiwan and other territories “stolen” by Japan should be returned to the Republic of China (ROC) after the war. He formalized this view in the Cairo Declaration of November 26, 1943, together with UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the ROC’s Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The Soviets accepted this position at Tehran in December.

At Potsdam, on July 26, 1945, President Harry S. Truman reaffirmed this position with the commitment by the same powers (again, subsequently adhered to by the Soviet Union) that

The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out and Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to the islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and such minor islands as we determine.²

The Japanese Instrument of Surrender of September 2, 1945, accepted the provisions of the Potsdam Proclamation and pledged to carry it out. On October 25, 1945, Chiang Kai-shek’s representative, General Chen Yi, accepted the surrender of the Japanese forces on Taiwan and proclaimed that this act constituted the reincorporation of Taiwan into China under the sovereign administration of the ROC.³

The United States and the other allies demurred, characterizing Chen’s acceptance of the surrender as “on behalf of the Allies” and maintained that no act transferring sovereignty had occurred. Moreover, as the Chinese civil war progressed, and as the depravity of ROC rule on Taiwan deepened and spread, more and more qualms arose in Washington about the wisdom of endorsing Chinese sovereignty. In Washington’s view, it would be strategically damaging to U.S. interests to allow the Communists to seize the island, but it would also be strategically unwise—and immoral—to support continued Nationalist rule there. As a result, various ideas emerged centering around either UN trusteeship or a referendum that would likely lead to independence.

Reflecting the American ambivalence, a January 1949 National Security Council draft report said:

The present legal status of Formosa and the Pescadores is that they are a portion of the Japanese Empire awaiting final disposition by a treaty of peace. The U.S. position regarding the status of the islands is qualified by the Cairo Declaration by the Chiefs of State of the U.S., U.K. and China and the policy which

² Cited in Hungdah Chiu (ed.), *China and the Question of Taiwan*, (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 208. Chiang Kai-shek did not attend, but “signed” the Potsdam Declaration “by wire.”

³ Citations of the relevant documents are found in Chiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 209ff.

the U.S. has followed since V-J Day of facilitating and recognizing Chinese *de facto* control over the islands.⁴

Although the report went on to say that “the basic aim” of the United States should be to deny Formosa and the Pescadores to the Communists, it also concluded that in determining policy the United States “cannot leave out of account the Formosan people and their strong resentment of Chinese rule arising from Chinese maladministration and repression.”

The debates that swirled within the U.S. government are well documented and do not need further elaboration here.⁵ Suffice it to say that, while the Defense Department, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed allowing Taiwan to slip into Communist hands, it declined to declare the island to be of such critical priority as to warrant American military intervention. And the State Department, which also opposed military intervention, kept searching for a political or diplomatic approach that would not lead to Communist control, but that also did not confront the Mainland with an issue of irredentist ambition in which the United States appeared as the villain.

During 1949, detailed plans were drawn up to take the issue to the United Nations, but by fall, with Communist victory assured on the Mainland and deemed inevitable across the Taiwan Strait within a year, the United States abandoned these efforts and adopted a hands-off approach. On January 5, 1950, President Truman made a formal announcement eschewing involvement in the Chinese civil war or provision of military aid or advice to the ROC government on Taiwan. Secretary of State Dean Acheson followed up the same day with a press conference in which he spelled out the new policy. While he announced no decision on sovereignty, Acheson stated that, “whatever may be the legal situation,” U.S. policy would not be hamstrung by quibbles over “any lawyers’ words.”⁶ Unwilling to fight a war against the newly-founded People’s Republic of China (PRC), realpolitik was the order of the day.

That policy lasted less than six months. When North Korea attacked across the 38th Parallel on June 25, 1950, Truman once again abruptly changed course. On June 27, he ordered the 7th Fleet to prevent military action either way across the Strait. He went on:

⁴ “Draft Report by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States with Respect to Formosa,” January 19, 1949, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, Volume IX (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), p. 271. Although only a “draft,” this document reflected important U.S. Government views at the time as seen in its selection by the State Department Historian for inclusion in this volume.

⁵ See, for example, David M. Finkelstein’s Washington’s Taiwan Dilemma, 1949-1950 (Fairfax: George Mason University Press, 1993).

⁶ Excerpts from Truman’s statement and Acheson’s press conference are available in Chiu, op. cit., pp. 220-222.

The determination of the future status of Formosa must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations.⁷

At this point, it became an openly stated American objective to keep Taiwan out of PRC hands. U.S.-PRC relations descended into open hostilities in Korea, eventually settling into an extended cold peace. Still, before the end of the 1950s, a realization dawned not only on China specialists in the United States but on some political leaders, as well, that total estrangement from Mainland China was not in the American interest. So controversial was this issue, however, that as they were transferring power, outgoing President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned his successor, John F. Kennedy, that Ike would not criticize JFK on foreign policy except in one area: If Kennedy sought to move ahead with the PRC, Eisenhower would feel compelled to oppose him publicly.⁸

A variety of legal theories were tried out over the years to facilitate a reknitting of U.S. relations with the Mainland while ensuring that Taiwan was not sacrificed in the process. All of these approaches, it should be noted, were rejected by both Taipei and Beijing, who shared the view that Taiwan had been returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1945, their “only” difference being over which of them was the legitimate government of China.

As late as April 1971, the U.S. position remained that the status of Taiwan’s sovereignty was “undetermined,” as none of the conditions for international resolution laid out in Truman’s June 27, 1950, statement had been met.⁹

THE NIXON/KISSINGER OPENING

Seeking help in extricating the U.S. from Vietnam and an ally in opposing the USSR, President Richard M. Nixon took advantage of his sterling anti-Communist credentials and Sino-Soviet tensions to reach out to the PRC to forge a partnership based on common strategic interests. Although China, newly emerging from the depths of the Cultural Revolution to find a hostile Soviet Union threatening it, shared a

⁷ President Truman’s statement is available in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume VII (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), pp. 202-203.

⁸ According to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, Houghton-Mifflin, 1965, page 480), Ike issued his warning in connection with the question of admitting China to the United Nations. Clark Clifford reports it as having been connected to the proposal of “liberal Democrats” to recognize the PRC (Counsel to the President, New York: Random House, 1991, p. 345).

⁹ Cf. Department of State, “Transcript of Press, Radio and Television News Briefing,” April 28, 1971. In its peace treaties with the United States and others powers in 1951 and with the ROC in 1952, Japan ceded sovereignty over Taiwan, but it did not specify to whom it was ceding it, leaving that question in limbo.

positive view of such a shift, it is clear from the record that satisfactorily dealing with Taiwan was a prerequisite to progress between Washington and Beijing.¹⁰

In their July 1971 meetings with Henry A. Kissinger, Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Mao Zedong sought to push Washington to full normalization of relations in short order, switching recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Nixon was not prepared to do that for domestic political reasons, but there was a reasonably clear understanding that this would come in his second term. In the meantime, however, Nixon was prepared to commit that, as the war in Indochina wound down, he would remove the bulk of U.S. forces on Taiwan and that he would draw down the remainder as U.S.-PRC relations developed.

From the beginning, Nixon and Kissinger sought to elicit from Beijing a commitment to peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. Although it was difficult “in principle” for the Chinese leaders to make such a commitment on an “internal” matter, they did say that they would work for a peaceful outcome. By 1973, however, Mao revealed his frustration—and, likely, his inner belief—when he told Kissinger he could “do without” Taiwan for a hundred years, but that, in the end, he believed the issue would have to be resolved by force.¹¹

The American side never clearly addressed the issue of Taiwan’s sovereignty in these conversations. In July 1971, for example, when Zhou Enlai complained about the State Department spokesman having said only eleven weeks earlier that the status of Taiwan was not settled, Kissinger responded that this would not be repeated. Still, when Zhou sought a commitment from Kissinger that the United States would go further and recognize Taiwan as “belonging to China,” he did not get a direct response. The best he could elicit from the American National Security Adviser was a statement that, with the eventual U.S. recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China, with the U.S. commitment not to support “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan,” and with the U.S. pledge of non-support of the Taiwan Independence Movement, the issue of Taiwan “belonging to China” would “take care of itself.”¹²

In the February 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, Beijing laid out all of the formulations that it found unacceptable: “two Chinas,” “one China, one Taiwan,” “one China, two governments,” an “independent Taiwan,” *and* “the status of Taiwan remains to be determined.” For its part, the U.S. adopted the now-famous formula:

¹⁰ Much of this discussion is based on documents released under the Freedom of Information Act to the National Security Archive that are available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/>.

¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation of November 12, 1973, in William Burr (ed.), *The Kissinger Transcripts*, (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 186.

¹² See Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, July 10, 1971, afternoon session, National Security Archive, [op. cit.](#), Document 35, pp. 15-16.

The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.¹³

In a sense, the U.S. view remained that the sovereign status of Taiwan still had not been determined. While Washington “acknowledged” the Chinese position, it took no stand of its own. But the American view on the terms for determining that status were narrowed from Truman’s formulation envisaging one or another international action to whatever was worked out peacefully between the two sides of the Strait. The options theoretically ranged from independence to reunification. But the United States pledged not to support the former and declined to support latter, taking the position that the substance of any resolution was not for Americans to determine. What the U.S. insisted it had a role in determining, however, was the method of resolution. That is, the U.S. had a strategic national interest, not in either keeping Taiwan from reunifying with the Mainland or fostering such a union, but in ensuring that any resolution was peaceful. Indeed, except for the period between January 5, 1950 and June 27, 1950, as described earlier, that insistence on peaceful means has been the consistent American position since the 1940s.

At the time this position was formalized in the various U.S.-PRC joint communiqués, Taiwan was not a democracy but an authoritarian and (even at that late date) often repressive society. Nonetheless, the U.S. position reflected not only an enduring sense of concern for the well-being of the people in Taiwan, but also a belief that allowing forceful takeover would have created a political firestorm in the United States. Perhaps equally important was (and is) the conviction that allowing use of force to settle the issue would undermine regional stability as well as the credibility of the U.S. strategic posture in Asia and beyond.

Taiwan’s democracy has blossomed over the past decade and a half, however, and in American minds stands in sharp contrast to the repressive nature of the PRC political system and the still-vivid images of Tiananmen. For these reasons, and especially in light of greater PRC threats to use force against Taiwan in recent years, the importance of peaceful settlement has become even more salient for

¹³ It is worth noting here that the Chinese-language term for “acknowledge” in the Shanghai Communiqué (“ren shi dao”) was altered in normalization communiqué six and a half years later to “cheng ren.” This change was proposed by the Chinese side as a more accurate rendering of “acknowledge,” but it is read by many people to have the stronger meaning of “recognize.” The U.S. made clear for the record that the United States intended no change of position in this regard from the Shanghai Communiqué and that, in any event, in stating the U.S. position, the English-language version was authoritative. With this in mind, it is noteworthy that, in all English-language versions of the normalization communiqué put out by the PRC government, “acknowledge” is used.

the American public. President William J. Clinton expressed this by saying that any settlement had to meet with the “assent” of the people of Taiwan.¹⁴

DEALING WITH LEE TENG-HUI

When Lee Teng-hui first took over as president in Taiwan in the late 1980s, he hewed closely to the traditional KMT stance on “one China” and the position that the only issue was whether the ROC or PRC was the legitimate government of that “one China.” He backed the formation of a National Unification Council and creation of Guidelines that called for ultimate unification. Nonetheless, over time, although he did not directly advocate a final configuration of either “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan,” he supported a variety of steps that distanced Taiwan from the Mainland in practical and even legal ways pending unification. For example, he asserted that amendments to the ROC constitution in 1991 and 1992 limited Taipei’s “jurisdiction” to cover only Taiwan, the Penghus and the offshore islands, and said he did not challenge the PRC’s jurisdiction over the Mainland.¹⁵ And although he frequently referred to the fact that “the Republic of China” was a sovereign, independent state in existence since 1912, he increasingly spoke of a geographically-limited “Taiwan” or “the Republic of China on Taiwan” as his country. It was use of this latter phrase, repeated by some counts as many as sixteen times in his speech at Cornell University in June 1995, that made Lee’s visit to the United States especially objectionable to Beijing. That visit, of course, led to a crisis in U.S.-PRC relations as well as in cross-Strait relations, and climaxed in the military tensions in spring 1996.

In the wake of those tensions and the military moves of both sides in March 1996, Washington recognized that a course correction was necessary. Within two months, Secretary of State Warren Christopher made a speech in which he not only called on both sides of the Strait to avoid unilateral efforts to change the status quo, but also advocated periodic U.S.-PRC cabinet-level meetings in capitals

¹⁴ Clinton’s statement appeared in “Remarks by the President to the Business Council,” February 24, 2000 (<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ea/uschina/clint224.htm>). In response to PRC complaints that the views of the people on the Mainland on this question also counted for something, the U.S. position under President George W. Bush has evolved even further. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Peter T.R. Brookes, recently put it: “We don’t support a unilateral change in the status quo and we expect Taiwan’s future to be determined in a peaceful and mutually agreeable manner *to the people on both sides of the strait*.” (Speech to Brookings Institution National Issues Forum: “Northeast Asia-After One Eventful Year: Assessing the Bush Administration’s Policy for Northeast Asia,” April 3, 2002.) (Emphasis added)

¹⁵ Later, Lee became more explicit: “Taiwan is not a part of China. These are two nations on an equal footing.” (Lin Mei-chun, “Lee cautions government on ‘one China’ principle,” *Taipei Times*, May 6, 2002 (<http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2002/05/06/story/0000134816>)). He backed calls to abolish the National Unification Council and Guidelines, saying they were a political compromise that failed to achieve their objective of inducing the PRC to eschew the use of force. (Lin Mei-chun, “TSU seeks end of unification council,” *Taipei Times*, May 15, 2002 (<http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2002/05/15/story/0000136094>)).

as well as regular summit meetings.¹⁶ This eventually led to the exchange of presidential visits, with Jiang Zemin going to Washington in October 1997 and Clinton traveling to Beijing in June 1998.

It was during the latter visit that Clinton publicly articulated the controversial “three no’s”—no U.S. support for “one China, one Taiwan” or “two Chinas,” no support for “Taiwan independence,” and no support for Taiwan’s membership in international organizations made up of states. None of these positions was new either to the Clinton Administration or to previous American administrations.¹⁷ Indeed, the first two were positions tabled by Kissinger in his very first trip to China in July 1971, and the third has been the American position since U.S.-PRC normalization in 1979. While no one should expect the Bush Administration to repeat Clinton’s words, neither should anyone expect it to repudiate their substance.

Still, both out of respect for Taiwan’s achievements and in light of the PRC military build-up opposite Taiwan since the mid-1990s, the U.S. was increasingly solicitous of Taiwan and its leader. That continued unchecked until July 9, 1999, when in an interview with Radio Deutsche Welle Lee intoned the formula he thought should apply to cross-Strait relations. He said they should be treated as “a state-to-state relationship or at least a special state-to-state relationship.”¹⁸ In response, the United States dispatched officials to both Taipei and Beijing to ensure that everyone knew the U.S. did not support this “two states theory,” as it became known. And at the Auckland APEC leaders’ meeting that fall, while Clinton cautioned Jiang about the serious consequences if the PRC used force against Taiwan, he also told the PRC president that Lee had “made things more difficult”¹⁹ for both China and the United States.

CHEN SHUI-BIAN ARRIVES ON THE SCENE

The election in March 2000 of Chen Shui-bian, candidate of the long-time independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), had an ironic effect on this dynamic. Having been sensitized over the preceding two years or more to the negative American view of gamesmanship in this realm, Chen sought to reassure both Washington and Beijing that he was not going to rock the cross-Strait boat by declaring independence or even taking any of several steps short of that to which the PRC had exhibited

¹⁶ “American Interests and the U.S.-China Relationship,” Address to The Asia Society, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, New York City, May 17, 1996.

¹⁷ That said, Clinton supported efforts to permit Taiwan to participate in the activities of such organizations as the WHO, but, as under Bush in May 2002, those efforts were blocked by the PRC.

¹⁸ Interview text available at <http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/state/1.htm>.

¹⁹ See Bonnie S. Glaser, “Beginning to Thaw,” Comparative Connections, 3rd Quarter 1999, available at http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/993Qus_china.html.

extreme neuralgia. This included, for example, his pledge not to seek to write the “two states theory” into the constitution.²⁰

Americans were pleased by this gesture, and although the PRC did not respond in the positive fashion that Chen had hoped (which undoubtedly weakened his political leverage—and his enthusiasm—for taking further steps), Beijing’s angst subsided to some extent. Still, suspicions regarding Chen’s long-range intentions remained, and over time the PRC came to see many of Chen’s statements and actions as playing to—and expanding the limits of—American tolerance rather than moving cross-Strait relations ahead. Indeed, Beijing perceived a tendency toward “creeping separatism” that, while less dramatic than what it had foreseen under Lee or feared under Chen, was nonetheless potentially more dangerous. This was because the rationale for threatening to use force to deter a dramatic “declaration of independence” was clear-cut, but doing so in reaction to any one small, seemingly “reasonable” yet insidious step would be far more difficult to justify.

Chen declined to head the National Unification Council (which Lee had chaired), refused to call himself a “Chinese,” and noted that unification was “not the only option.” Although the Clinton Administration could see why these positions bothered Beijing, and continued to urge both sides to avoid provocation and return to dialogue, each of Chen’s positions had a plausible explanation and, in any event, none seemed so confrontational as to warrant a crisis.

COME THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

In important ways, however, the picture changed with the advent of the George W. Bush Administration in January 2001. After taking what seemed to be an initially hostile position toward the PRC in the Republican primary campaign, one time even labeling it a “strategic competitor” (presumably to draw a sharp contrast with Clinton’s vision of China as a future “strategic partner”), candidate Bush eventually adopted a stance of favoring good U.S.-PRC relations. But he also made clear that he thought Clinton had been insufficiently attentive to Taiwan’s security concerns and had not given the island the dignity it merited based on its democratic evolution and economic achievement. Once in office, President Bush sought to remedy these perceived shortcomings.

²⁰ Chen’s full pledge, contained in his May 20, 2000, inauguration speech, went as follows: “[A]s long as the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] regime has no intention to use military force against Taiwan, I pledge that during my term in office, I will not declare independence, I will not change the national title, I will not push forth the inclusion of the so-called “state-to-state” description in the Constitution, and I will not promote a referendum to change the status quo in regard to the question of independence or unification. Furthermore, there is no question of abolishing the Guidelines for National Unification and the National Unification Council.” (http://www.president.gov.tw/2_special/index_e.html)

How he did so was also conditioned by the EP-3 incident of April 2001, only two months after his inauguration, when a lumbering U.S. reconnaissance plane was bumped by a PLA fighter jet that was harassing it to demonstrate PRC umbrage at close-in American intelligence collection. The quick (and, to Americans, implausible) Chinese accusation that the U.S. plane had been responsible for the accident, and the detention of the crew for 11 days—several days after the terms of their release had been agreed, angered the American government and public. That anger is still reflected in the Pentagon's reluctance to engage in military-to-military exchanges with China,²¹ though that is not the only reason for DoD's reticence.

But for the President, though he too was quite obviously upset at PRC handling, the incident underscored the importance of creating effective working relations with China even if—perhaps because—serious problems in the relationship persisted. He spoke on the day the EP-3 crew returned to the U.S. of the need for the United States and China to work together on a host of common interests, observing that, while we had differences, some of them fundamental, he would approach those differences “in a spirit of respect.” Adumbrating language adopted in his meeting with Jiang Zemin in Shanghai six months later, Bush spoke of the need to advance a “constructive” relationship between the two countries, continuing:

Both the United States and China must make a determined choice to have a productive relationship that will contribute to a more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world.²²

Indeed, the trend of relations from that point on, through Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to China in July and the Bush-Jiang meeting in Shanghai in October, was generally in the same direction. This was so even though a series of American actions upset Beijing, including the approval in late April 2001 of a significant package of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the President's ABC-TV interview statement the next day about doing “whatever it took” to help Taiwan defend itself (including implicitly, the dispatch of U.S. forces), and substantially more liberal ground rules allowed Chen Shui-bian when he transited the United States in May.

The positive track was reinforced by the tragic events of September 11, which allowed the two Presidents to set a new tone for the relationship when they met in Shanghai. While Taiwan was very much on Jiang Zemin's mind as, in private, it was on George Bush's, in public both only touched lightly on this most problematic of issues.

²¹ During PRC Vice President Hu Jintao's visit to Washington in early May 2002, he and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld discussed reinvigorating military exchanges, as President Bush and President Jiang Zemin had already agreed to do. The issue has lingered for months, however, and exactly what will result from the Hu-Rumsfeld discussion remains to be seen.

²² “Remarks by the President Upon the Return From China of U.S. Service Members,” White House press release, April 12, 2001.

During the February 2002 Bush visit to Beijing, as well, Taiwan-related issues were handled in a generally positive manner. Now, however, each side was more direct laying out the concerns uppermost in its mind. Jiang publicly reminded Bush of the need to adhere to past commitments, and Bush alluded twice to the “commitments” the U.S. had to Taiwan’s security under the Taiwan Relations Act. (By way of contrast, in public Bush mentioned the “one China” policy by name just once and referred to the three U.S.-PRC joint communiqués only indirectly.)

Despite the almost yearlong generally positive trend and the “success” of Bush’s two China visits, the climate deteriorated again shortly after the President left Beijing. As noted earlier, the PRC had already identified an increasingly aggressive pattern of “creeping Taiwan independence,” for example, what they labeled Taipei’s “de-Sinicization”²³ and “rectification of names”²⁴ campaigns. But now certain events suggested more strongly than ever to Beijing that this trend was proceeding with U.S. connivance. This was seen in a planned (but subsequently cancelled) Lee Teng-hui visit to Washington and in references in the Pentagon’s “Nuclear Posture Review” (NPR) to the possible use of U.S. nuclear weapons in a Taiwan contingency. It was also most sharply reflected, Beijing believed, in the American decision to allow Taiwan’s defense minister, Tang Yao-ming, to visit the United States to attend a privately sponsored Taiwan defense-related conference in Florida and to meet there separately with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly. Beijing saw this as a break with precedent, since other Taiwan defense ministers who had come to the U.S. since normalization had, nominally at least, only been “transiting” the country.

In his speech to the conference, Wolfowitz reiterated long-standing U.S. policy that U.S. does not support “Taiwan independence” and that it also opposes the use of force by Beijing. In addition, following standard practice, he urged cross-Strait dialogue to resolve the issues between them peacefully. But he also spoke of the Taiwan Relations Act as “the foundation” of U.S.-Taiwan relations (omitting, as Bush had done in public in Beijing, reference to the three U.S.-PRC joint communiqués) and he reprised the President’s April 2001 ABC-TV remarks that “the United States is committed to doing whatever it takes to help Taiwan defend itself.”²⁵

For his part, Kelly affirmed the continuing validity of the so-called “six assurances” provided to Taiwan in 1982.²⁶ Although these positions have been standard fare since they were first issued two

²³ Emphasizing Taiwan’s language, history and culture rather than China’s.

²⁴ Using “Taiwan” more and more frequently rather than “Republic of China,” even in official contexts.

²⁵ The text of Wolfowitz’s speech, initially withheld, was eventually released under the Freedom of Information Act. Cf. Jay Chen and Sofia Wu in “U.S. Committed to Helping Taiwan Defend Itself: Pentagon Official,” CNA, April 8, 2002 (<http://portal.gio.gov.tw/cna/20020409/20020409201046.html>).

²⁶ The “six assurances” were provided to Taipei in July 1982 as the August 17, 1982, U.S.-PRC joint communiqué was being negotiated. They have been reported with slight variations. The U.S. government version, although not characterized as “assurances,” was presented in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by then-Assistant Secretary of State for East

decades ago, their reiteration at this time received considerable notice in the context of what is generally seen as the Bush Administration's "tilt" toward Taiwan.

The strongest remonstrance over the defense minister's visit and the NPR came from PRC Vice Minister Li Zhaoxing to Ambassador Clark Randt on March 16.²⁷ Pulling out most of the rhetorical stops, Li accused the United States of interfering in China's internal affairs and undermining U.S.-PRC relations. He charged that the U.S. was "acting stubbornly and arbitrarily" in continuing arms sales to Taiwan, "pampering" Lee Teng-hui, upgrading U.S.-Taiwan relations, and "inflating the arrogance" of separatist forces in Taiwan. Citing the NPR, he accused the United States of nuclear saber rattling.²⁸ Noting that the U.S. constantly repeats its fidelity to the "one China" policy and the three U.S.-PRC joint communiqués, he dismissively asked: "Is any part of your acts mentioned above consistent with these joint communiqués?"

Observing that the West has a saying that there is no such thing as a "free lunch," Li noted that the East also has an apt saying for this situation: "A man who is not trustworthy cannot stand." "How," he inquired rhetorically, "can a nation stand on its feet among the community of nations if it does not honor its own word?"²⁹

CURRENT TRENDS

Despite all of this, many international observers view the cross-Strait situation with a fair degree of equanimity. After all, they argue, Chen Shui-bian may be trying to push the envelope on Taiwan's

Asian and Pacific Affairs John H. Holdridge on August 18, 1982: The U.S. did not agree to set a date certain for ending arms sales to Taiwan; Washington sees no mediation role for the U.S. between the two sides of the Strait; the U.S. will not attempt to exert pressure on Taiwan to enter into negotiations with the PRC; there is no change in the U.S. long-standing position on the issue of sovereignty over Taiwan [i.e. that the U.S. has "acknowledged the Chinese position on this issue"]; the U.S. has no plans to seek revisions to the Taiwan Relations Act [as, Holdridge reported, the PRC suggested at one point that it do]; and the U.S. has not agreed to engage in prior consultations with Beijing on arms sales to Taiwan.

²⁷ "China Summons US Ambassador to Make Representations," *People's Daily on-line*, March 17, 2002

(http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200203/17/eng20020317_92254.shtml)

²⁸ The Taiwan defense ministry was also reportedly distressed by the introduction of U.S. nuclear policy into the equation. The ministry said that reference to the possible use of nuclear weapons in a Taiwan contingency "will be detrimental to cross-strait relations since it will only give greater leverage to hawkish members of the Chinese [PRC] government" (Brian Hsu, "Defense ministry sees cross-strait ties worsening," *Taipei Times*, April 1, 2002

(<http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2002/04/01/story/0000130036>)

²⁹ Bush's subsequent reference to "both countries, the Republic of Taiwan and China" was readily set aside by Beijing as a verbal slip, but many PRC analysts took it as a true reflection of the President's underlying approach to the issue. That said, even in the campaign Bush endorsed the "one China" policy. In a GOP debate on March 2, 2000, in Los Angeles he said: "I would hope Taiwan would...hear the call that a one-China policy is important for the peaceful resolution of the dispute between China and Taiwan...[and] has allowed...Taiwan to develop into a market-oriented economy and flourishing democracy."

(http://issues2000.org/Celeb/George_W_Bush_China.htm) And in the flurry following his April 2001 statements about doing "whatever it took" to defend Taiwan, the President reaffirmed his adherence to the "one China" policy, as, we have noted, he did again in Beijing in February 2002.

standing in the world, in general, and its treatment by the United States, in particular. But Washington will not support a radical step by Taipei, and Chen will not chance it. For even if the PRC is not prepared to launch an all-out, direct invasion of the island, and even though *any* attack would bring very serious consequences down on Beijing's head, few doubt that the PRC would take some forceful measures if Chen breached a "red line" on "independence."

Moreover, with the increasing level of economic interaction—and interdependence—across the Strait, both sides have strong incentives not to precipitate a crisis. Equally important, neither wants to be seen as "mismanaging" cross-Strait relations—or relations with the United States—as they approach important central leadership changes (with the senior PRC leadership scheduled to turn over in 2002-2003 and political maneuvering already under way in Taiwan in anticipation of the island's 2004 presidential election.)

Beyond wanting to ensure Taiwan's safety while remaining on good terms with Beijing, the United States, too, has strong reasons to work to reinforce calm across the Strait as it pursues the war against terrorism and copes with the crisis in the Middle East.

Yet, no one can count on the situation remaining frozen indefinitely, with disruption possible from any one of a number of quarters. A new Taiwan Caucus has recently been formed in Congress that will want to be seen to be doing something active on Taiwan's behalf. The Caucus is already reportedly promoting an invitation to Chen Shui-bian to visit Washington,³⁰ and Taiwan's foreign minister announced that a Chen visit to the U.S. "in his capacity as president of the Republic of China" is an "important goal."³¹ Chen himself said he hopes to "enter" the United States, "and not just in transit."³² Even short of that, it is clear that both Taipei and some officials in the Bush Administration favor lifting long-standing restrictions on allowing Taiwan's representatives to make office calls in the State Department and NSC, and Taiwan is pressing its case.³³

President Bush signed legislation committing the United States to promoting "observer" status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization. While China's view is not accepted by most Americans, Beijing opposes any support for Taipei's application as inconsistent with previous U.S. commitments on "one China." In the event, the U.S. spoke out in favor of Taiwan's effort, but it did so at a dinner rather

³⁰ Cf. Carol Giacomo, "U.S. mulls inviting Taiwan leader to Washington," Reuters, May 7, 2002.

³¹ Ella Lu, "ROC Foreign Ministry Hopes President Can Make Official Visit to U.S.," CNA, May 9, 2002.

³² "It's Not Necessary to Wait," May 13, 2002 interview with Newsweek International, May 20, 2002 issue.

³³ Cf. James Kuo and Maubo Chang, "ROC Is Seeking Better Treatment for Its Diplomats in US," CNA, March 16, 2002.

than during the World Health Assembly³⁴ debate, where it was raised by several states for inclusion on the agenda.

Although they are unlikely to succeed, voices are even being raised to codify the “six assurances” in legislation,³⁵ presumably to forestall any temptation by a future Administration from seeking to walk them back without having to pass through the gauntlet of congressional righteousness. And health and Taiwan politics permitting, Lee Teng-hui will almost certainly reschedule his visit to Washington, where he will speak at the National Press Club and be received grandly on Capitol Hill. In that event, Beijing will complain loudly, but it will watch especially closely how Lee is treated by the Administration.

In addition, if the current pattern is not broken, it is likely that the PRC will continue its build-up of missiles opposite Taiwan and its acquisition of other weapons systems designed specifically for a Taiwan contingency. This will trigger further, more sophisticated U.S. arms sales to Taiwan—and other military relationships—that will deepen the divide not only across the Strait but also between Washington and Beijing. This will contribute to the trend already accelerated by the enshrining as policy in a State Council White Paper more threatening PRC postures on the possible use of force against Taiwan,³⁶ on the one hand, and stated plans to deploy more U.S. Navy and Air Force assets in the Pacific,³⁷ on the other. The frequent reiteration recently of China’s commitment to a patient, peaceful approach to reunification³⁸ is no doubt intended, in part, to quell concerns over the White Paper. But not only does that document remain on the books as a statement of official policy, but the continuing PRC build-up will inevitably rub up against the bedrock U.S. policy concerning peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.

A “doomsday” scenario emerging from all of this is not likely and should not be predicted. But neither can it be dismissed. Under some scenarios stimulated by the most problematic of these possibilities (for example, a Chen visit or the sale of Theater Missile Defense (TMD) or Aegis-equipped destroyers to Taipei), one can imagine the PRC engaging in large-scale military exercises (a la 1996), a robust Taiwan response, and an unanticipated incident that quickly escalates. Although Americans close to the Administration aver with some insistence that there is “adult supervision” of Taiwan policy, i.e.

³⁴ The WHA is the WHO’s principal decision-making body.

³⁵ Cf. Nat Bellochi, “Toward better US-Taiwan relations,” *Taipei Times*, April 17, 2002 (<http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/2002/04/17/story/0000132196>)

³⁶ The PRC State Council’s February 2001 “Taiwan White Paper,” for example, included several troubling provisions, including one calling for possible use of force against Taiwan not only if Taiwan declared independence, but merely if too much time went by without achieving negotiated reunification. (Text of the White Paper is at <http://www.chinadaily.net/highlights/docs/2001-04-30/3791.html>)

³⁷ See Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001.

³⁸ See, for example, Vice Premier Qian Qichen’s January 24, 2002, speech commemorating Jiang Zemin’s January 30, 1995, “eight point proposal.” At the same time, Jiang himself recently reiterated the call for “resolving the Taiwan issue at an early date.” (Xu Xingtang, “Jiang Zemin Meets Former US President Bush,” *Xinhua*, May 7, 2002.)

that the United States will not adopt policies or take actions that cross obvious PRC “red lines,” it is not at all clear where Washington thinks those “red lines” lie or even where Beijing does.

As President Bush has implied on numerous occasions, there is no American desire to poke Beijing in the eye on “one China.” Yet, his Administration has demonstrated considerable impatience with toeing the PRC’s line on how to define U.S. “unofficial” relations with Taiwan or how to define what is or is not necessary for Taiwan’s defense in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act. These, the Administration believes, should be American decisions, not something preemptively limited by fear of PRC anger. And, especially since the PRC reaction to what has been done so far amounts to very little—a tongue-lashing or two and the cancellation of some navy port calls³⁹—the argument is that, as long as the U.S. holds the line on the basics of its “one China” policy, there is not only no danger, but still more room for maneuver. Moreover, it is argued, since even the Clinton Administration made clear to Beijing that the U.S. would react to continuing PRC military build-up by upping the ante on our security relations with Taiwan, Bush’s approach is well within the bounds of past policy and practice.

China faces some tough choices in this situation. Its economic well-being, its political stability, and even its security depend in important measure on constructive relations with the United States. Since the U.S. seems firmly committed not to support an “independent Taiwan,” the issue for Beijing becomes, not whether the U.S. will stick with its “one China” policy writ large, but determining whether at some point Taipei’s salami tactics (and U.S. complicity) add up to the functional equivalent of “independence.” Or at least where they reach a point that a warning shot (literal or figurative) needs to be fired that has more than a pinprick effect.

Generally speaking, the PRC has been relying in recent months on the deepening cross-Strait economic ties to provide ballast in current circumstances (for example, by producing business community pressure on Chen Shui-bian not to go too far) as well as to generate momentum for closer political ties in the future. And it has counted on the positive effects of summit diplomacy with Washington, supplementing practical cooperation in the war against terrorism, to steady U.S. relations. But the trends within Taiwan discussed above, and the sense that the United States is either oblivious to or unconcerned about PRC concerns, has created renewed doubts in Beijing about the efficacy of its current approach.

On current trends, then, there is a more than trivial chance that tensions will be ratcheted up in coming months. This means that the policy issue on the table has at least two dimensions. The issue is

³⁹ In the wake of Tang Yao-ming’s Florida visit, an unconfirmed call by the PLA Navy at a U.S. port was “cancelled” as was a USN destroyer call at Hong Kong. Exactly a month after the latter cancellation, however, the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk and associated vessels arrived in Hong Kong.

not only what the United States can do to advance cross-Strait peace and stability, but, even more basically, what it can do to prevent a deterioration.

THINKING ABOUT AMERICAN POLICY IN THE PERIOD AHEAD

It has long been a premise of American policy that bolstering Taiwan's defensive capability provides a level of assurance on the island that can facilitate cross-Strait dialogue, a point that Chen Shui-bian has embraced.⁴⁰ The underlying assumption has been that, while it might not "declare independence," without a sufficient sense of confidence Taipei would instinctively refuse to engage with Beijing for fear of being bullied into submission, and the situation would remain fragile. From 1992/1993 until 1995, and then again late in the 1990s, evidence suggested this approach was bearing fruit.

However, following Lee Teng-hui's Cornell visit in 1995, and especially in the wake of his "two states theory" of 1999 and Chen Shui-bian's election in 2000, the cross-Strait political track has withered as mutual trust has plummeted. As a result, the level of militarization of cross-Strait relations has grown and, with it, so has the level of U.S. security involvement. In light of the growing PRC deployment of missiles opposite Taiwan and the purchase of sophisticated Russian weaponry designed to confront not only Taiwan but any U.S. intervention force, as we have seen, there has been a counter-pattern of growing and increasingly sophisticated American arms sales and interaction with Taipei, together with increasingly firm pledges regarding American involvement in the event of a PRC attack.

The PRC has consistently opposed arms sales, and the issue almost derailed normalization in late 1978. But especially in current circumstances, Beijing challenges the U.S. view that arms sales promote dialogue. Rather, it believes, those sales and other security ties to the U.S. reinforce Chen Shui-bian's resistance to "one China" and his determined pursuit of "creeping independence," contributing, not to dialogue, but to a distancing between the two sides and an increased likelihood of eventual military confrontation.

The PRC does not seek Taipei's "surrender" and its acceptance of a role as "a province of the PRC." And Beijing does not prefer to use force. Quite the opposite. But it certainly insists that Taiwan abjure any goal of permanent independent status outside of "China" and any policies that lead in that direction, and that Taipei reembrace the "principle" of "one China" and the goal of unification. The PRC's foremost objective in adopting these positions is to staunch the hemorrhaging toward ever more formalized separate status, leaving the unification process, including agreement on who is the "sole legal government of China," to be addressed in the future.

⁴⁰ Newsweek International interview, *op. cit.*

In the best of all possible worlds, as Beijing would define that, Taiwan would allow the PRC to “speak for” it even now in the international community, at least where sovereign states are involved, and to “sponsor” it as “a part of China” in organizations and regimes that do not involve sovereignty. But one presumes that the PRC is realistic enough to accept that any near-term cross-Strait arrangement would fall far short of these “ideal” objectives.

Both sides have a certain logic on their side. The PRC cannot be faulted for assuming that, without at least a potential threat of real consequences, Taiwan would go its merry way toward formal separate status or independence. There is little question that high level of support for maintaining the “status quo” and the very low support for “independence” registered in Taiwan public opinion polls reflects not the heart-felt ambitions but the well-honed pragmatism of the island’s people, who understand the likelihood of severe consequences if they indulged their preferences on this issue. Without the threat of such consequences, these polling results would be dramatically different.

Similarly, the U.S. and Taiwan cannot be faulted for assuming that, without the means to impose a substantial cost on the PRC if it launched an attack, the likelihood of some kind of direct military pressure from the Mainland would be high. Especially since the issue today is not the long-standing ROC-PRC/KMT-CCP competition within the context of a mutually accepted “one China” but the very existence of “one China,” a great deal more is at stake for Beijing.

Thus, a continuing U.S. policy of providing carefully selected defensive weapons to Taiwan is justified. Even though Taiwan would not be able on its own to defeat a determined PRC assault *whatever* it buys, providing such weapons can raise the initial cost of PRC attack to a level that will act as a meaningful deterrent, or, if deterrence fails, will hopefully stave off defeat until the U.S. is able to act. One problem is that it is no longer clear that the systems being made available to Taiwan are either “carefully selected” or necessarily “defensive.” The *Washington Times*, for example, a strong supporter of Taiwan, noted editorially recently that the diesel-electric submarines approved for sale in April 2001 are “offensive” in character and a “non sequitur” in the context of the PRC threat.⁴¹ While an argument can be made that “the best defense is a good offense,” in Taiwan’s case that could prove highly destabilizing and detrimental to Taiwan’s security rather than beneficial. Among other things, U.S. sales supporting movement in that direction would contribute to the conviction of the PRC leadership that the United States seeks to block reunification, not just to prevent the use of force. And it could therefore have unpredictable effects on the internal debate in China on Taiwan policy.

Although this paper focuses on U.S. policy, it is important to note that responsibility for resolving this dilemma, of course, hardly rests solely with the U.S. (and Taiwan). Even if the PRC is completely

⁴¹ “China’s Hu is here,” May 1, 2002 (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/20020501-95436878.htm>)

sincere that its current build-up is to deter movement toward independence (and U.S. support for that) rather than to force Taiwan at gunpoint to accept a PRC-dictated solution, neither Washington nor Taipei can afford to take that position at face value. If Beijing continues its build-up, Washington will feel compelled to continue both to provide more and better hardware and software to Taipei and to build up American forces that can be employed in a timely and effective manner in a Taiwan contingency.

The key to defusing this dangerous dynamic lies in demilitarizing it or at least in reducing the degree to which it is militarized. While either agreed or unilateral reciprocal steps could help to achieve this, realistically that may not be feasible without some progress on the political front. Most important—and effective—of course, would be a *modus vivendi* between Taiwan and the Mainland. At the moment, however, the political situation in both places would seem to preclude that. The putative successors on the Mainland will not want to look “soft” on Taiwan, backing away from the “one China” principle or even the “one country/two systems” approach and Jiang Zemin’s 1995 eight-point proposal. And Taipei is extremely unlikely to accept the “one China” principle in advance of dialogue, especially since the tendency in Taiwan appears to be to push the envelope as much as possible on international acceptance of its sovereign, independent identity (either under the label “Republic of China” or “Taiwan”). While the Taiwan position does not preclude eventual unification, it runs directly counter to the present PRC position that there *is* “one China” today encompassing both the Mainland and Taiwan and that Chinese sovereignty and territory are indivisible.

The most effective policy for the United States to promote peace and stability in this circumstance should include some combination of:

- reassuring Beijing, through practice as well as policy, that the U.S. neither seeks nor supports Taiwan independence;⁴²
- placing clear limits on U.S. relationships with Taiwan to make clear that the U.S. is not seeking to infuse those relations with officiality;
- reaffirming that the U.S. continues to have a strategic national interest in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region, which extends to the resolution of cross-Strait issues by peaceful means alone;

⁴² This was reportedly done privately by President Bush to PRC Vice President Hu Jintao during the latter’s visit to Washington in early May 2002, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz repeated it to a Brookings Institution seminar on May 15. (Jay Chen and Sofia Wu, “U.S. Official Reaffirms ‘One China’ Policy,” CNA, May 15, 2002) Public reassurances to this effect at the highest level would, however, be appropriate given the deep doubts created in Beijing by the Administration’s posture toward Taiwan. Even more to the point, actions consistent with this policy are crucial.

- making clear that the U.S. is prepared to appropriately throttle back on its arms sales and other military relations with Taiwan in a context in which the PRC military threat to Taiwan is also meaningfully throttled back.

Proposals have come forth from various quarters either, at one extreme, to abandon the so-called “six assurances” or, as noted earlier, to enshrine them in binding legislation. Advocates of abandonment argue that, unless the United States applies pressure on Taipei to reenter dialogue on the basis agreed a decade ago (under the so-called “1992 consensus” and in response to Jiang Zemin’s “eight point proposal”), the danger of military confrontation will inevitably grow. Those advocating legislation believe that we must drive home to Beijing that, though we do not support an “independent Taiwan,” we will not be party to—or tolerate—any effort that involves or even implies intimidation.

Whether analytically one believes it makes sense to take one step or the other, politically either move would create a firestorm that would inflict harm far in excess of any presumed benefits. That does not mean, however, that we are without resources to support our own interests.

However sympathetic we are with Taipei, including its “reasonable” call for dignified treatment, we need to face up to the reality of the linkages between our Taiwan policy and our overall China policy. It will not work in the end to insist that, short of independence or formal treatment of Taiwan in “official” ways, Beijing will simply have to accept whatever U.S. approach to the island we employ. It may be galling that Beijing has a strong say in what is or is not acceptable, but a willingness to be sensitive to the PRC’s view on this was fundamentally involved in the decision to normalize relations over two decades ago. This is not to argue that Beijing can call all the shots. And, in fact, neither on arms sales nor on other aspects of our Taiwan policy do they. But it is to argue that making unilateral determinations with little regard to PRC sensitivities (other than over formal “independence”) is a recipe for disaster.

At the same time, Beijing needs to act less imperiously toward Taiwan. It needs to rely far less on military sanctions than on political suasion. In this connection, it should stop blocking Taiwan’s participation in the international community in ways that do not challenge the PRC’s sovereign claim to be the “sole legal representative of China.” Instead of holding out the prospect of support for more “international space” as an incentive for Taiwan’s acceptance of the “one China” principle, the PRC should offer such support now as a demonstration that it recognizes the people of Taiwan deserve to be active participants on issues of importance to them. Were the Mainland not single-mindedly seeking to bludgeon Taiwan into accepting the “one China” principle, but rather demonstrating that the Mainland is concerned about the interests of the people in Taiwan, progress on the principle itself would likely be more readily obtainable.

In the meantime, if resumed dialogue at the Wang-Koo⁴³ level is not possible because both sides have staked out irreducible positions of “principle,” Beijing should agree to lower-level, authoritative dialogue now to explore ways out of the current stalemate rather than holding out for a change in Taiwan’s policy or leadership.

The U.S. should make the case, certainly privately but also probably publicly, for such an approach. For example, Washington needs to be exceedingly clear that, while it supports a strong role for Taiwan in the international community, it will not back, and will oppose, efforts to parlay any Taiwan successes in this regard into moves that overstep the limits of our “one China” policy. One can empathize with Taiwan’s desire for equal standing even in international organizations and regimes made up of states. But the reality is that we decided for sound national interest reasons two decades ago that we would not support that goal. The world may have changed, and Taiwan may have changed. And while those changes merit our respect and make our insistence on peaceful approaches all the more salient, they do not detract from the importance of staying the course on our “one China” policy—either in terms of our broad national interests or our focused concern for the security, prosperity and well-being of the people in Taiwan.

Allowing Chen Shui-bian to come to Washington would be one clear example of overstepping appropriate bounds. The better part of wisdom tell us that allowing him to “visit” anywhere in the United States under current circumstances (i.e. when suspicions regarding U.S. and Taiwan motives are so high in the PRC) would probably be another.⁴⁴ Permitting office visits at the State Department and NSC by Taiwan’s representatives and acquiescing in a name change for the Taiwan office in the United States may seem harmless enough in the abstract, but, taken in context, they are profoundly political issues and would constitute gratuitous pokes at Beijing. The first step in respecting Taiwan’s dignity while not undermining our policy and interests is to understand the complex relationships involved rather than asserting that Beijing has no choice as long as we do not overstep our unilateral definitions of their “red lines.”

There is no question that the U.S. relationship with Taiwan has its peculiarities and its unsatisfactory elements. Perhaps some of what has been achieved since the advent of the Bush Administration helps put that relationship on a politically more sustainable basis. What is disturbing about it, however, is that—fine words during Summit meetings notwithstanding—it appears to treat PRC

⁴³ Wang Daohan and Koo Chen-fu are, respectively, the Mainland and Taiwan senior “personages” who head the “unofficial” agencies created to conduct cross-Strait talks. They met in Singapore in 1993 and “informally” in Shanghai in 1998, but formal talks have been suspended since Lee’s Cornell trip in 1995. A “return” visit by Wang to Taiwan, scheduled for 1999, was canceled after the “two states theory” interview.

⁴⁴ There is widespread speculation that the current attention to a possible Chen visit to Washington is a precursor to a “bait and switch” maneuver, where he would “settle for” a visit to other American cities.

concerns about Taiwan cavalierly as well, for some, as casting China in the role of strategic challenger to the United States. Thus, not only are certain American gestures toward Taiwan potentially problematic in terms of cross-Strait relations, but they appear to many in China as fitting into a larger U.S. strategic posture of preparing for an inevitable Sino-American confrontation, with Taiwan as a tool in that process.

Despite the hard-line views of some people, including in the Bush Administration, about China's rise, not only would any such conclusions about an inevitable future confrontation be unjustified on the merits, but they would be a serious misreading of American policy assumptions today. That does not mean, however, there are not grounds for Beijing to perceive American policy as potentially hostile, or for the PRC to believe that Taipei is having some success in playing on such concerns as do exist for all that can be gotten out of them.

The United States should obviously not be Beijing's instrument in dealing with Taipei. But neither should it be Taiwan's in dealing with the PRC. Both will seek to have us do their bidding, and because Taiwan's case is the especially appealing in terms of American values, there is a strong temptation to move in that direction. We need to be alert to the risks of yielding to such temptation and to keep our own interests in clear perspective.

Virtually every recent American Administration has come into office critical of its predecessor's approach to China policy. Ronald Reagan sought to reverse much of what Jimmy Carter did; Bill Clinton tried to draw a bright line between his China policy and that of George H.W. Bush. After some time in office, however, the new Administration typically moves away from such a posture to lay out its own policy, though it is generally one that reaffirms at least the basics of what has gone before.

To a surprising degree, even a full year into the current Administration, there still seems to be a strong motivation "not to be Clinton." While this may be politically understandable, it reflects an attitude toward Clinton's China policy rather than an in-depth understanding of it.

The negatives in Bush's policy have certainly not approached the turmoil caused by the initial Reagan Administration desire to raise the level of officiality in U.S.-Taiwan relations only a year and a half after normalization. It has rivaled it, however, in terms of upgrading arms sales and other security relationships with the island, and giving it "dignity," to the point that these issues have taken on a deep political meaning for both Taipei and Beijing. And, while, as noted, the President appears personally convinced of the importance of sound relations with the PRC, it does not appear that his Administration has integrated these elements into a coherent policy.

Having accorded Taiwan more dignity, laid down markers on the security front, and established that this Administration will not slavishly follow past practice and policy simply because they *are* past practice and policy, it is time to add depth and nuance to our approach to cross-Strait issues. When the President says, as he forthrightly did more than once during his February 2002 visit to Beijing, that there should be no provocation from either side, he should give meaning to that. With the PRC, he should do so by demonstrating that it is not merely the use of force but the explicit or even implicit threat to use force that will evoke an American response. And with Taiwan, he should make clear that it is not merely a formal declaration of independence but steps that lead in that direction that we will not support and may well oppose.

On occasion, it may be appropriate to speak out publicly on these issues. Other times, it may be the better part of wisdom to work behind the scenes. The important point is to determine U.S. interests and to be consistent. That consistency may not always be comfortable for Americans in political or other terms. But if it serves the U.S. interest, which includes the preservation and strengthening of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, then we can live with that discomfort.