Thank you for taking the time to review our paper. This is one of our first drafts of the paper, so we appreciate any and all feedback you might have. Looking forward to the conference!

**Title:** Grand Strategic Ambiguity: the Taiwan Question and American Grand Strategy

**Authors:** Patrick Hulme and James Lee[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Abstract:**

The Taiwan Question is one of the most important policy issues facing the United States today. On the one hand, twenty-five million free individuals in a thriving liberal democracy--and the world’s most important semiconductor manufacturing hub--hang in the balance. On the other hand, committing to defend the island would entail the United States running the risk of a major crisis, and perhaps even war, unseen in over half a century. Accordingly, a lively policy debate has grown in prominence over the past year as to whether the United States should reconsider its current policy of “strategic ambiguity” toward the island. Alternative policy options include, on one extreme, “strategic clarity” (i.e., making a formal policy commitment to defend the island) and, on the other extreme, renunciation (i.e., disclaiming any intent to do so). Much of this debate, however, has been limited to Taiwan and China specialists familiar with the intricacies of U.S. policy toward the island. Given the enormous stakes involved, it is imperative that such a conversation over Taiwan policy be placed within an overarching framework of what U.S. national interests are and how to best achieve those ends: grand strategy. To this end, this paper outlines five ideal-type grand strategies--Liberal Internationalism, Deep Engagement, Conservative Primacy, Offshore Balancing, and Restraint--and attempts to distill each strategy’s policy prescription for the U.S. relationship with Taiwan.

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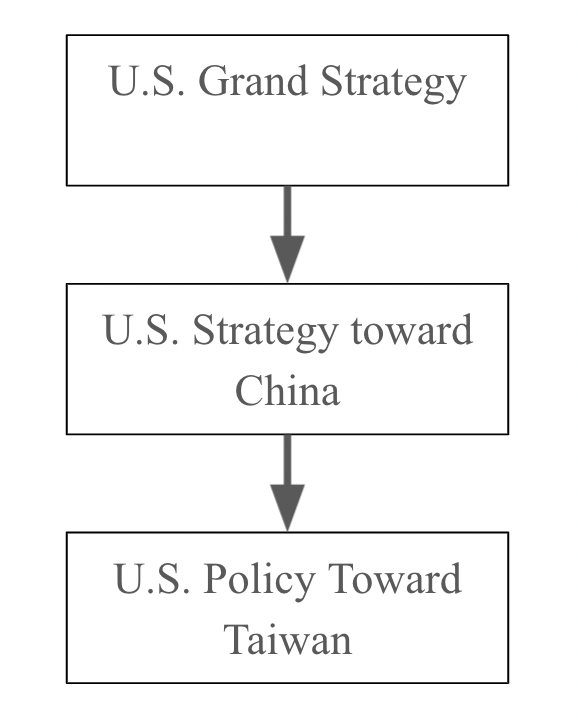
# **Introduction**

Sino-American competition has become a primary foreign policy concern across both political parties [(Haass 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?aQYlWk), and no issue seems more likely to lead to overt conflict than the dispute over Taiwan [(Blackwill and Zelikow 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?87jmRy). For more than 70 years, Taiwan has been self-governing--but not legally independent--while the People’s Republic of China has claimed Taiwan as a “renegade province” under its sovereignty. Given the increasing military power of the People’s Republic of China [(Heginbotham 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?PjeHh6), Beijing’s “Taiwan Temptation” to resolve this issue with force has only recently become more attractive than ever before [(Mastro 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?eUD0qs). With Chinese warplanes routinely violating Taiwan’s ADIZ, tensions have risen to the point where war is now a realistic prospect. Admiral Philip Davidson, the former Commander of Indo-Pacific Command, has warned that Beijing could launch an invasion within the next six years [(Admiral Philip S. Davidson 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?5WAnXH).

The sense of an impending crisis over Taiwan has sparked a debate in the U.S. policy community about whether or not long-standing policies will continue to serve U.S. interests in the Taiwan Strait and the wider Indo-Pacific. Since the 1970’s, the United States has maintained a policy of “strategic ambiguity”: declining to say whether, or under what conditions, it would use force in the event of a conflict between Taiwan and mainland China. Recently, prominent voices have called the wisdom of this policy into question, and some have argued that the United States should instead adopt a policy of “strategic clarity” [(Haass and Sacks 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?ZY0DBD). Others, however, have contested this policy proposal [(Glaser et al. 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?lXSMOz), and the Biden administration has thus far shied away from abandoning the policy. Commenting on the proposal for strategic clarity, Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, recently said that “the Chinese would find this deeply destabilizing” [(Haines 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Xm59bz).

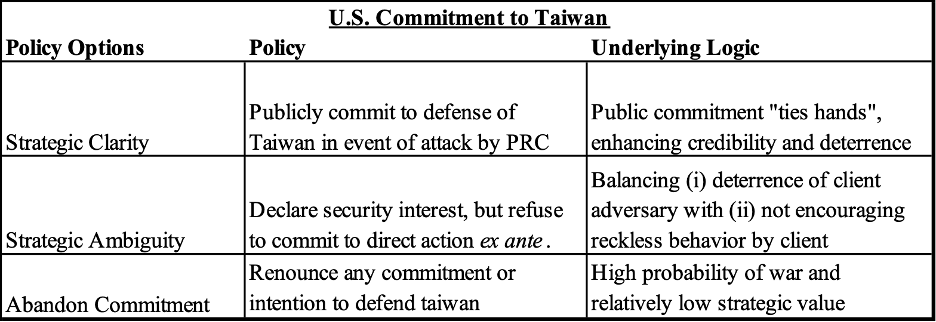
These debates over the Taiwan question have unfolded alongside a broader debate over what overall U.S. grand strategy should be. While variations of containment dominated U.S. grand strategy during the Cold War [(Gaddis 2005)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?zXVPFW), the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unipolar moment led to a substantial re-thinking of American foreign policy [(Krauthammer 1990; Posen and Ross 1996)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?8mUeH5). Between 1990 and the late 2010s, different interpretations of primacy prevailed over a more restrained strategic vision [(Mearsheimer 2018b; Posen 2015; Walt 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?HLWvJF), but by 2017, the rise of China and the prospect of a return of multipolarity led the United States to adopt “great power competition” as a strategic priority [(Ashford 2021; Lissner 2018; Trump 2017)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?slTwxS). In the words of the Council of Foreign Relations’s Richard Haas, we are in the midst of an emerging “post–post–Cold War U.S. foreign policy” [(Haass 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?wD4ZSf).

These simultaneous debates--the first on Taiwan policy, and the second on overall U.S. grand strategy--should be closely related. From the perspective of Taiwan policy, failing to articulate a policy that is informed by grand-strategic principles runs the risk of incoherence and even failure.[[2]](#footnote-2) From the perspective of overall strategy, any grand strategy for the United States in the 21st century must prescribe a strategic posture toward China, and since the Taiwan question poses the greatest risk of a war with China, a grand strategy that fails to prescribe a strategic posture toward the Taiwan question must be found lacking. Yet these connections have not been well-defined in existing research in the field of strategic studies, an omission that can likely be attributed to the fact that the Taiwan question is the domain of specialists, while grand strategy is the domain of generalists. The Taiwan question abounds in complex terminology and subtle legal distinctions; Richard Bush’s “One-China policy primer” is an authoritative and sophisticated summary of the U.S. position on Taiwan that aims at a condensed presentation but still reaches the length of a journal article [(Bush 2017)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gnFtF1). Discussions of grand strategy often abstract away from this level of detail, but detail is what the Taiwan question rests on.



This article situates Taiwan policy in the context of U.S. grand strategy. In addition to reviewing the schools of thought on U.S. grand strategy and contemporary policy debates on the Taiwan question, the article provides a historical overview of the strategic context in which the United States’ position on the Taiwan question arose. Policies like the One-China policy and strategic ambiguity have a long history; it would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole dispute surrounding Taiwan is a legacy of the Cold War. While the outlines of the history have been well-appreciated in recent debates on the Taiwan question, the strategic logic behind the United States’ Taiwan policy has received less attention. Two aspects of this logic stand out as having particular significance. First, when the United States affirmed its interest in Taiwan’s security during the Cold War, Taiwan’s importance to the United States’ security was secondary. Second, the One-China policy was formulated at a time when the United States was seeking rapprochement with the PRC and U.S. officials believed that the Taiwan question would be resolved in the near to medium term; it was not formulated with the expectation of indefinite separation and continuing great power competition. Neither of these assumptions applies anymore. Taiwan’s semiconductor industry (and TSMC in particular) has elevated Taiwan’s importance in the accelerating U.S.-China geoeconomic competition, and there is no near- or medium-term prospect of Taiwan agreeing to unification with (mainland) China. The fact that the historical strategic assumptions no longer apply does not mean that long-standing policies need to be abandoned, but that they need to be revised or adjusted to reflect current realities.

This article proceeds as follows: first, the current debate over U.S. policy toward Taiwan is introduced. Most prominently, this focuses on the current debate between “strategic ambiguity”, “strategic clarity”, and renunciation. Second, a history of Taiwan in U.S. grand strategy since the Second World War is given. Thereafter, the relationship between possible U.S. grand strategies today and the contemporary Taiwan question is considered. The paper utilizes five ideal type grand strategies--Liberal Internationalism, Deep Engagement, Conservative Primacy, Restraint, and Offshore Balancing--and then applies each of these toward the Taiwan question.



# **The Importance of the Taiwan Question Today**

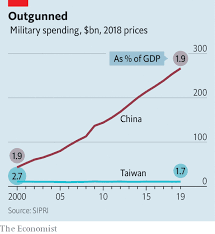
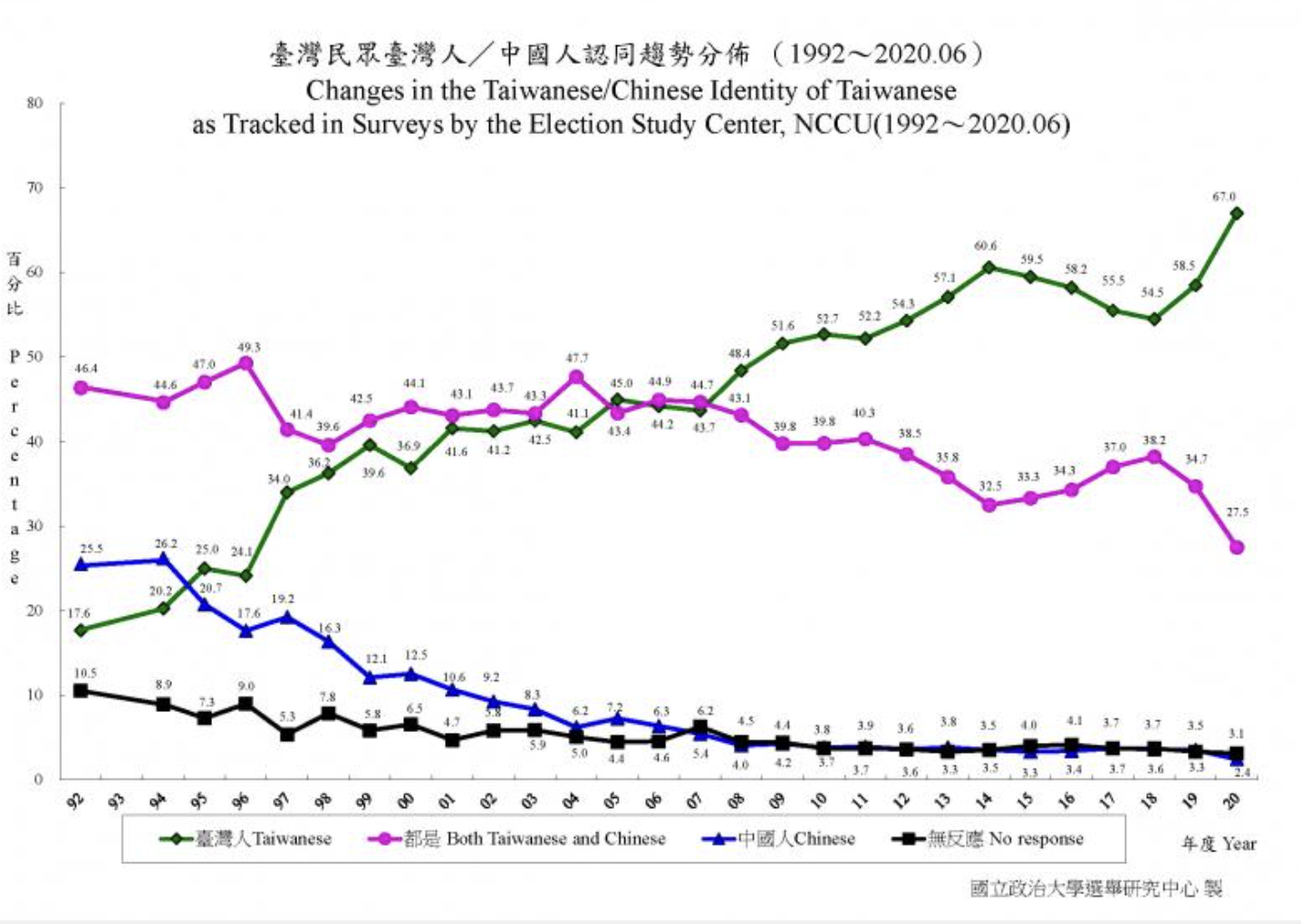
The United States faces many challenges in its foreign policy. Russia threatens the eastern flank of NATO and meddles in American elections; Iran continues to pursue nuclear weapons; and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula seems more distant than ever before. International terrorism remains a threat, and the risk of domestic terrorism has gained recent prominence. Major global issues exist as well--notably the health and economic damage of the ongoing pandemic and the crisis of climate change. Just in the U.S.-China relationship, pressing issues are ubiquitous: cyberwarfare, an emerging nuclear arms race, strategic competition over international institutions, geoeconomic competition, and many more issues are pressing.

Even in the midst of all of these challenges, the Taiwan question requires the sustained attention of the security studies community. It is a central issue for the overall U.S.-China relationship, which has an unparalleled importance for contemporary international relations [(Romberg 2001)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?UO7737). With the United States having oriented its national security strategy toward great power competition--an orientation that has enjoyed bipartisan support in both houses of Congress--China policy is more important for the United States’ overall foreign policy now than at any other time in recent history [(O’Hanlon and Twardowski 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Dwfcrm). Secretary of State Antony Blinken has called the U.S. relationship with the People’s Republic of China “the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century,” because “China is the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system,” [(Blinken 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?O1xQzJ).

Of all of the points of contention in the U.S.-China relationship, Taiwan is the single issue that is most likely to lead to war between the superpowers.[[3]](#footnote-3) There are several disputes in East Asia that could draw the United States and China into direct conflict - such as North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, a clash between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and an altercation in the South China Sea - but the Taiwan question stands above the others. Taiwan far exceeds the islands in the South China Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in terms of its geographic size and the value of its resources. It has a population that is about the same as that of Australia.[[4]](#footnote-4) And for Chinese nationalism, which is one of the pillars of the CCP’s domestic legitimacy, Taiwan’s importance is paramount. Thomas Christensen has argued that “preventing Taiwan’s permanent separation from the mainland and fostering eventual unification are core goals of all Chinese nationalists” and that “dramatic failure on Taiwan policy” could have a negative impact on domestic stability [(Christensen 2002, 12)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?dnN5mf). And Taiwan is increasingly important for the United States as well: one Taiwanese company, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), holds 56% of global revenue for manufacturing computer chips, and its market share for the most advanced chips - the chips that will be needed to power the Fourth Industrial Revolution - is almost 90%.[[5]](#footnote-5) Steve Blank at Stanford University has estimated that if China gains control of Taiwan and cuts off the supply of TSMC’s chips, “the U.S. defense and consumer electronics industries would be set back for at least five years” [(Blank 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?KwaN41). Taiwan is not only one of China’s core interests and a flashpoint in U.S.-China relations, but also a superpower of the semiconductor industry that could decide the future of the U.S.-China geoeconomic competition.

Although the Taiwan question tends to fly under the radar during periods of stability, it has always been the issue with the greatest potential to make the U.S.-China relationship unravel. The late Alan Romberg, an authority on the Taiwan question, wrote that this dispute “sits as a potential time bomb that could have grave consequences not just for that relationship and for the twenty-three million people of Taiwan, but also for the future strategic and economic prospects of the PRC, the United States, Japan and the entire East Asian region.” That was in 2003, when U.S.-China relations were believed to be “the best ever” [(Romberg 2001](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?nyoAhZ)). Now that U.S.-China relations seem to be at the worst ever in recent memory, and now that China wields vastly greater military power, the Taiwan question demands the attention of strategic theorists.

There seems to be hardly any prospect that Taiwan will favor unification in the foreseeable future. Chinese national identity used to be prevalent in Taiwan, but it is becoming an artifact of a distant historical era. When the Government of the Republic of China moved to Taiwan in 1949, it was a party-state controlled by the KMT - the Chinese Nationalist Party - which implemented a nation-building program aimed at inculcating Chinese identity among the people of Taiwan.[[6]](#footnote-6) Since the 1990s, when the party-state was dismantled and Taiwan became a democracy (still using the name “Republic of China”), the prevalence of Chinese national identity has been steadily declining. The past few elections have seen the clear defeat of the KMT and the victory of Tsai Ing Wen’s DPP, which, unlike the KMT, does not endorse the One-China principle. Even the KMT avoids endorsing unification in the near term, choosing to maintain the One-China principle as a purely abstract concept. Beijing’s proposal of “One Country, Two Systems”, is opposed by a significant majority of Taiwanese - as many as 79% of respondents in a 2019 poll by Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) - who have witnessed the recent suppression of the freedoms that were promised to the people of Hong Kong under the concept of “One Country, Two Systems.” With the MAC poll also showing that nearly 90% of respondents believed that Taiwan’s future should be decided by Taiwan’s people, the government of Taiwan is highly unlikely to consider unification under “One Country, Two Systems.”[[7]](#footnote-7)



Meanwhile, China’s chances of successfully seizing Taiwan by force are growing every day. While a simple lack of capability prevented Beijing from considering forceful unification as a serious possibility in the past, today China’s rapidly growing economy and military power mean that the balance of power across the Strait has been tilting heavily in Beijing’s favor. China, furthermore, has shown an increasing willingness to flex its muscles internationally [(Doshi 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gkswUC). While China had pursued a “Peaceful Rise” strategy under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, Xi has taken a much more forward-leaning stance in international affairs, which Yan Xuetong has classified as a “Striving for Achievement” [(Yan 2014)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?rK4qWR). “Keeping a Low Profile” has been replaced by “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy over the past two years, and Beijing shows little sign of being deterred by world opinion. Oriana Mastro at Stanford has observed that “even moderate voices in Beijing have been calling for tossing out peaceful reunification,” [(Buckley and Myers 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?csaFdB).

The people of Taiwan do not want unification--at least not on Beijing’s terms--and Beijing is reaching the level of power that will allow it to dispense with negotiation and resort to force. Whether or not Beijing chooses to exercise that option depends critically on what the United States will and will not do in the event of a cross-strait conflict, and what signals the United States sends to both Taiwan and (mainland) China before a potential war begins. Should the United States keep its One-China policy? Should the United States maintain strategic ambiguity? It is high time to debate these questions in the context of the United States’ grand strategy: what the United States’ vital interests are, and how the United States can defend them. But the existing framework for the United States’ policy toward Taiwan originated in the Cold War, and they were based on strategic assumptions that may no longer apply. This paper will examine the historical origins of the United States’ position on the Taiwan question before it proceeds to the present and the future of American grand strategy in the Taiwan Strait.

# **The Current Debate of U.S. Policy Toward Taiwan**

The policy debate over Taiwan involves not only the question of whether the U.S. should help Taiwan balance against a rising China, but whether such help should come in the form of internal or external balancing [(Waltz 1979)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?XwWD0m).[[8]](#footnote-8) Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper argue that a patron will increasingly provide arms as the balance of power between its client and the adversary of the client worsens [(Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper 2016)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?hKUas3). It is thus no surprise that as Chinese military power has grown there have been increasingly calls for increased arms sales to the island. Because the United States has consistently sold arms to Taiwan since it normalized relations with the PRC, arms sales are seen as a comparatively moderate response--or “third way” [(Porter and Mazarr 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?bdmA3m)--to a perceived increase in Chinese aggressiveness. The Taiwan Relations Act, for example, has long asserted a policy of selling arms to Taiwan without defining an actual defense commitment. Beijing has always objected to these arms sales, claiming that they are a violation of the United States’ commitments under the 1982 Arms Sales Communique.[[9]](#footnote-9) But the United States has persisted in selling arms to Taiwan for decades, and arms sales are not fundamentally provocative alterations to the *status quo*.

More controversial, however, have been recent calls to amend the United States' policy with regard to direct military participation in the event of armed conflict. Since the abrogation of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1979, the United States has not maintained an international legal commitment to intervene in Taiwan’s defense.[[10]](#footnote-10) The United States has not even defined an official policy about what it would do in the event of a conflict. Although President George W. Bush famously said that the United States would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend theirself [*sic*],” the United States’s official policy is strategic ambiguity.[[11]](#footnote-11) Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper argue that this feature of the U.S.-Taiwan relationship emerged in the 1970s as the two parties found their security interests to be less and less compatible [(Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper 2016)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?RtbHJp). But with the United States having recently shifted toward great power competition with the PRC and with Taiwan facing an increasingly severe threat from the PRC, the interests of the United States and Taiwan have converged. Small wonder, then, that there has been growing support in the United States for a new policy of strategic clarity toward Taiwan, a view enshrined in a recent article by Richard Haass and David Sacks for *Foreign Affairs* [(Haass and Sacks 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?ZPN2G6). Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, said that the Biden administration had chosen not to adopt strategic clarity, however, because “the Chinese would find this deeply destabilizing.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

## Strategic Ambiguity

As described below, strategic ambiguity has been the policy of the United States toward Taiwan since the renunciation of the Sino-U.S. defense treaty in 1979. Prior to this time, the United States had a formal defense commitment to the government on the island similar to other bilateral alliance relationships it had in the region with Japan and South Korea. After normalization of relations with mainland China in the 1970’s, however, the formal alliance was replaced by the provisions Taiwan Relations Act--a piece of legislation that was notably silent as to what exactly the U.S. would do in the event the island were attacked. While conventional alliance relationships see great value in clearly announcing the circumstance under which one country will intervene to help another, the logic behind this “strategic ambiguity” is that of *dual* deterrence. On the one hand, by giving the impression the United States *might* intervene in the event of a cross-strait attack, the policy is meant to maintain some of the deterrent value of a more traditional alliance relationship. On the other hand, by not *guaranteeing* American intervention, the policy is meant to deter Taipei from formally declaring independence from the mainland. Advocates of a stronger commitment toward the island argue that the former threat has grown in recent years while the latter threat has diminished, suggesting “strategic clarity” would be a better policy if the U.S. sought to avoid war. Many Taiwan experts, however, disagree with this reasoning. Bonnie Glaser, for example, argues that a change in the status quo from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity might actually provoke the People’s Republic of China into attacking Taiwan, and thus opposes a change in policy [(Glaser 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gUo84G). Nonetheless, advocates of strategic ambiguity do not go so far as to advocate abandoning a commitment to Taiwan altogether [(Tucker and Glaser 2011)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?bcWTnw).

## Strategic Clarity

In contrast to the policy of strategic ambiguity over the past four decades, there have been recent calls to make a clear and public commitment to defend Taiwan in the event of attack. Most prominently, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, wrote for *Foreign Affairs* that “American support for Taiwan must be unambiguous” [(Haass and Sacks 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?kxkcE6). The underlying logic for this policy prescription is precisely the same as that used to argue in favor of the deterrent effect of traditional military alliances. By publicly committing to the United States to defend Taiwan, the United States will have more difficulty backing down in an actual crisis due to the audience or reputation costs this would entail. This commitment mechanism would thus theoretically increase the credibility of a U.S. threat to intervene in the eyes of the People’s Republic of China, and thus help decrease the probability of deterrence failure [(Schelling 2008)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?wsoSuH). As Haass and Sacks put it: “to keep the peace, make clear to China that force won’t stand.”

While such a public commitment to the defense of another entity is a normal occurrence in U.S. foreign policy, what is rather unique about the Taiwan situation is that the Republic of China--unlike other American allies--is not recognized as a state by the United States and the vast majority of other countries in the international system. Nonetheless, there is precedent for security guarantees to entities lacking “normal” statehood. The most significant likely would be West Berlin over the course of the Cold War.

## Renunciation

The last option would share the unambiguous signalling of strategic clarity, but would announce the oppositepolicy*.* Instead, the United States would publicly renounce any commitment to defend the island. Perhaps the most well known iteration of this policy is Glaser’s proposed “grand bargain” between the United States and the People’s Republic of China [(Glaser 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?fOsLe7). Glaser himself, however, seems to think the opportunity for such a bargain has passed and that a renunciation would be more unilateral rather than as a part of a deal [(Glaser 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Rngt7B). Furthermore, while renunciation of the current quasi-commitment implied in strategic ambiguity might seem unimaginable to many Americans, broad retrenchment has been successfully utilized by many declining great powers [(MacDonald and Parent 2011)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?p9BglJ). Viewed from the broader overall perspective of U.S. grand strategy, it is thus possible to argue it would make sense to disclaim what Posen has described as “simultaneously the most perilous and the least strategically necessary commitment that the United States” [(Posen 2015, pg. 102)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?eUt6Wr).

# **History of the Taiwan Question**

## Origins of the Taiwan Question

The Taiwan question originated in the inconclusive resolution of the Chinese Civil War. The Cairo Declaration, issued in 1943, stated that “all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan], and the Pescadores [Penghu Islands], shall be restored to the Republic of China.”[[13]](#footnote-13) At that time, the Allies expected that the Government of the Republic of China, which was under the control of Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT, would exercise effective control over all of China after the war. After Japan surrendered in 1945, ROC forces took control of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands and established a provincial government in Taipei, but there was not - and never would be - a formal transfer of sovereignty to China. After KMT forces lost the civil war with the CCP in (mainland) China, the ROC government moved to Taiwan in December 1949; and in the spring of 1950, the Truman administration, exasperated with the KMT after its repeated failures, announced that it would not use military force to prevent Taiwan from falling to the CCP [(Christensen 1996)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?2bwTSU).

## *The Strategic Importance of Taiwan during the Cold War*

The Truman administration concluded that although Taiwan was strategically important, it was not important enough to warrant U.S. military intervention if the PRC launched an invasion. As Thomas Christensen has argued, the fact that the United States eventually did intervene in Taiwan’s defense after the outbreak of the Korean War reflected the imperative of domestic mobilization for the Cold War and not a fundamental change in the U.S. understanding of Taiwan’s strategic importance. With the prominence of the China Lobby in U.S. politics and amid the ideological fervor of the McCarthy era, failing to defend Taiwan at a time when the Truman administration had decided to intervene in Korea and was preparing for a massive buildup of military and economic assistance to Western Europe would have produced an uproar in domestic politics (Christensen 1996, pg. 133-137; [Tucker 1994)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?RJPx5o). And if it had appeared necessary to contain PRC expansion in June of 1950, it appeared all the more necessary to contain PRC expansion after the Chinese Communist forces intervened in Korea (Tucker 1994, pg. 320-34).

For the United States, Taiwan’s strategic importance was the same after the Korean War as it had been before: “keeping Taiwan from Communist control was important, *but not vital* to America’s global security position” (Christensen 1996, 106; emphasis in source text). That assessment no longer applies to the current situation, but it applied throughout the Cold War even though domestic politics intervened. To be sure, there were strong ethical reasons why the United States should prevent Taiwan from falling to Communism, reasons that had growing weight as the KMT police state evolved into the first - and only - democracy in the Chinese-speaking world. But from the perspective of *realpolitik*, Taiwan’s importance to the United States was secondary. Understanding how the Truman administration arrived at this conclusion will be important for understanding how the situation in the Taiwan Strait has now changed.

The most important assessments of Taiwan’s strategic importance were conducted during and shortly after the defeat of the Nationalist government in (mainland) China. In November 1948, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted an assessment to the National Security Council in which they concluded that if Taiwan were to fall to the Chinese Communists, “the strategic implications to the security of the United States would be seriously unfavorable.” In other words, Taiwan’s security was an important interest of the United States, though not a vital one. The strategic importance of Taiwan was couched in terms of its security: since it was likely that all of (mainland) China would eventually fall under Communist control, Taiwan could serve U.S. interests as a “wartime base capable of use for staging of troops, strategic air operations and control of adjacent shipping routes.” If, on the other hand, Taiwan were to come under the control of a Communist state aligned with the Soviet Union, the United States would be faced with “an enemy capability of dominating to his advantage and our disadvantage the sea routes between Japan and the Malay area, together with a greatly improved enemy capability of extending his control to the Ryukyus and the Philippines.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Another reason why Taiwan was strategically important was the value of the island’s economic and agricultural resources: it was “capable of serving as a major source of food and other materials for Japan.”[[15]](#footnote-15) At a time when U.S. officials harbored grave concerns about the economic security of Japan, this aspect of Taiwan’s value to the United States was not insignificant.[[16]](#footnote-16) But it meant that Taiwan’s importance was subsidiary to that of Japan, which was one of the strongpoints in Kennan’s strategy of containment.[[17]](#footnote-17)

## *The Political Status of Taiwan*

After the outbreak of the Korean War, the Truman administration decided to intervene in the defense of Taiwan and developed a legal rationale for this sudden change in policy. On June 27, 1950, President Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet to “neutralize” the Strait and announced that “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.”[[18]](#footnote-18) To assist Warren Austin (the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations) in defending the U.S. intervention to the UN Security Council, Truman wrote a letter that included seven points to explain the new U.S. position toward Taiwan. Among the seven points, the most important for the purposes of this essay is point 4, which explained how the United States could maintain the position that Taiwan’s status was undetermined even though it had been under the control of ROC forces since 1945:

(4) The action of the United States was expressly stated to be without prejudice to the future political settlement of the status of the island. The actual status of the island is that it is territory taken from Japan by the victory of the Allied forces in the Pacific. Like other such territories, its legal status cannot be fixed until there is international action to determine its future. The Chinese Government was asked by the Allies to take the surrender of the Japanese forces on the island. That is the reason the Chinese are there now.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In other words, Truman was arguing that Taiwan had been placed under ROC administrative control, but not under Chinese sovereignty. The ROC and the PRC both opposed this position, but neither of the Chinese governments was able to convince or successfully pressure the United States to abandon its position that Taiwan’s status was undetermined. The United States persistently used its influence to prevent international recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan. When Japan and the ROC signed a peace treaty in 1952, Article 2 of the treaty stated that “Japan has renounced all right, title, and claim to Taiwan (Formosa) and Penghu (the Pescadores) as well as the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands,” but it did not state that Japan had transferred its “right, title, and claim” over Taiwan to China.[[20]](#footnote-20)

For the United States, Taiwan’s status was and is undetermined. Even when the United States recognized the ROC, U.S. officials referred to it as the “GRC,” the Government of the Republic of China, to underscore the fact that the United States had diplomatic relations with the ROC state but did not recognize that state’s sovereignty over the territory under its control.[[21]](#footnote-21) Richard Bush, the former Chairman and Managing Director of the American Institute in Taiwan, explains that the U.S. position on Taiwan’s status was based in legal reasoning: if the United States did not recognize Taiwan as being part of China, then intervening in Taiwan’s defense and selling arms to Taiwan would not be a violation of China’s sovereignty [(Bush 2017)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Mzmi3f). This interpretation implies that the United States did not plan to recognize the ROC indefinitely, since the ROC government welcomed the United States’ intervention in defense of Taiwan, while the PRC objected. Prior to the Korean War, there had been tantalizing signs of an anti-Soviet faction in the CCP that had raised hopes that the United States could encourage a breach between the PRC and the Soviet Union.[[22]](#footnote-22) By June 2, 1950, that possibility was ruled out as a near-term prospect.[[23]](#footnote-23) As a long-term prospect, however, it was still conceivable. Even after the PRC intervention in the Korean War, NSC 48/5 stated that the objective of U.S. policy was to “detach China [PRC] as an effective ally of the USSR and support the development of an independent China which has renounced aggression” and to “deny Formosa [Taiwan] to any Chinese regime aligned with or dominated by the USSR and expedite the strengthening of the defensive capabilities of Formosa.” The United States would continue to recognize the ROC, but it would plan for (and encourage) the eventual realignment of the PRC away from the Soviet Union.[[24]](#footnote-24) The position that Taiwan’s status was undetermined meant that the United States could hold out the possibility of eventually recognizing the PRC as the government of China without having to recognize the PRCs claim of sovereignty over Taiwan.

## *U.S. Relations with the ROC in the Early Cold War*

U.S. relations with the ROC were fraught for much of the 1950s. Invoking the phrase from the philosopher Mencius that “Heaven hath not two suns, nor a nation two kings 天無二日，民無二王,” Chiang Kai-shek stridently refused to accept a two-Chinas solution to the Chinese civil war.[[25]](#footnote-25) To bolster his claim that the ROC was still the sole legal government of China, he repeatedly called on his forces to prepare for a counteroffensive against (mainland) China. Anticipating the possibility that the ROC would initiate a war with the PRC that would then escalate into a war with the Soviet Union, the United States adopted a range of policies to minimize the risk of entrapment. Victor Cha has argued that the hub-and-spokes alliance system in Asia, which included the Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROC, was designed with this risk in mind.[[26]](#footnote-26)

This was also the origin of strategic ambiguity.[[27]](#footnote-27) Article 5 of the Mutual Defense Treaty stated that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the West Pacific Area directed against the territories of either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.” But Article 6 specified that the territories of the ROC would be limited to Taiwan and the Penghu Islands and “such other territories as may be determined by mutual agreement” (which John Garver calls the “elastic clause” [(Garver 1997, pg. 57)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?2xKl1L)).[[28]](#footnote-28) It neither included nor excluded the Nationalist-held islets of Quemoy and Matsu or the Chinese mainland. The concern was that if the United States allowed those territories to be explicitly included in the Mutual Defense Treaty, the KMT would provoke the CCP by using Quemoy and Matsu to stage offensive operations against (mainland) China, or the KMT would deploy so many troops to those islets that the the CCP would be tempted to attack them - thus initiating U.S. intervention, thus initiating U.S. hostilities with the CCP, and thus initiating U.S. involvement in a land war in China.[[29]](#footnote-29) All of this is now distant history, but it marks the beginning of a persistent theme in U.S.-Taiwan relations: the United States declining to commit itself to using force *ex ante* for fear of the moral hazard problem in which Taiwan would take provocative actions that would trigger the PRC to use force. During the Cold War, the feared provocation was a counteroffensive to unify Taiwan with (mainland) China under KMT rule; after the Cold War, the feared provocation was a declaration of independence by Taiwan that would trigger a PRC attack.



## *Strategic Ambiguity and the Status of Taiwan during U.S.-PRC Rapprochement*

When the United States and the PRC normalized relations, the United States’ legal commitment to defend Taiwan was diluted even further. Quemoy and Matsu were excluded from the Taiwan Relations Act altogether, and strategic ambiguity was extended to Taiwan and the Penghu Islands.[[30]](#footnote-30) Whereas Article 5 of the Mutual Defense Treaty stated that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the West Pacific Area directed against the territories of either of the Parties would be *dangerous to its own peace and safety*” (emphasis added), Section 2 of the TRA states that PRC coercion against Taiwan would be “a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of *grave concern to the United States*” (emphasis added). Whereas each of the Parties “declares that it would *act to meet the common danger* in accordance with its constitutional processes” (emphasis added) under Article 5 of the Mutual Defense Treaty, the United States said its policy was “*to maintain the capacity of the United States* to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan” (emphasis added).[[31]](#footnote-31) Although U.S. officials often refer to the United States’ “commitment” to Taiwan, it is a political commitment and not a legal commitment; the Taiwan Relations Act does not use binding language on what the United States should do if the PRC attacks Taiwan [(Bush 2017, pg. 18-19)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?5WjLbc).

The TRA effectively transferred the United States’ policy of strategic ambiguity from Quemoy and Matsu to Taiwan and Penghu. What did not change, however, was the United States’ position that the status of Taiwan was undetermined. During the process of rapprochement, Nixon privately assured Mao that he considered Taiwan to be part of China, but he said that he could not say so publicly because the potential reaction on Capitol Hill could derail the development of closer relations between Washington and Beijing.[[32]](#footnote-32) The 1972 Shanghai Communique was finessed so that the United States did not recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan: it said that “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” (emphasis added).[[33]](#footnote-33) Although there is an ambiguity about whether the dependent clause “that Taiwan is a part of China” is the direct objective of “acknowledges” or “maintains” (and hence whether the United States itself acknowledges that position or merely acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that position), that ambiguity was resolved in the 1979 Normalization Communique, which stated that “the Government of the United States of America *acknowledges* the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China (emphasis added).[[34]](#footnote-34) The PRC negotiators insisted on translating acknowledges as 承认, which means “recognizes.” After “an argument ensued and dictionaries were consulted,” the U.S. negotiators relented.[[35]](#footnote-35) But the United States holds that the English version of the Communique is controlling, so it denies that it ever recognized Taiwan as being part of China. The United States still maintains the position that Taiwan’s status is undetermined.[[36]](#footnote-36)

## *The One-China Policy*

The result of the negotiations between the PRC and the United States (and between the United States and Taiwan behind the scenes) was the textual core of the United States’ One-China policy. Washington and Beijing issued Three Communiqués in 1972, 1979, and 1982; Washington also issued two unilateral statements of support for Taiwan in the form of the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 and the Six Assurances of 1982. The One-China policy has been discussed at great length and depth elsewhere (Bush 2017, Romberg 2003, Bush 2004), and the preceding section of this paper discusses the most salient features of the One-China policy for understanding strategic ambiguity and the U.S. position on the status of Taiwan. Since the One-China policy has been in place for almost half century, and since it would have to change if there were a fundamental change in the United States’ strategic posture toward the Taiwan question, its main features are outlined here so that the discussion of the schools of strategic thought may be based on a thorough understanding of what the status quo policy is.

Under the One-China policy, the United States recognizes one Chinese government and does not recognize Taiwan; its relations with Taiwan are unofficial. It has a policy of providing arms to Taiwan and maintaining the capacity to intervene in Taiwan’s defense, but it is not under any international legal obligation to maintain those policies. When U.S. officials refer to the United States’ “commitment” to Taiwan, they are referring to a political commitment and not to an international legal commitment; it would be more accurate to characterize the United States’ support for Taiwan as a long-standing policy than as a commitment (Lee 2021). This policy is designed to deter the PRC from attacking Taiwan by raising the threat of U.S. intervention if the PRC uses force and also providing assurances to the PRC that the United States will not support Taiwan’s independence if the PRC refrains from force [(Christensen 2002)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?4EzU3f). Hence, the United States has historically gone to great lengths to adhere to the policy of maintaining unofficial relations with Taiwan, which, in the past, included prohibiting Taiwan officials from visiting U.S. officials in their government offices in Washington and establishing the American Institute in Taiwan as a private corporation even though it functions as an embassy. Richard Bush, the former Chairman and Managing Director of AIT, notes that officials who work there officially leave government service, but their years of service there still count toward the government pension system (Bush 2017, 15). These unusual practices are meant to demonstrate consistency with the United States’ policy of maintaining unofficial relations with Taiwan: the two sides have robust economic and cultural relations, but there are limits on their strategic and military cooperation.

Strategic ambiguity is meant to serve the policy of “dual deterrence”: deterring the PRC from using force against Taiwan, and deterring Taipei from provoking Beijing through a move toward formal independence (Bush 2017, 18). Ruling out U.S. intervention entirely would, of course, encourage the PRC to seek to unify with Taiwan through force. Promising U.S. intervention unconditionally would lead to the moral hazard problem by encouraging Taiwan to push the envelope on independence. In other words, strategic ambiguity is meant to address Taipei’s concerns about abandonment and also to address the United States’ own concerns about entrapment. This latter point is especially important because of recent concerns that the United States’ support for Taiwan raises the risk of the United States being dragged into a war with China. In advancing the case for accommodating China on the Taiwan question, Charles Glaser acknowledges that “current U.S. policy is designed to prevent Taiwan from declaring independence and to make clear that the United States will not come to Taiwan’s aid if it does”; but he also argues that “the United States will find itself under pressure to protect Taiwan no matter what the source of a Chinese attack” and that “the United States has limited control over Taiwan’s policy, which puts it in the unfortunate position of being hostage to decisions made in Taipei” [(Glaser 2015, pg. 69)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?OAQrGK). His argument is based on the idea of a U.S. “commitment” to Taiwan: in a more recent version of this argument in *Foreign Affairs*, he says that “compared with the U.S. commitment to Japan and South Korea, the *obligation* to Taiwan is much riskier” [(Glaser 2021](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?QVArHU), emphasis added). But nothing in the One-China policy is defined as a U.S. obligation toward Taiwan: although the TRA has binding language on the obligations of the President toward Congress in Section 3(c), the language on arms sales to Taiwan in Section 2(b)(5) and Section 3(a) and the language on maintaining the capacity to defend Taiwan in Section 2(b)(6) are only phrased as a statement of policy (Bush 2004, 152-160).[[37]](#footnote-37) Glaser’s argument may be based on the belief that the United States is committed to defending Taiwan as long as Taiwan does not provoke the PRC, but that would be a flawed premise: the United States has not said if it would intervene in Taiwan’s defense, and it has not specified conditions under which it would intervene.

## *Taiwan’s Strategic Importance Today*

The previous section discussed how, in the early years of the Cold War, U.S. officials considered Taiwan to be an important interest but not a vital one. It also discussed how this assessment was based primarily on Taiwan’s strategic position in the first island chain, and in a secondary sense on Taiwan’s economic importance as a source of agricultural goods and raw materials for Japan. The geographic argument is still valid, since a strategic competitor that gained control of Taiwan - now the PRC itself being the main strategic competitor rather than a proxy of the Soviet Union - would be able to project power into the Western Pacific and threaten Japan and the Philippines. But it would not be accurate to conclude that because Taiwan’s geographic position has remained fixed, its geographic importance has remained fixed. Taiwan’s geographic importance has arguably grown in relative terms. At the beginning of the Cold War, the Soviet Union had the potential to become a Eurasian hegemon, projecting economic influence, political influence, and military power into Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If the PRC had gained control of Taiwan then, the ability of the Soviet Union to project power would have grown, but it would not have fundamentally altered the strategic landscape of the Cold War - hence the conclusion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1948 that Taiwan was an important but not a vital interest. Today, however, Taiwan is much more important because the PRC cannot project military power as widely or as effectively as the Soviet Union could in the 1950s. As Hal Brands and John Lewis Gaddis have recently observed, China faces serious geographic constraints: “China will remain chiefly a land power, beset by an ancient dilemma. If, in search of strategic depth, it tries to expand its perimeters, it is likely to overstretch its capabilities and provoke resistance from anxious neighbors. If, to regain solvency, it contracts its perimeters, it risks inviting in enemies” [(Brands and Gaddis 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?kF2vrP). It cannot build a sphere of influence like the Warsaw Pact: it does not have satellite states, and its only treaty ally is North Korea. Although there have been concerns about China’s military base in Djibouti, that kind of overseas military presence pales in comparison with the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence in the Cold War.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The PRC needs Taiwan. Control of the island is the PRC’s only realistic prospect of substantially increasing its global military presence. It cannot advance through the Eurasian continent like the Soviet Union did after the Second World War, establishing puppet regimes in Eastern Europe, fomenting subversion in France and Italy, menacing Greece and Turkey, and deploying the Red Army with impunity to crack down on resistance in Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. China has neither the interest nor the opportunity to become a new Soviet Union. It does have the potential to become a peer competitor of the United States, but not to become a Eurasian hegemon. Taiwan is the only opportunity that the PRC has. It’s Beijing’s window into the Western Pacific, a foothold in a strategic corridor that could extend to the South Pacific or even to Guam and Hawaii. During the Cold War, Taiwan was but one of many potential theaters of conflict between the United States and its strategic competitors. Now it is the main theater, if not the only one.

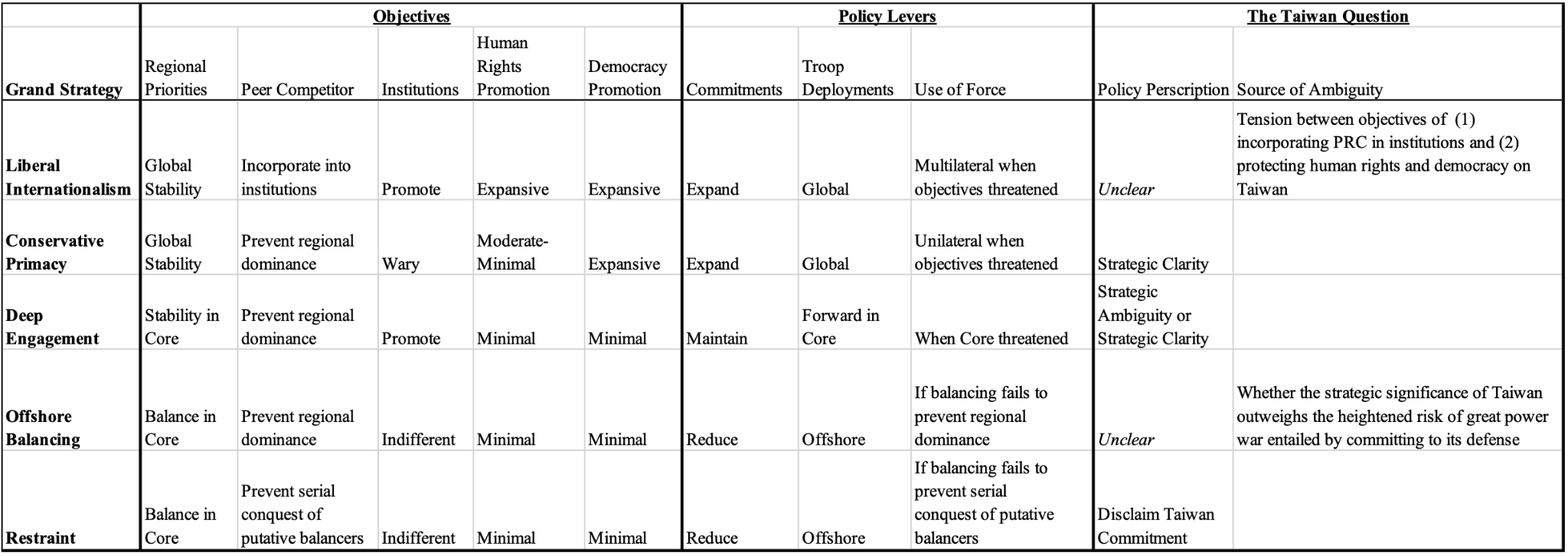
One of the most important developments in Taiwan’s strategic importance in the years since the Cold War - and especially in the last 10 years - has been the rise of Taiwan’s semiconductor industry. In a recent paper, the semiconductor market research company IC Insights reported that Taiwan’s installed semiconductor capacity (21.4%) exceeded that of South Korea (20.4%), Japan (15.8%), China (15.3%), North America (12.6%), and Europe (5.7%). For advanced chips (10 nanometers or less), Taiwan had 62.8% of global manufacturing capacity.[[39]](#footnote-39)

# *Grand Strategy*

Simultaneous with the current re-evaluation of U.S. policy toward Taiwan is a broader conversation about overall American grand strategy. As Betts aptly puts it, “grand strategy is in vogue” [(Betts 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?FjwOkX). While some are skeptical of grand strategy’s importance [(Balzacq and Krebs 2021; Betts 2019; Edelstein and Krebs 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?bO0OSn),[[40]](#footnote-40) we take the view that grand strategy can be more-or-less successfully applied to important strategic questions faced by the United States, including the Taiwan issue. We agree with Brand and Feaver that ‘[s]uperpowers need an overarching idea of what they are trying to accomplish in the world, and of how individual policies fit into that broader matrix, if they are to make their policies cohesive and their power effective.” [(Brands and Feaver 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?FsRTS9). There is no widespread agreement over how to precisely define “grand strategy” [(Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019; Betts 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?AJeg3I),[[41]](#footnote-41) but we adopt Brands’ formulation as ​​“the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy … a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so” [(Brands 2014, pg. 3)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?CyIEwz) It not only includes “a deeper logic about how the world works”, but also has a prioritizing function in “deciding what goals, threats, and opportunities are most important...in a world where resources are finite” [(Brands and Feaver 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?K9LsrJ).

In attempting to provide the ligaments between grand strategy and specific American policy toward Taiwan, we do not seek to put forth our own grand strategy, but instead to use those developed by others and then attempt to distill deductive policy prescriptions for the Taiwan issue. Specifically, we utilize the four ideal-type grand strategies identified by Avey, [Markowitz, and Reardon](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?RhYNdG) [(2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?1qjwGy).[[42]](#footnote-42) Furthermore, we follow Wohlforth in further subdividing the last of these ideal types into Offshore Balancing and true Restraint [(Wohlforth 2020--see also Ashford 2021; Jervis 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?zOYcZh). This is especially important when considering U.S. policy toward the People’s Republic of China, given that prominent advocates of the two strategies give substantially different policy prescriptions with regards to the rise of China [(Wohlforth 2020, Ashford 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?lxuxIP). Thus, we identify five ideal-type grand strategies: 1) Liberal Internationalism, 2) Conservative Primacy, 3) Deep Engagement, 4) Offshore Balancing, and 5) Restraint.

# American Grand Strategy and the Taiwan Question: Five Ideal Types Applied



Plot adopted from [Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon (2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?uZ90cd), with modifications in order to distinguish Offshore Balancing and Restraint as suggested by [Wohlforth (2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?V9l4C3).

## Liberal Internationalism

Liberalism Internationalism has traditionally been one of the more popular grand strategies amongst both academics and politicians. Neoliberal institutionalism and hegemonic stability theory form the grand theoretical anchors for the strategy [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?OWJ4Sy), and Liberal internationalists argue a benevolent hegemon can create the constitutional rules for a system that creates buy-in from less strong powers [(Ikenberry 2001)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?SD21si). In this sense, the hierarchical association between the hegemon and other states is a contractual relationship based on legitimacy more than coercion [(Lake 2009)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?i4l4mY). Once created, these international institutions are sticky and survive ever after hegemony passes [(Ikenberry 2008; Keohane 1984)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?53o9Io)**.** Of key importance to this strategy is that rising powers are essentially co-opted into perpetuating the order they find because of the benefits they accrue from it. Thus, one of the major arguments from this camp was to welcome China into the “Liberal International Order” as a “responsible stakeholder.” Liberal internationalism, furthermore, subscribes to mid-level theories such as those that make up the Kantian Tripod: peace is encouraged by democratic domestic institutions, international commerce, and international rules and organizations. Liberal Internationalists, furthermore, are nuclear pessimists and believers in managed interdependence [(Wohlforth 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?1cG3T4).

A liberal-internationalist approach essentially guided U.S. policy toward China from the end of the Cold War through the end of the Obama Administration. Notably, this was even the case in the George W. Bush administration--otherwise often classified as neoconservative--as China was encouraged to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the system. In recent years, however, a bipartisan consensus has formed that such engagement of China failed [(Campbell and Ratner 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?THQ2dw). As Ikenberry has recently written:

“The American grand strategy at the end of the Cold War was to invite the illiberal states into the liberal order. Once China and Russia gained the benefits of trade and exchange, went the reasoning, they would understand that it was in their interest to become “responsible stakeholders.” Implicit in this logic was the expectation that these states would engage in self-initiated regime change. They would slowly shed their autocratic and authoritarian institutions and move closer to the Western liberal democratic model. This has not happened, and liberal internationalists must now reassess their assumptions and consider new approaches,” [(Ikenberry 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?aqvZ1c)**.**

Thus, a Liberal Internationalist approach to China has recently fallen out of favor inside the Beltway and, if anything, it is almost seen as inapplicable to the current competitive relationship between Washington and Beijing.

### Liberal Internationalism and the Taiwan Question

No grand strategy exhibits as much internal tension toward the Taiwan issue as liberal internationalism. On the one hand, advocates of liberal internationalism view liberal democracy as a normative good, and for this reason would be expected to be very sympathetic to a democratic Taiwan facing a threat from an autocratic China. As Anne-Marie Slaughter has explicitly put it, the United States should “support[] liberal democratic parties and institutions in countries determining their own political future. … The twenty-first century, like the twentieth century, must be made safe for democracy” [(Slaughter 2009)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?qern5B). On the other hand, liberal internationalism makes the use of rules and institutions--including international law--core features of the strategy. Taiwan's extremely precarious international legal position and Liberal Internationalism’s clear prescription to accommodate China [(Ikenberry 2012, pg. 356)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?RSatOk), however, suggest that strong support for the island might be counter to the overall goal of the strategy.

Ikenberry makes accommodating China a clear policy recommendation, and given the PRC’s long stand on the Taiwan question, it seems possible that sacrificing the island in order to achieve the “greater good” of Chinese buy-in to the international order might be reasonable. Ikenberry writes “[t]he big bargain that the United States will want to strike is this: to accommodate a rising China by offering it status and position within the regional order in return for Beijing’s acceptance and accommodation of Washington’s core strategic interests,” [(Ikenberry 2012, pg. 356)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?UGRMkK). Given the PRC’s long stated position on the Taiwan issue--as well as the domestic legitimacy the CCP stakes on completing the reunification of China--it is nearly unimaginable that the U.S. would be able to strike any such bargain with China while giving significant support to Taiwan. Indeed, given the PRC’s growing economic and military power, any hope of coming to such a grand agreement would likely force the U.S. to lessen the significance of its relationship with the island. While no Liberal Internationalist himself, Charles Glaser's “Grand Bargain”--in which the U.S. would fully abandon Taiwan--between the U.S. and China would seem to be the only plausible option.

Furthermore, Ikenberry describes the Westphalian system of state sovereignty as the “bedrock” of the Liberal International Order. Given the near universal consensus--including in Taipei and Washington--that Taiwan is not a separate country from China, supporting the ROC would *per se* seem to be a violation of the Westphalian sovereignty espoused by Ikenberry [(Krasner 1999)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?qLn9wS). Thus, international institutions such as the concept of sovereignty also seem to guide against involvement in sub-national disputes. Moreover, given a primary goal of Liberal Internationalism is to “[forge] a world of liberty under law” [(Ikenberry and Slaughter 2006)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?9fuL2k), supporting a government that has virtually no legal standing seems quite contradictory to this overall goal. More than any other grand strategy, Liberal internationalism emphasizes the importance of international law, and from a purely international legal perspective, the People’s Republic of China has a strong case to make that Taiwan is an internal issue in which outside interference is prohibited. Along these same lines, Betts takes Ikenberry to task over his “utter contradiction” when it comes to Taiwan [(Betts 2011)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?UnVyPs). In *Liberal Leviathan* Ikenberry argues that the United States should “accommodate a rising China by offering it status and position within the regional order in return for Beijing's acceptance and accommodation of Washington’s core strategic interests, which include remaining a dominant security provider within East Asia” [(Ikenberry 2012)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?onGTr7), but fails to even mention the Taiwan issue [(Betts 2011)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?20sYls). “What then are the rules for the rule-based system on basic security issues, for example, secession? Are we to support it, as in Kosovo; oppose it, as in Cyprus; or fudge it, as on Taiwan?” [(Betts 2011, pg. 95)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?zIMMAp).

It is possible that in the past a Liberal Internationalist policy prescription for Taiwan would have fallen more easily under the broader US-China relationship. This would involve “engaging” China and encouraging that state to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system. The long hope of this line of argument was that, for example, economic liberalization in mainland China would lead to political liberalization. Thus, over the long run, Taiwan would have become much less of an issue as a more liberal PRC would either be more inclined to support self-determination on behalf of those residing on the island or Taiwan itself would become more amenable to reunifying with a more attractive, politically open China. That clear non-occurrence of this chain of events, however, had been a serious drag on the grand strategy’s viability with regards to American China policy in general, and with regards to Taiwan particularly. While Liberal Internationalism seemed to drive much of U.S. policy toward China after the Cold War, such an approach has come to be seen as discredited by many in Washington today and looks likely to be marginalized for the foreseeable future.

## Deep Engagement

Like Restraint and Offshore Balancing, Deep Engagement derives from the realist foundations but uses hegemonic stability theory as its core theoretical anchor instead of balance-of-power realism [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018; Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a; Wohlforth 1999)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?W3eEpD). Serving as the global hegemon is not cheap, but the ultimate benefits derived from the order secured are argued to outweigh the costs [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a; Norrlof and Wohlforth 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?av0VzJ). Deep Engagement is undergirded by mid-level theories such as a belief in inefficient balancing and nuclear pessimism [(Wohlforth 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?YnteaQ).

Deep Engagers’ belief in the necessity of a hegemon to secure a stable international order means they advocate the United States maintaining its hegemonic role in the system. While a rising China might call into question the practical ability of the United States to maintain this position, Deep Engagers’ have argued that the purported growth of Chinese power is widely overblown [(Beckley 2018; Brooks and Wohlforth 2016b)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?dTUFU0). Specifically in response to the threat of rising Chinese power, Deep Engagers argue that it is easier to be a defender of the *status quo* system than to replace it. Brooks and Wohlforth write :

“[D]eep engagements’s core objectives are defensive: securing regional allies, raising the costs to China of coercively upsetting the status quo, sustaining the favorable institutional and economic order, and continuing to provide China with incentives to cooperate with rather than combat that order…” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a, pg. 113)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?LnUUKp).

Modern A2/AD technologies mean that “the zone close to China’s coast is poised to turn into a no man’s land (or no man’s sea)” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a, pg. 114)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?L7Pxe4). Therefore, “As long as the United States keeps its focus on deep engagement’s core defensive mission, it will long retain options to sustain the strategy in Asia” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a, pg. 115)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?8JaQgS).

### Deep Engagement and the Taiwan Question

Deep Engagers have recently applauded the United States' careful balancing under “strategic ambiguity” in attempting to simultaneously deter Chinese aggression against Taiwan while also dissuading the island from upsetting the status quo by moving toward independence [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016a; Lind and Wohlforth 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?mH8FN2).[[43]](#footnote-43) Brooks and Wohlforth approve “the United States [seeking] to reassure Beijing that it supports the ultimate aim of one China as long as it is achieved peacefully” (Brooks and Wohlforth 2016, pg. 90). As described above, however, walking this tight rope is becoming less and less feasible as the *status quo* becomes increasingly tenuous.

A prescription for the Taiwan issue viewed from a Deep Engagement lens is not completely obvious. On the one hand, security commitments are a core feature of the grand strategy, and it might seem that if the grand strategy’s proponents look approvingly at the U.S.-Japanese alliance and the U.S.-South Korea alliance, then perhaps a renewed security commitment to Taiwan would be no different. On the other hand, Brooks and Wohlforth are careful to distinguish the core tenets of a deep engagement grand strategy from “add-ons” such as democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention [(2016)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gbXKis). Thus, while other grand strategies might argue for a security commitment to Taiwan based on the liberal-democratic nature of the island’s government, such a logic does little to justify such a commitment under the Deep Engagement rubric.

Helpfully, Brooks and Wolhforth provide a list of factors to be considered when attempting to distinguish between “core commitments'' and “ ‘deep engagement plus’ add-ons” not central to the grand strategy: (1) power, (2) threat, (3) economic importance, and (4) importance to core international institutions [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?CJu5KN), pg. 84). First, power is defined as “the centrality of the state, region, or territory to the global distribution of capabilities'' [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?VB1zgM), pg. 84). Taiwanese military power itself is small compared to that of the U.S. or China, and even if its forces were to become part of an anti-U.S. alliance, this would not substantially alter the world balance of power. In two other areas, however, the hypothetical surrender of the island to PRC control would yield substantial effects. First, the geographic location of the island would mean that Japan--and especially the Ryukyu islands--would be much more vulnerable to attack. It is for this reason that Japan itself has recently threatened to intervene to defend Taiwan. Second, the concentration of the world semiconductor industry in Taiwan--specifically TSMC--would mean significant economic power hangs in the balance. Considerations of power thus suggesting defending Taiwan should be of significant importance to the United States.

Second, threat is defined as “the degree to which a commitment will prevent or forestall a significant threat to the US homeland” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?brS9dC), pg. 84). The greatest current Chinese threats to the United States homeland--its nuclear weapons and cyber capabilities, for example--would not significantly increase in case Beijing were to seize the island. Because it would be a stretch to argue a PRC controlled Taiwan would threaten the continental U.S., this suggests the island would perhaps be outside the core commitments of a Deep Engagement strategy.

Third, economic importance is defined as whether “potential commitment is central to the functioning of the global economy” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?iosu3j), pg. 84). While the island is far from being a Germany or Japan, it is nonetheless the twentieth largest economy in the world--similar in size to Switzerland or Saudi Arabia, and far larger than the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, or Hong Kong. Moreover, the concentration of certain industries--especially, semiconductors---on the island suggests the island is of significant economic importance.

Lastly, considerations of Taiwan’s importance to core international institutions asks whether the island is “central to the functioning and stability of the network of core international institutions the United States built after World War II to fulfill its grand strategy” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?BVN3Qa), pg. 84). Given that the Republic of China is only a member of a few international institutions--after decades of PRC campaigning against ROC membership--it seems clear that under this factor, the United States should not give great weight to committing to the island’s defense.

The totality of the factors, therefore, do not seem to yield a clear answer as to whether Taiwan meets the threshold of importance to warrant a security commitment by the United States. On the one hand, it seems reasonable for one to argue that the power and economic importance of the island make it worthy of protection. While not explicitly expressing support for a Taiwan commitment, Brooks and Wohlforth do seem to mention it in a positive light and group the U.S.-Taiwan relationship with guarantees to Western Europe during the Cold War—i.e., formal alliance commitments (pg. 90). But, on the other hand, it also seems reasonable to emphasize the lack of threat to the American homeland a Chinese takeover would yield and Taiwan’s near non-existence in international institutions to come to the conclusion the island is not worth risking American blood to defend. Deep Engagement’s policy prescription for the Taiwan Question thus seems somewhat indeterminate. Note that this would not be the first time a Deep Engagement type grand strategy was seemingly “on the fence” over Taiwan. Dean Acheson famously stated in early 1950 that Taiwan (and Korea) was outside of the U.S. defense perimeter in the Asia-Pacific, but the administration suddenly moved the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait at the outbreak of the Korean War a mere few months later [(Christensen 1996)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?JNOy4g).

Given the fact Taiwan was seen as a core commitment during much of the Cold War, combined with the exponentially more important role the island plays in the world economy today, it seems reasonable to conclude that Deep Engagers would lean toward considering Taiwan a core commitment. This interpretation is further buttressed if one considers nuclear proliferation concerns as well. Proponents of Deep Engagement have argued that U.S. security assistance to Taiwan and pressure against nuclear proliferation from the United States is what caused the island to abandon its nuclear weapons program during the Cold War [(Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth 2012)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?UGZvMr). Yet if the threat from China continues to rise, and the commitment from the United States remains ambiguous, Taiwan will start facing strong incentives to acquire nuclear capabilities. Seeking to prevent such proliferation in East Asia would force the United States to provide a greater security commitment to the island.

It might be little surprise that Deep Engagers seem to support the “muddle through” choice of maintaining the *status quo*. Lind and Wohlforth recently praised the U.S. policy for “demonstrating how the United States can deter a rival great power from expanding while preventing a partner from provoking it” [(Lind and Wohlforth 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?vayaen). While realizing that “[t]his policy may be tested again, as demographic and economic trends strengthen the Taiwanese people’s sense of national identity, as China grows more assertive, and as voices in the United States call for an unambiguously pro-Taiwan policy,” they urge Washington to “hold fast: for decades, conservatism has served it, and the region, well.” [(Lind and Wohlforth 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?BKJxpH). Yet it is precisely this *status quo* that is becoming increasingly unsustainable as Chinese power grows and its incentives to avoid implementing coercive strategies against the island diminish. Thus, if current trends continue and Chinese power continues to grow rapidly, Deep Engagers will likely increasingly find “strategic clarity” more in line with their overall strategy.

## Conservative Primacy

Like liberal internationalism, conservative primacy subscribes to the hegemonic stability theory--albeit in a form more accepting of coercive hegemony in certain circumstances [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?CO0LRd). A key difference with liberal internationalism, however, is conservative primacy’s skepticism of international institutions and willingness to utilize military force unilaterally. Illiberal states are seen as inherently dangerous, although support for regime change has waned since the experience of the Iraq War [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Uq3ZQ4). Given Conservative Primacy’s hostility toward autocratic regimes and belief that the United States should remain the world’s sole superpower, the grand strategy unambiguously calls for a confrontational stance with China. Conservative Primacists embrace a Cold War with China and may even see it through a moral lens as a righteous crusade. Many recently expressed strong disagreement with the assertion U.S. foreign policy has become too hostile to China in a survey for *Foreign Affairs* [(Is U.S. Foreign Policy Too Hostile to China? 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?5G1qRi).

### Conservative Primacy and the Taiwan Question

Conservative Primacy clearly advocates strongly supporting Taiwan. One logic behind this is similar to the logic utilized by offshore balancers in favor of supporting Taiwan: its material effect on the balance of power. This includes both the geostrategic significance of the island, as well as the geoeconomic importance of its industries. The second logic, however, is dissimilar to realism-based strategies, and instead appeals to a moral duty to assist other “sister republics” [(Nau 2013)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Ay7MEc). Through this logic, a fellow liberal democracy is seen as inherently worthy of protection against a threatening communist autocracy. These two separate logics are often seen in arguing for a strong U.S. commitment to the island. For example:

“***[I]f Taiwan became a platform for Chinese military capabilities, the defense of other U.S. allies in the region, such as Japan and the Philippines, would become vastly more difficult. Nor would such a concession likely satisfy Chinese ambitions.*** A growing body of literature by scholars such as Toshi Yoshihara, James Holmes, Liza Tobin, and Elizabeth Economy suggests that China desires at the very least to push the United States beyond the chain of islands running from Japan to Taiwan to the Philippines. Even a limited Chinese sphere in the western Pacific would serve as a springboard to this larger objective. Meanwhile, the United States will have sacrificed a number of critical advantages by pulling out. ***A free Taiwan offers proof that Chinese culture and democracy are not incompatible; subjugating Taiwan would also allow Beijing to remove this ideological threat.***” [(Brands 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?BaggOr).

While clearly outside the mainstream, some Conservative Primacists have even gone so far as to advocate helping Taiwan secure nuclear weapons as a deterrent against Chinese aggression.[[44]](#footnote-44) Not all agree with an explicit embrace of strategic clarity, however. [Mastro, for example, argues that a formal change in policy is unnecessary because Beijing already expects the United States to come to Taiwan's defense,](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?uVHaX2)[[45]](#footnote-45) [and thus the bigger focus should be on strengthening the American military presence in the region in order to maintain a favorable balance of power (2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?bNMWIa). By and large, though, Conservative Primacists urge strong U.S. support for the island in the form of large arms sales, a more robust U.S. military presence in the region, and strategic clarity in coming to the island’s defense.

## Offshore Balancing

While Deep Engagement takes hegemonic stability theory as its point of departure, Offshore Balancing and Restraint subscribe to balance-of-power realism [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Dffeia). Mearsheimer is perhaps one of the leading advocates of the grand strategy, and the influence of his Offensive Realism can be seen in the prescriptions for which he advocates [(Mearsheimer 2014)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?ogTPTh). Given a belief in the inevitability of great power competition--i.e., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics--*Offshore Balancers were consistently skeptical of long lasting cooperation with China even decades before the recent downturn in Sino-American relations [(Mearsheimer 2010)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?4kQvhr). Mearsheimer long argued that China could not rise peacefully, and that an intense security competition would eventually arise between Beijing and Washington--a prediction seemingly vindicated over the past few years [(Campbell and Rapp-Hooper 2021; Campbell and Ratner 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gENkp3). In 2016 Walt and Mearsheimer specifically wrote:

“Ideally, Washington would rely on local powers to contain China, but that strategy might not work. Not only is China likely to be much more powerful than its neighbors, but these states are also located far from one another, making it harder to form an effective balancing coalition. The United States will have to coordinate their efforts and may have to throw its considerable weight behind them. In Asia, the United States may indeed be the indispensable nation.” [(Mearsheimer and Walt 2016)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?RnaS88).

More recently, Walt has elaborated the need for an onshore American presence in Asia:

“China is a potential hegemon in Asia, and it will remain one long after the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. Although Asia contains a number of capable medium-sized powers, such as Japan, South Korea, and India, it will not be easy for them to form an effective balancing coalition. In this case, the United States needs to coordinate this effort and commit its own forces. Buck-passing will not work. Although U.S. military forces will have to be onshore in a number of places in Asia, this policy is still fully consistent with the grand strategy of offshore balancing.” [(Walt 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?jqVIHJ).

Offshore balancing today thus seemingly gives a clear prescription for Washington's strategy toward Beijing--an onshore presence in East Asia and the waging of a new Cold War. Even in 2014--several years before the recent severe downturn in relations between Beijing and Washington--Mearsheimer argued that “[t]he optimal strategy for dealing with a rising China is containment” [(Mearsheimer 2014, pg. 384)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?iEUGiC). And as recently as October 2021, Mearsheimer has strongly disagreed with the assertion that U.S. policy today toward China is overly hostile [(Mearsheimer 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?pu9cyY):

“China is bent on establishing hegemony in Asia, which makes eminently good sense from Beijing’s perspective. In effect, China is imitating the United States, which worked hard to achieve hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, however, the United States is committed to preventing China from becoming a regional hegemon—for good strategic reasons—and thus has no choice but to balance hard against China. The resulting competition between these two great powers, which is effectively a new Cold War, will only intensify over time. One hopes it won’t lead to a hot war.”[(Mearsheimer 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?qdUHsE)

Most recently, Mearsheimer has argued that the U.S. should “maintain formidable conventional forces in East Asia to persuade Beijing that a clash of arms would at best yield a Pyrrhic victory” and yet in the same article recognizes “Although the main targets of China’s appetite certainly have strategic value for China, they are also considered sacred territory, which means their fate is bound up with Chinese nationalism. This is especially true of Taiwan: the Chinese feel an emotional attachment to the island that the Soviets never felt for Berlin, for example, making Washington’s commitment to defend it all the riskier.” [(Mearsheimer 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?OVCuU8)

### Offshore Balancing Primacy and the Taiwan Question

On the question of U.S. policy toward Taiwan in particular, however, the grand strategy is far less clear. On the one hand, Mearsheimer has argued the United States should make the island part of its counter-China balancing coalition. First, he argues that Taiwan itself is important to the material balance of power in the region:

“[T]he United States will have powerful incentives to make Taiwan an important player in its anti-China balancing coalition. First, as noted, Taiwan has significant economic and military resources and it is effectively a giant aircraft carrier that can be used to help control the waters close to China’s all-important eastern coast. The United States will surely want Taiwan’s assets on its side of the strategic balance, not on China’s side” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?f5hXQJ).

Second, he argues that abandoning Taiwan would harm American credibility with regards to other allies in the region:

“If the United States were to sever its military ties with Taiwan or fail to defend it in a crisis with China, that would surely send a strong signal to America’s other allies in the region that they cannot rely on the United States for protection. Policy makers in Washington will go to great lengths to avoid that outcome and instead maintain America’s reputation as a reliable partner. This means they will be inclined to back Taiwan no matter what” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?9BKMKp).

In the same article, however, Mearsheimer makes arguments against U.S. support for Taiwan:

“While the United States has good reasons to want Taiwan as part of the balancing coalition it will build against China, there are also reasons to think this relationship is not sustainable over the long term. For starters, at some point in the next decade or so it will become impossible for the United States to help Taiwan defend itself against a Chinese attack” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?MHyVh6).

Specifically, geography looms large in this calculation. As recognized by others, a tyranny-of-distance [(Hulme and Gartzke 2021; Porter 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?46Gbla) make U.S. power projection in defending Taiwan highly difficult:

“In addition, geography works in China’s favor in a major way, simply because Taiwan is so close to the Chinese mainland and so far away from the United States. When it comes to a competition between China and the United States over projecting military power into Taiwan, China wins hands down. Furthermore, in a fight over Taiwan, American policy makers would surely be reluctant to launch major attacks against Chinese forces on the mainland, for fear they might precipitate nuclear escalation. This reticence would also work to China’s advantage....One might argue that there is a simple way to deal with the fact that Taiwan will not have an effective conventional deterrent against China in the not-too-distant future: put America’s nuclear umbrella over Taiwan. This approach will not solve the problem, however, because the United States is not going to escalate to the nuclear level if Taiwan is being overrun by China. The stakes are not high enough to risk a general thermonuclear war. Taiwan is not Japan or even South Korea. Thus, the smart strategy for America is to not even try to extend its nuclear deterrent over Taiwan” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?94H17y).

Offshore balancers, furthermore, emphasize the power of nationalism [(Mearsheimer 2018b; Walt 2018, pg. 282)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?dC27uh). None of the other possible American coalition partners in the region--Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, and others--tread on Chinese nationalism as does Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan would be a particularly dangerous partner to cultivate.

“There is a second reason the United States might eventually forsake Taiwan: it is an especially dangerous flashpoint, which could easily precipitate a Sino-American war that is not in America’s interest. U.S. policy makers understand that the fate of Taiwan is a matter of great concern to Chinese of all persuasions and that they will be extremely angry if it looks like the United States is preventing unification. But that is exactly what Washington will be doing if it forms a close military alliance with Taiwan, and that point will not be lost on the Chinese people.” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?6Fl2w1).

To use Mearshermier’s own words, Offshore Balancing seemingly suggests a “schizophrenic”[[46]](#footnote-46) Taiwan policy [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Jms9U5). As others have pointed out, some of the underlying theoretical logics of Offshore Balancing are unclear [(Wohlforth 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?hEeo1L), and it could be the case that this lack of logical clarity makes a prescription for the Taiwan question unclear. In any case, it would thus be helpful if advocates of offshore balancing clarify their policy prescription for Taiwan.

## Restraint

Calls for a more restrained post-Cold War grand strategy began soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but an actual strategy of Restraint was first coined in by [Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?HZFYT8) in “Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation” [in the late 1990’s (Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?6y5d3t). While some have classified Offshore Balancing and Restraint as “close cousins”, the two grand strategic camps diverge substantially when it comes to the rise of China [(Ashford 2021; Wohlforth 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?K6chSI) and are thus treated separately here.

Like Offshore Balancing, Restraint relies on balance-of-power realism as its underlying theoretical anchor [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?AEOe0o). Restrainers argue that local balancing is usually relatively efficient and that nuclear proliferation can have a pacifying effect [(Wohlforth 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cwuZTP). The defense-dominance of current technology means that the status quo is quite difficult to overturn [(Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?wpuzQG), and thus the United States is quite secure behind its two massive ocean moats. Extensive defense commitments and large military outlays are net negatives for the United States, while the supposed benefits of primacy are overstated [(Drezner 2013; Gholz and Press 2001)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?9OAi56).

Because the cost of a major power war--a war which could conceivably lead to inadvertent escalation [(Posen 1991)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?duTcw4)--would be astronomical, the United States should certainly avoid unnecessary conflict with China. Unlike Offshore Balances, Restrainers would argue even an intense security competition--and especially a new “Cold War”--with Beijing should be avoided if possible, because of the exorbitant costs of a large standing military and forward deployment. While Offshore Balancers argue that now is the time for an onshore America presence in East Asia and the rallying of a contra-China coalition, Restrainers see the possibility of serial territorial conquest as quite small and thus think true Chinese regional hegemony remains unlikely for the foreseeable future.

### Restraint and the Taiwan Question

The question of Taiwan is explicitly considered in “Come Home, America” [(Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?thxwuY). The authors write that the U.S. should end its alliances throughout the region and “terminate the implicit guarantee to Taiwan” [(Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997, pg. 20)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?aMYreD). Trusting in efficient balancing and worried about free-riding, the authors argue that withdrawing from security commitments in the Asia-Pacific region will “giv[e] those nations new incentives to take care of themselves” [(Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997, pg. 20)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cS9Gti). Furthermore, the authors argue that the defensive advantages Taiwan holds as an island would contribute substantially to its security:

“The amphibious operations required for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan...would be extremely difficult and at a minimum would require substantial investment in amphibious warfare capability. Taiwan could extract a withering toll on invading forces. Its air force is large, sophisticated, and growing; its navy has deadly missile boats; and it produces anti-ship cruise missiles. The same Taiwanese forces would make a Chinese blockade of Taiwan even harder. China would find it difficult to harass Taiwanese ports on the eastern side of the island with ground-launched anti-ship cruise missiles. Chinese attacks on shipping would be blocked by Taiwan's air superiority and sea control, and Chinese blockading forces would find it difficult to cover the wide swath of ocean around Taiwan. China could use its ballistic missile force to conduct terror attacks against Taiwanese targets, but terror attacks have negligible military or long-run political effects--witness the failures of the German Blitz and of the sustained IRA bombing campaign against the United Kingdom. As long as Taiwan has access to advanced Western weapons, it will be able to defend itself.” (pg. 21).

The authors do note, however, that their logic of terminating all alliances in Asia is based upon the fact that “[n]o Asian ally of the United States faces an overwhelming conventional threat” [(Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky 1997, pg. 20)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?g0Hvy5)-- a circumstance that has changed considerably over the past quarter century with the exponential rise of Chinese military power [(Heginbotham 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?W5v01L). It could, thus, be the case that the authors would offer a different prescription given the changed circumstances of today versus the late 1990’s.

More recently, Gholz has advocated for helping U.S. allies in the region--including Taiwan--develop their own A2/AD capabilities thus creating a “no man’s sea” between the Chinese mainland and the first island chain [(Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?GcMoii). This is consistent with what other Restrainers have recently advocated in helping arm Taiwan, but avoiding a security commitment to the island [(Porter and Mazarr 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cGH6cV).

It is clear that all Restrainers would oppose “strategic clarity”, with Shifrinson and Wertheim for example recently arguing that the Biden administration should not make “explicit guarantee to defend Taiwan or otherwise enlarg[e] the United States’ already extensive regional commitments.” [(Shifrinson and Wertheim 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?mdMeNp). In *Restraint*, Posen classifies the U.S. commitment to Taiwan as “simultaneously the most perilous and the least strategically necessary commitment that the United States has today” [(Posen 2015, pg 102.)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?vs3eTl) Ashford recently argued “Taiwan’s strategic significance to the United States is not even remotely enough to risk a war with China.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Porter writes:

“American military power is more greatly constrained than before. If it is true that the home defender enjoys advantage against the cross-sea invader, so too does China’s geographic and strategic position make life increasingly difficult for America as an Asia-Pacific power. China’s greater proximity to Taiwan in West Pacific or East Asian waters combined with its growing capacity for access and area denial threatens America’s ability to intervene at acceptable cost, and more broadly therefore to maintain its credibility as a security guarantor. It is harder for America to function as the guardian of the Pacific region if its ability to operate there is strained and it can no longer act as though the sea lanes were its uncontested lake.” [(Porter 2018, pg. 122)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?e2IGHx)

Because of this, some Restrainers argue renunciation is the best course. Most prominently, Charles Glaser advocated for a “grand bargain” between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific, which--among other things--would include an American concession of Taiwan to the People’s Republic of China [(Glaser 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?gQnzNE). Glaser recently went so far as to classify his own position on the issue as “neo-isolationism”.[[48]](#footnote-48) On the other hand, some Restrainers still favor arming Taiwan. The development and proliferation of A2/AD capabilities are emphasized by many restrainers as a reason to be optimistic about defense dominance in the Asia-Pacific in general [(Beckley 2017; Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?oHpHWQ). Porter argues “The same logic that enables China with today’s tools to raise the costs of US intervention into its maritime space to unpalatable levels enables Taiwan to do the same at a price more suited to its limited GDP expenditure on defence,” and that “a Chinese invasion would be costly, protracted and geopolitically dangerous” [(Porter 2018, pg. 120)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?eZrkQk).

“Taiwan can present an ominous defence against an invader without America going to the trouble of ramping up its security assistance and arms trade with Taiwan, and the deterioration of relations with China that this may create. Taiwan’s vulnerability is easily exaggerated. In terms of its ability to conquer, a rising China is not as strategically threatening as sometimes assumed.” [(Porter 2018, pg. 121)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?oOuQs3)

Porter rejects the temptation of the United States to abandon the region as a whole, but does call for “a distancing, to some extent, of America from the issue of China’s claims over Taiwan, abstaining from a position on Taiwan’s status but possibly selling arms to maintain its ability to defend itself.” More recently, Porter argued that “the United States should act as armourer, but not guarantor.” [(Porter and Mazarr 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?qC2yp7). In sum, restrainers clearly agree on not expanding the American commitment to Taiwan--i.e., reject the idea of “strategic clarity”--but there still exist differences in opinion as to whether the United States should support Taiwan with arms [(Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza 2019; Porter and Mazarr 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?SHArdN), or whether Taiwan should be abandoned altogether [(Glaser 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?V6y67L).

# **Conclusion**

President Biden recently created a stir when he declared at a CNN town hall that the United States had a “commitment” to “come to Taiwan’s defense if China attacked.” Ironically, a then-Senator Biden has chastised President Bush for making a similar mistake two decades ago.[[49]](#footnote-49) Biden’s slip reignited debate over the utility of “strategic ambiguity” in the Taiwan strait, with some members of Congress--including Democrats--even going so far as to suggest Congress soon pass an Authorization for the use of Military Force (AUMF) to defend the island.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The risk of major war--and possible abandonment of millions of free individuals to autocratic tyranny--inherent in the Taiwan question makes the policy choice facing the United States today deserving of rigorous analysis. The choice of American policy on the question, however, cannot be answered in the vacuum of cross-strait deterrence or even merely under the wider context of the overall U.S.-China relationship, but instead requires understanding the overall grand strategy of the United States today. Applying five ideal-type grand strategies to the Taiwan question, we are able to situate policy recommendations ranging from strategic clarity to strategic ambiguity and renunciation within broader strategic frameworks of how the United States might “create security for itself” [(Posen 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cRX4bk).

Liberal Internationalism guided U.S. policy toward China from the end of the Cold War until 2017, but has fallen into disrepute today [(Campbell and Ratner 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?hxrLEM). While the strategy’s emphasis on shaping China yields no clear answer for the Taiwan question, the recent marginalization of the theory makes it less relevant than in the past. Conservative Primacy, in contrast, remains very influential in China policy as its clear prescription of competition and confrontation gives a direct answer to the Taiwan question: strong support for the island and greater clarity in the U.S. commitment toward it. Notably, the underlying logic of the theory rests upon not only geostrategic and geoeconomic considerations of material power, but also on a sense of moral duty to assist fellow liberal democracies against autocratic tyranny. Deep Engagement is slightly less clear on its prescription for the island, but seemingly would advocate in favor of U.S. support given the economic and strategic importance of the island, combined with the view of many Deep Engagers that the United States maintains a large power advantage over China [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016b)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?EBHIUr)**.** While Deep Engagers have recently advocated a maintenance of “strategic ambiguity” [(Lind and Wohlforth 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?3cTkGX), it is not quite clear why the overall theory would not instead embrace “strategic clarity”, and this perhaps will be the case in the future as Chinese power grows. Offshore Balancing counsels against entangling alliances when regional hegemony is not a threat, but its advocates have argued that China does now pose such a threat. While strong support for regional powers such as Japan, Korea, and India seems quite clear, recommendations for Taiwan are less so [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?X9gFhr). Lastly, Restraint gives a clear prescription of not undertaking the risk of major power war in a commitment to the island. While some Restrainers go so far as suggesting the renunciation of any U.S. commitment to the island and perhaps making a “grand bargain” with China [(Glaser 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?SJBmzn), others still support major arms sales to the island and advocate creating a “no man’s sea” within the First Island Chain [(Gholz, Friedman, and Gjoza 2019; Porter and Mazarr 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?hh7h44).

The United States might still be the most powerful nation in the world, but its power nonetheless has limits. In answering whether to risk war over the island, Americans must first answer “what they are trying to accomplish in the world, and of how individual policies fit into that broader matrix,” along with “what goals, threats, and opportunities are most important...in a world where resources are finite” [(Brands and Feaver 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?T8OvyS). Grand strategy provides the intellectual tools to answer these important questions and thus addressing policy questions as critical--and potentially costly--as that over Taiwan requires an analysis starting at the grand strategic level. We can only make logical decisions between “strategic ambiguity”, “strategic clarity”, and renunciation if we have a broader sense of what American grand strategy is and what it should be.

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1. Authors listed in alphabetical order. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Clausewitz argued “[w]ar plans cover every aspect of a war, and weave them all into a single operation that must have a single, ultimate objective in which all particular aims are reconciled. No one starts a war--or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so---without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter is its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail” [(Clausewitz 1976)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?pYtd2a). While the policy questions in this paper focus mainly on strategy priorto actual war--and Clausewitz clearly addresses strategy duringwar--the reasoning is nonetheless analogous. As Brands and Feaver write “Grand strategy is not limited to military tools, but it conceptually borrows from the military hierarchy of tactics in support of operations in support of a theater strategy in support of an overarching grand strategy” [(Brands and Feaver 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?VEbmjl). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mearsheimer, for example, classifies it as “China’s most important dispute” [(Mearsheimer 2014, pg. 375)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?uIB5gb). See also [Blackwill and Zelikow (2021), Mastro (2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?DeIeeF), [Brands and Gaddis (2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Byd1PF). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 23.6 million for Taiwan, 25.8 million for Australia (as of July 2021). “Country Comparisons - Population,” *CIA World Factbook*, accessed 11 October 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/population/country-comparison>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. TrendForce Press Center, 24 February 2021, “Revenue of Top 10 Foundries Expected to Increase by 20% YoY in 1Q21 in Light of Fully Loaded Capacities, Says TrendForce,” *TrendForce*, <https://www.trendforce.com/presscenter/news/20210224-10675.html>; Kathrin Hille, 23 March 2021, “TSMC: How a Taiwanese Chipmaker Became a Linchpin of the Global Economy,” *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/05206915-fd73-4a3a-92a5-6760ce965bd9>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In an irony of history, the CCPs “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中华民族伟大复兴) is rhetorically repeating the KMTs “rejuvenation of Chinese culture”(中華文化復興運動) from the 1960s to oppose the PRCs Cultural Revolution. See Han Cheung, 28 July 2019, “Taiwan in Time: Cultural Counterattack,” *Taipei Times*, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2019/07/28/2003719466>; and [(Tozer 1970)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?pSXO0g). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mainland Affairs Council, 21 March 2021, “Taiwan Public Rejects ‘One Country, Two Systems,” Mainland Affairs Council, https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/News\_Content.aspx?n=A921DFB2651FF92F&sms=37838322A6DA5E79&s=9F000FAD137241F9; [(Buckley and Myers 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?vzhJI5). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As a U.S. Senator recently noted “One part of the solution to ensuring that our Taiwanese allies have what they need to defend themselves involve arms sales… another component of it, however, derives from our current policy of strategic ambiguity towards Taiwan... and I am concerned that that long standing policy...is undermining our efforts to bolster Taiwan.” [(Cruz 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?yMvXAQ). Kang argues, however, that there has been surprisingly little internal balancing on the part of states in East Asia in response to China’s rise [(Kang 2017)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?5X9XoN). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. During the Trump administration, John Bolton also authorized the declassification of a 1982 memorandum from President Reagan stating that “the U.S. willingness to reduce its arms sales to Taiwan is conditioned absolutely upon the continued commitment of China to the peaceful solution of the Taiwan-PRC differences” (Ronald Reagan, 30 August 2019, “Arms Sales to Taiwan [17 August 1982],” American Institute in Taiwan, https://www.ait.org.tw/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/08171982-Reagan-Memo-DECLASSIFIED.pdf). Since China has evidently not committed itself to the peaceful solution of the Taiwan question, arms sales have continued. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. U.S. officials often refer to the United States’ “commitment” to Taiwan (see Ned Price, 3 October 2021, “Increasing People’s Republic of China Military Pressure against Taiwan Undermines Regional Peace and Stability,” U.S. Department of State, https://www.state.gov/increasing-peoples-republic-of-china-military-pressure-against-taiwan-undermines-regional-peace-and-stability/). The Taiwan Relations Act, however, does not use that language. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Quoted in [Sanger 2001](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?4AeljK). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Chiang Chin-yeh and Emerson Lim, 30 April 2021, “China Would Find U.S. Strategic Clarity ‘destabilizing’: U.S. Spy Chief, “ Focus Taiwan: CNA English News, https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202104300006. On the wider debate surrounding strategic ambiguity, see [Glaser et al. (2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?rYd9HQ). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Final Text of the Communiqué [26 November 1943, Document 343],” 1961, in Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943, ed. William M. Franklin and William Gerber (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943CairoTehran/d343. Note, however, that the Cairo Declaration only said Taiwan would be restored to the ROC; it did not say Taiwan would be restored to the legal government of China; note also that the verb “restore” is vague about whether it means transferring sovereignty or merely transferring administrative control. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ProQuest History Vault, “NSC 37,” *Documents of the National Security Council, 1947-1977, Basic Set* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2011), <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002944-001-0891&accountid=14524>. Supporting Christensen’s thesis that the Korean War did not fundamentally change the strategic importance of Taiwan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would submit a memorandum in July 1950 to “reaffirm their views” that the fall of Taiwan to Communism would be “seriously detrimental to United States security,” but, again, not vital; see ProQuest History Vault, “NSC 37/10,” *Documents of the National Security Council, 1947-1977, Basic Set* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2011),

    <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002944-001-0950&accountid=14524>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ProQuest History Vault, “NSC 37,” *Documents of the National Security Council, 1947-1977, Basic Set* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 2011), <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002944-001-0891&accountid=14524>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. On U.S. concerns about Japan’s economic security, see Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)[.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?aNc2aW) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)[.](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?qovEPk) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Harry S. Truman, 1976, “Statement Issued by the President [27 June 1950, Document 119],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, Korea, Volume VII, ed. John P. Glennon (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v07/d119>. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Harry S. Truman, “Letter to Ambassador Warren Austin on the U.S. Position with Respect to Formosa [27 August 1950],” *Harry S. Truman Library*, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/223/letter-ambassador-warren-austin-restating-us-position-formosa>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. USC US-China Institute, “Treaty of Peace between the Republic of China and Japan (Treaty of Taipei) 1952, *USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism*, <https://china.usc.edu/treaty-peace-between-republic-china-and-japan-treaty-taipei-1952>; Bush, *At Cross Purposes*, 92-94 [(2004)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Jc8F6g). In 2014, the recent administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016) repeated the KMT claim that Taiwan had been returned to ROC sovereignty under the ROC-Japan Peace Treaty: Gary Shew, 8 August 2014, “No, Taiwan’s Status is Not Uncertain,” *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/no-taiwans-status-is-not-uncertain/>. The argument is primarily based on the fact that Article 4 of the ROC-Japan Peace Treaty stated that “it is recognised that all treaties, conventions, and agreements concluded before 9 December 1941 between Japan and China have become null and void as a consequence of the war” (USC US-China Institute, “Treaty of Peace between the Republic of China and Japan (Treaty of Taipei) 1952, <https://china.usc.edu/treaty-peace-between-republic-china-and-japan-treaty-taipei-1952>), meaning that Taiwan had been restored to ROC sovereignty because the Treaty of Shimonoseki, under which the Qing Dynasty had ceded Taiwan to Japan, had become null and void, and the ROC was the legal successor to the Qing Dynasty. The KMT argument also refers to Article 10 of the ROC-Japan Peace Treaty, which says that “nationals of the Republic of China shall be deemed to include all the inhabitants and former inhabitants of Taiwan (Formosa) and Penghu (the Pescadores) and their descendents who are of the Chinese nationality.” But it omits the qualifying statement that immediately precedes that clause: “for the purposes of the present Treaty” (USC US-China Institute, “Treaty of Peace between the Republic of China and Japan (Treaty of Taipei) 1952, <https://china.usc.edu/treaty-peace-between-republic-china-and-japan-treaty-taipei-1952>). Bush acknowledges that “the ROC-Japan treaty with its associated scope-of-application provision did create for the first time a formal, if still de facto, link between the ROC government and the territory under its jurisdiction” (*At Cross Purposes*, 95). But the ROC-Japan Treaty stopped short of recognizing ROC sovereignty over the territory of Taiwan; it only recognized the ROC as having administrative control of Taiwan. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For example, see NSC 5503: National Security Council, 1986, “National Security Council Report [15 January 1955, Document 12],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1955-1957, China, Volume 2, ed. Harriet D. Schwar (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v02>. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Walter P. McConaughy, 1976, “The Consul General at Shanghai (McConaughy) to the Secretary of State [5 January 1950, Document 129],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, ed. Neal H. Petersen, William Z. Slany, Charles S. Sampson, John P. Glennon, and David W. Mabon (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d129>; and Dean Acheson, 1976, “The Secretary of State to the Consul General at Peiping [5 January 1950, Document 130],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, ed. Neal H. Petersen, William Z. Slany, Charles S. Sampson, John P. Glennon, and David W. Mabon (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d130>. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Charlton Ogburn, 1976, “Memorandum by Mr. Charlton Ogburn of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs [2 June 1950, Document 185],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, ed. Neal H. Petersen, William Z. Slany, Charles S. Sampson, John P. Glennon, and David W. Mabon (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d185>. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. James S. Lay, Jr., 1977, “Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay) [17 May 1951, Document 12],” *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1951, East Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Part 1, ed. Paul Claussen, John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon, Neal H. Petersen, and Carl N. Raether (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v06p1/d12>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001[)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?4I5Sr6); Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011[)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?4A2jl1), 454-502. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016[)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?TphKy1). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, “Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity?” in *Dangerous Strait: the U.S.-Taiwan-China Crisis*, ed. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (New York: Columbia University Press), 186-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The Avalon Project, “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954,” *Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School*, accessed 25 October 2021, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp>**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The United States also pressured the KMT to agree that “use of force will be a matter of joint agreement, subject to action of an emergency character which is clearly an exercise of the inherent right of self-defense,” but because the KMT refused to have this condition specified in the Treaty itself, it was included in a separate exchange of notes. [(Garver 1997, pg. 57-58)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Lt9PBQ). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Section 15 of the TRA states that “the term ‘Taiwan’ includes, as the context may require, the islands of Taiwan and the Pescadores, the people on those islands, corporations and other entities and associations created or organized under the laws applied on those islands, and the governing authorities on Taiwan recognized by the United States as the Republic of China prior to January 1, 1979, and any successor governing authorities (including political subdivisions, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof).” It does not definitively exclude Quemoy and Matsu from the definition of “Taiwan,” but it also does not contain an elastic clause as did the Mutual Defense Treaty. “Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, accessed 25 October 2021, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The Avalon Project, “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of China; December 2, 1954,” *Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School*, accessed 25 October 2021, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp>; “Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, accessed 25 October 2021, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Alan Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 42-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People’s Republic of China [27 February 1972, Document 203],” in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Volume 17, China, 1969-1972, ed. Stephen E. Phillips (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Richard Bush, *At Cross Purposes*, 130-131; “U.S.-PRC Joint Communique (1979),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, accessed 25 October 2021, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/u-s-prc-joint-communique-1979/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Alan Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See David Stilwell, 8 September 2020, “Remarks by David R. Stilwell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Heritage Foundation (virtual), *American Institute in Taiwan*, <https://www.ait.org.tw/remarks-by-david-r-stilwell-assistant-secretary-of-state-for-east-asian-and-pacific-affairs-at-the-heritage-foundation-virtual/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et seq.),” *American Institute in Taiwan*, accessed 28 October 2021, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, 16 May 2020, “China’s Djibouti Naval Base Increasing Its Power,” *East Asia Forum*, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/05/16/chinas-djibouti-naval-base-increasing-its-power/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Chang Chien-chung and Frances Huang, 16 October 2021, “Taiwan’s IC Strength Could Spur Chinese Takeover: IC Insights,” *Focus Taiwan: CNA English News*, <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202110160009>. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “It should, according to well-established conventional wisdoms, be the center of gravity of states’ relations with the outside world, yet, in practice, grand strategy often seems an unattainable ideal” [(Balzacq and Krebs 2021](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?oYsRCq)). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Paul Kennedy defined it as bringing “together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests,” [(Kennedy 1991, pg. 5)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Hf0jfC) . Some take a more narrow, military focused view of the concept--what Balzacq et. al refer to as the “classicist” tradition of grand strategy [(Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?VWrtAg) . Others take a broader view of the term to include economics, diplomacy, and other uses of national power [(For example, Brands 2014; Kennedy 1991)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Rxv3yE). Posen defines it as “a nation-state’s theory about how to produce security for itself,” with a particular emphasis on military threats [(Posen 2015)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?eWOQxi). Brands argues it is “an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies...the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there...the theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world,” [(Brands 2014, pg. 3)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?Z3efR3). Betts similarly defines it as “a practical plan to use military, economic, and diplomatic means to achieve national interests (or political ends) over time, with the least feasible cost in blood and treasure,” [(Betts 2019)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?u5PAMn). Silove likewise argues that “grand strategy” has historically been used in reference to either “grand plans,” “grand principles,” and “grand behavior” [(Silove 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?64AexW). “Grand plans specify ends and the means by which to achieve them in detail. Grand principles do the same in more general terms. Grand behavior is a pattern in the relative allocation of means to certain ends, regardless of whether that pattern is the result of a grand plan, a grand principle, or some other factor” [(Silove 2018, pg. 19)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?LWK2O1). We follow Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon and in taking a “grand principles” view of grand strategy and defining American grand strategy as “the U.S. theory of how it can maximize American security, prosperity, and liberty” [(Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018, pg. 33)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?PFygLo). Moreover, as part of what Lissner calls the “grand strategy as blueprint” agenda , we seek neither to explain why the United States would implement a particular grand strategy nor to explore the importance of grand strategizing [(Lissner 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?uMeqhH), but rather seek to simply attempt to deduce appropriate Taiwan policy for the United States from certain grand strategic blueprint others have outlined. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. These four are Liberal Internationalism, Conservative Primacy, Deep Engagement, and Restraint. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. “A central, understated, aspect of deep engagement is deterrence...Today, an often discussed example is US support for Taiwan, which is aimed at deterring China from pursuing its claim to sovereignty over the island militarily. The aim in this situation and all others in which Washington has issued deterrent threats is not only to make it prohibitively expensive for other actors to use forceful policies to change the status quo but to do so in a way that does not transform potential partners into enemies or provoke other dangerous reactions. Thus, in the Taiwan case, the United States also seeks to reassure Beijing that it supports the ultimate aim of one China as long as it is achieved peacefully.” [(Brooks and Wohlforth 2016](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?LOkwAp), pg. 90). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. https://video.foxbusiness.com/v/6277911784001#sp=show-clips [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Note, though, that this somewhat assumes a form of strategic clarity already exists in the minds of Chinese decision-makers. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “All of this is to say that the United States is likely to be somewhat schizophrenic about Taiwan in the decades ahead. On one hand, it has powerful incentives to make it part of a balancing coalition aimed at containing China. On the other hand, there are good reasons to think that with the passage of time the benefits of maintaining close ties with Taiwan will be outweighed by the potential costs, which are likely to be huge. Of course, in the near term, the United States will protect Taiwan and treat it as a strategic asset. But how long that relationship lasts is an open question” [(Mearsheimer 2018a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?xfo5qV). Note that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish prediction and prescription in Mearsheimer’s argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/08/taiwan-china-incursions-us-military-war/> [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. https://calendar.tamu.edu/bushschool/view/event/event\_id/234945 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/05/02/not-so-deft-on-taiwan/2adf3075-ee98-4e70-9be0-5459ce1edd5d/?itid=lk\_inline\_manual\_30 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/11/elaine-luria-congress-biden-taiwan/ [↑](#footnote-ref-50)