



THE CURRENT NEED FOR ‘REASSURANCE’ IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT: A CHINESE MAINLAND PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Chinese mainland government places significant importance on the assurances provided by both the US government and the Taiwan authorities regarding the Taiwan question. The author argues that the US should publicly declare that it pursues long-term peaceful coexistence with China, will not obstruct the peaceful reunification across the Taiwan Strait for the sake of strategic competition, and does not support Taiwan independence. Chinese officials can regularly restate the mainland's policy towards Taiwan to the international community, emphasizing that "peaceful reunification is the best way to achieve cross-strait reunification." China should avoid engaging in the so-called 'great power strategic competition' with the United States and should conduct authorized 'Track II' dialogues with scholars and former officials from the DPP.[1]

Introduction

Peace in the Taiwan Strait is in the interest of both sides of the Taiwan Strait and all regional countries. The Chinese mainland has maintained a high degree of continuity and stability in its policy towards Taiwan. On August 10, 2022, after the visit to Taiwan by Nancy Pelosi, who was then still US House speaker, the Chinese government released a White Paper titled "The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era". The White Paper states that:

National reunification by peaceful means is the first choice of the CPC and the Chinese government in resolving the Taiwan question, as it best serves the interests of the Chinese nation as a whole, including our compatriots in Taiwan, and it works best for the long-term stability and development of China. We have worked hard to overcome hardships and obstacles to peaceful reunification over the past decades, showing that we cherish and safeguard the greater good of the nation, the wellbeing of our compatriots in Taiwan, and peace on both sides.[2]

This was meant to assure Taiwan and regional countries that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would conduct military exercises and train in the Taiwan Strait to deter 'Taiwan independence' forces on the island as well as outside interferences.

The Chinese mainland government attaches great importance to the assurances given by the US government and the Taiwan authorities on the Taiwan question. Of course, at different times in the development of China-US relations and cross-strait relations, the assurances that the Chinese mainland side hopes to receive are different. This paper will analyze the mainland side's specific ideas, needs and demands for reassurance at the current stage.

[1] This policy brief is based on a paper presented to a Toda Peace Institute Cluster workshop on "Scope for Reassurance on the Taiwan Issue" held in Tokyo, Japan from June 13 to 14, 2025.

[2] White Paper: The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era_Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America (china-embassy.gov.cn)

Reassurance from the US side

The Chinese side hopes the US government will make the following moves to reassure China. First of all, the United States should seek long-term peaceful coexistence with China. The Taiwan question has been the most important and most sensitive, sometimes also the most urgent, issue in China–US relations. The Chinese side has always viewed US policy towards Taiwan in the context of US policy towards China; therefore, when China looks at the US government's approach to the Taiwan question, it first looks at the US side's handling of US–China relations. Since the Trump administration 1.0 saw China as its main strategic competitor, neither the Republican nor the Democratic administration has made it clear what the endgame of the strategic competition with China will be. At the same time, there have always been two views in the US strategic community that worry China. One view is that rising and existing powers are bound to wage war or have a military conflict between each other; the other view is that the development of US–China relations can only be in the interest of the US if China changes its political system. Although these two views at the current stage in Washington are non-mainstream, due to the complexity and volatility of US domestic politics and the overall international situation, China has always been concerned about the 'endgame' scenario of US strategy towards China and has prepared and will continue to prepare a strategic response. This fundamental uncertainty about the future of bilateral relations is extremely detrimental to the interaction between China and the US around the Taiwan question. If the forthcoming US National Security Strategy report explicitly states that the United States seeks to peacefully coexist with China regardless of the outcome of strategic competition with China, it will be an important assurance to the Chinese government.

The US government needs to reassure China by clarifying that it has no intention to stop the mainland's efforts to promote peaceful unification across the Taiwan Strait.

Second, the US should not prevent peaceful reunification across the Taiwan Strait for the purpose of winning its strategic competition with China. The competition that the United States has pushed is mainly in the following three areas: geostrategic influence, science and technology, and ideology (social governance model). All three areas are related to Taiwan. In terms of geostrategic influence, the region where the US and China are competing most fiercely is the Asia–Pacific. If the Chinese mainland obtains the consent of the Taiwan society and the support of the regional countries to realize peaceful unification across the Taiwan Strait, China's influence in the Asia–Pacific region will surely exceed that of the US, which means that the United States loses its regional hegemony or primacy. There is a high degree of continuity in the science and technology policy of the US government, regardless of which party is in power. That is, it is determined to put brakes on China's development in the field of cutting-edge science and technology. Among them, chips are a core element in the US competition with China. The Biden and Trump administrations have put huge pressure on the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to invest and build factories in the United States, which shows that the US will not let the design and production of the most advanced chips remain in Taiwan. If the two sides across the Taiwan Strait are peacefully reunified, the US will lose control of the strategic resource of chips, which is unacceptable to the US strategic community.

In the field of ideology (social governance model), there is a view in the US that the Chinese mainland with its authoritarian system cannot unify with Taiwan with its democratic system. While President Trump may not be interested in 'promoting democracy' in other countries, there are many within his administration who 'support a democratic Taiwan and oppose the authoritarian China'. The US government needs to reassure China by clarifying that it has no intention to stop the mainland's efforts to promote peaceful unification across the Taiwan Strait.

Third, the United States should not support Taiwan independence. 'The US does not support Taiwan independence' is an important part of the US attempt to reassure China at the time when the US and the PRC recognized each other and established diplomatic relations in 1979. Currently the difference between US and the Chinese mainland's perceptions of 'Taiwan independence' is widening. The Chinese mainland considers Lai Ching-te to be a dangerous 'Taiwan independence' advocate, while Washington believes that, with Lai's 40 percent approval rating in the January 2024 election of Taiwan's leader, and with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) losing its majority in the Legislative Yuan, Lai does not have the credibility and capability to push for 'Taiwan independence'. Some people in Washington even think that the Chinese mainland takes the opportunity to label Lai 'Taiwan independence advocate' so as to increase the scale and frequency of military exercises in the Taiwan Strait and prepare for unification by force.

The United States worries about 'de jure Taiwan independence' or 'radical Taiwan independence'. It doesn't think the 'de-Sinicization' that Tsai Ing-wen promoted on the island during her eight years in power is a way to push for 'Taiwan independence'. Judging from the current situation on the island, Lai Ching-te continues to vigorously promote the 'normalization of Taiwan as an independent state' on the basis of Tsai Ing-wen's 'de-Sinicization'. He tries to change the result of the Legislative Yuan election through a mass recall campaign. He referred the Chinese mainland as a "foreign hostile force" in his March 13, 2025 speech, reinforcing the narrative of "resisting China & protecting Taiwan." He has been pushing for the construction of a 'national security' legal system in the Legislative Yuan by revision of ten laws, which include the Act Governing Relations Between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. As a result of the mass recall campaign, the Kuomintang (KMT) legislators will be stigmatized as Beijing's Trojan horses if they oppose the amendments of these bills. This is seen by the Chinese mainland as social mobilization to promote Taiwan independence on the island. If the process is not stopped as soon as possible, Taiwan society's perception that 'Chinese are foreigners' will be solidified, and public opinion on the two sides of the strait will be highly antagonistic. Since 2017, the Chinese mainland has been reminding the US of the danger of 'gradual Taiwan independence', but Washington has never taken it seriously, and now it is time to change this view. The US president or senior government officials should publicly state that "the United States does not support Taiwan independence," and issue a public warning to Lai Ching-te and the DPP against attempting to achieve the goal of 'Taiwan independence' by revising the ten 'national security' laws.

Reassurance from Taiwan's side

The Chinese mainland hopes that the Taiwan authorities will give the following assurances. First, DPP authorities should abandon the 'new two-State theory', which claims that the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are not subordinate to each other. The view of the Chinese mainland is that the Central Government of the PRC established on October 1, 1949 replaced the Government of the ROC as the sole legitimate government of the whole of China and the sole legitimate representative of China in the international community. From the perspective of international law, the succession triggered by this momentous event was a succession of governments within a State in which a new regime replaced the old, not a secession where one region became a State of its own. There is still only one China. China's status as a single subject of international law has not changed, nor have its sovereignty and territorial boundaries. During her second term, Tsai Ing-wen proposed that "ROC and PRC are not subordinate to each other," meaning that the sovereignty and territorial boundaries of the ROC and PRC are separate and do not overlap. The Chinese mainland calls this argument the 'new two-state theory' in contrast to Li Teng-hui's 'two-state theory' from 1999, in which the then leader of Taiwan said that the Taiwan authorities had positioned cross-strait relations as a "state-to-state relationship, or at least a special country-to-country relationship." The Lai Ching-te administration has inherited the 'new two-state theory', and both the old and new versions are different forms of 'Taiwan independence'.

Second, the DPP authorities should abandon the claim that UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 did not resolve the issue of Taiwan's representation in the United Nations. According to the DPP authorities, Resolution 2758, as adopted by the 26th United Nations General Assembly in 1971, resolved only the issue of China's representation, not that of Taiwan, on the grounds that the resolution not only made no mention of Taiwan, but

also failed to mention that Taiwan was a part of the PRC, and that China has sovereignty over Taiwan. The view of the Chinese mainland is that after its defeat in 1945, Japan returned Taiwan to China in accordance with the spirit and requirements of the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation. Since the ROC government was the central government of China at that time, it took over Taiwan from Japan on behalf of China, and Taiwan has since then been returned to China. In the following year, the Constitution of the ROC was promulgated in Nanjing, then the capital city of China, and more than ten 'National Assembly Delegates' from Taiwan participated in the 'constitution-making' and subsequent 'constitution-execution', making Taiwan constitutionally a part of the ROC's inherent territory. The succession of the PRC to the ROC on October 1, 1949, naturally included sovereignty over Taiwan as part of the inherent territory of the ROC. Therefore, long before Resolution 2758 was adopted, it was already a mainstream international consensus that Taiwan was a part of China, and Resolution 2758 resolved the question of who represents China's 'right of representation', which naturally did not include any specific reference to Taiwan.

The DPP authorities' promotion of the claim that "UNGA Resolution 2758 did not resolve the issue of Taiwan's representation" is a continuation of the 'Theory of the Undetermined Status of Taiwan' supported by the Taiwan independence forces, which believe that the San Francisco Peace Treaty signed between the Allied powers and Japan in 1951 is the legally binding treaty dealing with Taiwan's sovereignty. The theory says that in the San Francisco Treaty, Japan only indicated that it had renounced its sovereignty over Taiwan, but did not indicate that it would return Taiwan to China, therefore, the status and future of Taiwan are still not determined. In fact, the San Francisco Treaty was a part of the United States' strategic layout for the Cold War. The DPP authorities should acknowledge the '1992 Consensus' or freeze the 'Taiwan independence' clause in their party platform to lay the foundation for negotiations between the mainland and Taiwan on arrangements for Taiwan's participation in international organizations.

The DPP authorities should cease restricting exchanges between think tank researchers and academic scholars across the strait, as well as lift restrictions on educational, religious, entertainment, media, and cultural exchanges, allowing the people on both sides to genuinely reconnect and understand each other.

Third, the DPP authorities should stop the policy of decoupling economically and culturally from the Chinese mainland. Since the Tsai Ing-wen administration implemented the 'New Southbound Policy' and the US government promoted the policy of 'partial economic decoupling' from China, the trend of Taiwanese business leaving the mainland to invest in Southeast Asia has gained momentum. After Lai took office, the DPP authorities have prevented normal cross-strait people-to-people exchanges in the name of 'opposing China's united front work'. While labeling the Chinese mainland as "foreign hostile forces," Lai outlined 17 strategies to threaten the people in Taiwan who support cross-strait exchanges. The vice mayor of Shanghai announced that the city government would actively encourage Shanghai residents to visit Taiwan as tourists when he participated in the Taipei-Shanghai City Forum last December. So far, the DPP authorities have given no feedback. The head of the Education department in Taiwan publicly said that cross-strait exchanges for primary schools and middle schools should be avoided wherever possible. Scholars and experts who study cross-strait relations or international relations on both sides are almost banned from visiting the other side.

The lack of regular exchanges will easily lead to a high degree of confrontation between public opinions, misinterpretation and misjudgment of the other side's intentions and strategic planning, which would cause a sharp rise in the risk of unintended military friction. It's not only detrimental to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, but also extremely dangerous for the Asia-Pacific region and the world as a whole. The DPP authorities should cease restricting exchanges between think tank researchers and academic scholars across the strait, as well as lift restrictions on educational, religious, entertainment, media, and cultural exchanges, allowing the people on both sides to genuinely reconnect and understand each other.

Reassurance from the Chinese Mainland side

The international community and Taiwan are highly concerned by a perceived need to be reassured by the Chinese mainland that it will not use force to obtain national unification. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, after Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the Chinese mainland, on one hand, strengthened its deterrence against the 'Taiwan independence forces' on the island and against any international interference with China's military exercises. On the other hand, Beijing released the white paper "The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era" on August 10, 2022 to reassure Taiwan by declaring that the "policy of peaceful reunification remains unchanged." Such reassurance is particularly important in the context of widespread external concerns about the possibility of the Chinese mainland resorting to military means for reunification. The author of this paper believes that Chinese officials can more regularly restate the mainland's policy towards Taiwan to the outside world at various levels, emphasizing that "peaceful reunification is the best way to achieve cross-strait reunification" and that they are "committed to promoting cross-strait economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation, and deepening integration and development in various fields across the strait." [3]

China should reiterate its commitment to a new major country relationship, oppose 'strategic competition', and reject 'camp-based' confrontation in the Asia-Pacific.

Besides emphasizing the unchanging peaceful reunification policy, China can reassure the international community by avoiding 'great power strategic competition' with the US. Since Trump's first term, China has rejected this definition, focusing instead on responsibly managing competition. Trump's second term continues this strategy, with policies on tariffs and tech export controls. China should reiterate its commitment to a new major country relationship, oppose 'strategic competition', and reject 'camp-based' confrontation in the Asia-Pacific.

The second is to conduct authorized 'Track II' dialogues with scholars and former officials from the DPP. This is neither the 'Red-Green dialogue' often mentioned by the DPP and the green camp media nor an adjustment or change in the mainland's policy towards Taiwan. The purpose is to show Taiwan and the international community that the Taiwan question is fundamentally a political issue. In the situation where the DPP authorities do not accept the One China principle and the '1992 Consensus', and cannot propose a positioning of cross-strait political relations that the mainland can accept, the mainland still hopes to maintain cross-strait communication in the form of 'Track II' dialogues to prevent misreading and misjudgment, and to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. If the Mayor of Kaohsiung can publicly state that "people on both sides of the strait belong to the Chinese nation," the mainland can consider establishing the Xiamen-Kaohsiung Forum to promote exchanges between cities across the strait.

It is crucial for maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait that the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and the United States seek to reassure each other. For the mainland, in this process, whether the Taiwan authorities and the US government have the ability and willingness to receive and respond to the Chinese mainland's reassurance measures is another important and complex issue, which needs to be thoroughly discussed

[3] Xi Jinping, Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 25, 2022. http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202210/25/content_WS6357df20c6d0a757729e1bfc.html



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