

*The U.S. Global Strategy and Its Taiwan Policy**

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Abstract

Scholars from different disciplines have been drawn to cross-Strait relations since Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration in 2016. This article looks at U.S. Taiwan policy from the perspective of the world order, and argues that the world order determines U.S. Taiwan policy. Until recently, Taiwan could always provide what the United States needed in shaping and reshaping the world order. However, along with the rise of the Chinese mainland and the transformation of the world order, Taiwan lost its values in serving America's best strategic interests. Based on examining the current world order, this article argues that it is possible that the United States will abandon Taiwan eventually.

Since Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration in 2016, cross-Strait relations have swiftly deteriorated, and uncertainties have begun to haunt the Taiwan Strait again. Scholars have closely observed the DPP's internal and external policies, Beijing's responses and possible initiatives, and the U.S. possible role in the cross-Strait relations. This article examines the key moves the United States made in handling the cross-Strait relations and argues that the world order is key to determining the U.S. Taiwan policy.

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I explore U.S. vital Taiwan policy outputs under different world orders and examine the reliability of U.S. commitment to Taiwan through the lens of alliance theory. Although Taiwan is not a formal ally of the United States, it enjoys a *de facto* alliance status owing to the 1954 Mutual Defence Treaty (MDT) and the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act.¹ The theorization of alliance is very complex and contested, and the majority of the literature points in one direction: the formation, duration, and diffusion of alliance are driven by common interests, power relations, and identity (including ideology).² The focus of this article is Washington's commitment to Taipei. Hence, the theoretical foundation here is Glenn Snyder's theory on security dilemmas after alignments are formed. Snyder argues that there are two principal dilemmas facing alliance members: "abandonment" and "entrapment."³ The former might take various forms and the essence is the expectations of support are lost or weakened. The latter then means "being dragged into a conflict over an ally's interests that one does not share, or shares only partially."⁴ The analysis of American shifting commitment to Taiwan during different historical periods will demonstrate that the United States underwent a shift in its Taiwan policy at every turn of world order transformation; and the *de facto* alliance between Washington and Taipei has been guided by American interests only. Taiwan is losing its advantage in serving American best strategic interests, and the United States will eventually opt for abandonment.

1. The Cold War Order and the Taiwan Issue

Before we proceed to look at the cross-Strait relations, it worth clarifying the terminology of "world order." The world order is notoriously slippery, and it could mean very many different things and could be understood from various perspectives. In this article, I define it from an analytical angle, and take it as "the arrangement of power and authority that provides the framework for the conduct of diplomacy and world politics on a global scale";⁵ and "a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values."⁶ Hence, this article looks at the generic structure that shapes and limits behaviors of states and other political entities. In a similar vein, this article agrees with the conventional wisdom that since the end of World War II (WWII), the United States has played a leadership role in building and consolidating the liberal world order, which is beneficial to the

United States. As Brands neatly put it, the United States sought “to bring all the world’s major powers into a system in which they would be satisfied—and yet the US and its values would still reign supreme.”⁷

The Taiwan issue originates from the post-WWII world order. There is little doubt that Taiwan served as an important pioneer of American anticommunist campaign. The outbreak of the Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) went in parallel with the Cold War and the United States necessarily sided with its WWII ally, the KMT. Hence Washington came to defend Taiwan from its possible fall into communist hands. Taipei’s alliance with Washington blocked the CCP’s potential military takeover of Taiwan and the offshore islands and facilitated the KMT’s rule in Taiwan. It must be added though that American support for the KMT did not happen without problems and challenges. It was Taiwan’s function as a link in the chain of regional containment of the spread of communism that pushed the American leadership to back the KMT. Below, I detail how the bipolar world order shaped U.S. Taiwan policy.

The seed of communist ideological challenges posed to Western governments was actually planted even before the outbreak of WWI. However, it was during and immediately after WWII that the communist ideology quickly expanded along with the expansion of the Soviet Union. The post-WWII world quickly formed a bipolar order led by the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. Conventional European powers such as the United Kingdom and France were severely weakened by two world wars, particularly in relative terms. In order to provide a counterweight to an expansive Soviet power, the United States, rising as a new hegemon through two world wars, stepped forward to fill the vacuum left by a waning British Empire and a collapsing European order.⁸ Western alliance was formed and two pillar strategies were adopted by the United States. One of them was realist derived; and the other one was to promote the liberal economic order, loaded with Western democratic values. The former was organized around key concepts such as containment, deterrence, and the maintenance of the global balance of power. The aim was to deny the Soviet Union the ability to expand its sphere of influence in the world. As dominant and powerful as the United States was, its capacity to distribute resources worldwide was limited. It relied on its Western allies such as Britain and France to contain the Soviet Union’s expansion in Europe, while it directly involves

itself in East Asian and South East Asian affairs, and setting up military bases in those regions.

Almost immediately after WWII, the full-scale Chinese Civil War broke out. The United States initially did not want to continuously involve itself with the Chinese Civil War beyond 1949. The White House was advised several times by the Joint Chiefs that Taiwan was not important enough to warrant the use of scarce military resources and that the KMT's miserable failure in the mainland was "not due to military capacity, but the inner flaws of the KMT and the zero-confidence people had in the government."⁹ The United States looked to replace Chiang, but all attempts failed.¹⁰ Truman decided that the United States would not become involved in the Chinese Civil War and would let Taiwan fall. Meanwhile, the United States kept open the option to "cultivate a relationship" with potential native leaders on the island with a view "at some future date to being able to make use of autonomous movements should it appear to be in the US national interests to do so."¹¹

However, the outbreak of the Korean War transformed the strategic picture in East Asia and changed the U.S. wait-and-see attitude. Taiwan gradually became a link in the chain of regional containment of the spread of communism. The KMT government was the only one in Asia that could at least show resistance to the communist expansion.¹² And it was "the largest, active, committed, military, anti-Communist force in east Asia, its capacity to resist is of the gravest concern to all of the still free world".¹³

The United States then announced its support for the KMT government, and began to provide military and economic aid to Taipei.¹⁴ The Chinese Civil War was a microcosm of the Cold War. The CCP-KMT confrontation across the Taiwan Strait followed the same line until the China-Soviet split. Taiwan served as an anticommunism frontier before the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War period, the U.S. strategy in Asia was premised on the likelihood of war with "Red China," and the United States even deployed forward forces and bases in Taiwan. The MDT was signed in 1954. A *de facto* alliance was formed. The strategy of the United States was to contain the CCP from retaking Taiwan while restraining the KMT's effort to counterattack the mainland.

Meanwhile, the United States also challenged Taiwan's legal status. Hara detailed how, with careful calculations and manipulations of the United States, the ownership and legal status of Okinawa, Taiwan, and

the Diaoyu Islands evolved after WWII.¹⁵ It is common knowledge that the Cairo Declaration of 1943 specifically referred to Taiwan as territory “restored” to China. As previously mentioned, the Korean War drastically changed the strategic landscape of East Asia. The possible fall of the KMT worried Truman because Taiwan became strategically too significant to give up. The United States started to seek a UN trusteeship for Taiwan. The wartime Allies’ agreements and the earlier treaty drafts that confirmed the return of Taiwan to China did not seem to matter to the United States. From the first draft of the Japanese Peace Treaty in 1950, “China,” as the country to receive Taiwan, curiously disappeared from the U.S. documentation.¹⁶ Later on, Taiwan was relocated as an “unresolved problem” in the San Francisco Peace Treaty.¹⁷ Dulles told Chinese diplomats in October 1950 that Taiwan “represents a problem which should be settled by international agreement that we were able to protect Formosa with the Seventh Fleet.”¹⁸ A memorandum from Washington to Taipei wrote that “the decision to send the 7th fleet is not based on the ROC’s invitation, rather, it considers Taiwan Strait as ‘undecided sea territory’ and its future is subject to the peace treaty [it was later signed as the San Francisco Peace Treaty] with Japan.”¹⁹ Neither Beijing nor Taipei was invited to the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951, and neither was a party to the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Neither Taipei nor Beijing has since recognized the treaty or the claims concerning Taiwan and the offshore islands.

Still, Truman considered Chinese nationalism as a more powerful force than communist ideology, and believed that a PRC-Soviet split would come sooner if the United States did not try to deny Taiwan to China.²⁰ In the end, Beijing’s policy of “leaning to one side” toward the Soviet Union, and the treaty signed between Beijing and Moscow on 14 February 1950, pressured Washington to resume aid to Taipei and the “trusteeship” plan never came to fruition.²¹ However, the Soviet-China split became reality later, as Truman envisioned. The split started from the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 in which Khrushchev made a “secret speech” and denounced Stalin. The CCP interpreted the speech as betraying communist ideology. From 1960, the alliance broke down and the Soviet Union withdrew its experts from China and terminated the established economic agreements it had signed with China. It also deployed one million soldiers along the China-Soviet and China-Mongolian Republic borders. And eventually, military clashes took place in Zhenbaodao in 1969.

As the China-Soviet alliance broke down, the United States used the opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the PRC, although Zhou Enlai had in fact offered to hold negotiations with the United States as early as April 1955. Washington established a diplomatic relationship with Beijing in 1979 and cut all official ties with Taipei. The 1954 MDT was terminated on 31 December 1979, and the U.S. army later withdrew from Taiwan. Meanwhile, the United States enacted the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) on 10 April. It also serves as the legal basis for the Taiwan policy of the United States, including arms sales. Hence, Taipei was partially abandoned.

Clearly, Washington's decisions to abandon or back up the KMT were not driven by ideology or by international agreements. Rather, it was dominantly driven by American national interests. As a global power, its national interests were necessarily associated with the world order. The decisions on Taiwan's ownership, and the later Washington-Beijing rapprochement were all outcomes of U.S. global strategic calculations. Taiwan as a Cold War frontier was kept under the U.S. security protection to contain the expansion of communism in Asia. Looking through Snyder's conceptualization of alliance dilemma, the establishment of diplomatic relationship between Washington and Beijing in 1979 indicates that U.S. commitment to Taiwan was weakened, but not completely abandoned. As Richard Bush pointed out in his recent open letter to President Trump, the United States helps Taiwan to "ensure its security vis-à-vis a government that we do recognize."²² Taiwan still served as an important member of the U.S. anticommunism club until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

2. Post-Cold War and American Value-Driven Taiwan Policy

The Cold War was over following Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush's Malta summit meeting in December 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union on 26 December 1991. Vittorio Emanuele Parsi argues that the end of the Cold War means the world order shifts from a *pace d'equilibrio* ("peace of equilibrium") to a *pace egemonica* ("hegemonic peace").²³ The disparities of power are so great that counterbalancing by the other great powers is impossible. Hence, the world stepped into a unipolar system, at least a unipolar moment.²⁴ There has not been a hegemonic transition as such; the United States finds itself in a position where it has to renegotiate and reconstruct its own world order.

We may recall that the United States adopted two grand strategies to counterbalance the Soviets: containment of communist influence from both security and ideology perspectives. After the Cold War ended, the security pressure on the capitalist camp released instantly, and the focus was on further expansion of the liberal democratic values via the vehicle of economic globalization. Shih and Huang also find that the United States often seeks to extend the American value system while conducting foreign policies.²⁵ For the United States, the strategic importance of the Chinese mainland significantly decreased. China replaced the Soviet Union and became the biggest communist state. As a result of this development, the U.S. Taiwan policy was redirected.

Taiwanese society was also changing remarkably while the world order was under transformation. The diplomatic breakup from Washington had a drastic impact on Taipei's domestic politics since the public's confidence in the KMT collapsed. In addition, Taipei also faced massive pressure from emerging Taiwanese independence movements and the PRC's frequent "united front" strategies. The KMT then pushed a democratic transition throughout the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, Taiwan had gone through and successfully completed democratization. Democratization was the survival strategy for the KMT when the legitimacy and plausibility of counterattacking the mainland had faded away. Taipei's expectation that the international community would allow Taiwan to play on the international stage was based on "the significance, values and functions that ROC on Taiwan represented."²⁶ The successful political transformation again lifted Taiwan in a position to fit what the United States was looking for in consolidating the unipolar order.

Taipei's emphasis on democratic values undoubtedly had an impact on Washington-Beijing relationship since human rights became a U.S. priority in the post-Cold War U.S.-China relations, particularly after the Tiananmen Incident. Under the Clinton administration, the United States reviewed its Taiwan policy from 1993 and drew the conclusion that the island had made remarkable political and economic progress and that it was wrong to maintain the same stance toward Taipei that had been held since 1979. There was a voice for supporting "the other China"—if U.S. interests were well served by supporting democracy and human rights abroad, as most Americans believed, then such support must entail treating Taipei and its leaders with respect and dignity.²⁷ Washington held a review on 27 September 1994, which stated that "recognizing Taiwan's important role in transnational issues, we will support its membership in

organizations where statehood is not a prerequisite, and we will support opportunities for Taiwan's voice to be heard in organizations where its membership is not possible."²⁸ Under pressure from Congress and public opinion, and taking the forthcoming 1996 presidential election into consideration, Clinton even agreed to issue a visa to Lee Teng-hui for a visit to his alma mater, Cornell University, on 22 May 1995.

On the other hand, China's rapid economic growth since 1979 has transformed it into a major economic power—with its average annual real gross domestic product growing by 9.8 percent and the size of the economy in real terms increasing 14-fold.²⁹ The handover of Hong Kong by the United Kingdom in 1997 and of Macau by Portugal in 1999 also significantly contributed to the PRC's economic strength. There was a huge power disparity between Beijing and Washington. However, a rising China with the world's largest population and impressive economic achievement were still changing the nature of the U.S.-China relationship. The relationship with Beijing has become too complex for the United States to give Taipei more leeway.

By the same token, the United States did not want to push China into an alliance with the Russians. Starting in the early 1980s, Soviet and Chinese leaders slowly began to construct a new relationship. China-Soviet ties expanded in many areas after the 1989 Deng-Gorbachev meeting.³⁰ The normalization of the China-Soviet relationship created a delicate situation for the United States and other Western countries. Even when the Tiananmen Incident took place in 1989 and human rights became an issue in the PRC-U.S. relationship, the possibility of an improving relationship between China and the Soviet Union still made it "difficult for the Bush administration to condemn the actions of the Chinese leadership."³¹ The Tiananmen Incident also convinced the Bush administration that cultivating good relations with Beijing's military leaders had become more important than ever. The Bush administration sent National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger on a secret mission to Beijing to deliver the message that "the recent event" (the Tiananmen Incident) made the broader relationship more difficult to manage in the United States, but the president "wants to manage short-term events in a way that will best assure a healthy relationship over time."³²

The U.S. Taiwan policy also reflects how the United States reidentifies its strategic interests while the world order was shifted. Lee's visit to the United States needs to be understood together with the collapse of the

Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar system. The structural changes in international society suggest that the United States was in the position to renegotiate its relationship with other key players. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was not possible for any other state to challenge the military and political superiority of the United States. The Soviet threats were fading away; the expansion of the liberal order, with its key values of democracy, became a main global strategy of the United States. As Brands argues, the strategic goal of the United States was to bring all the world's major powers into a system which they do not disrupt, yet the United States and its values would remain supreme.³³ Under the circumstances, Taiwan's successful democratic transition exactly maps onto the U.S. global agenda. Hence, Lee Teng-hui's high-profile visit to Cornell took place.

Taipei served the U.S. global strategic interests very well and there was no danger of abandonment. Taipei enjoyed a steady de facto alliance status and much more. Lee's visit proved that power disparity between the United States and the Chinese mainland also ensured the United States a convenient position to stimulate China's sensitivities. The United States did not hesitate to give a tough time to China, and human rights and democracy haunted the Chinese mainland government for the whole time under the Clinton terms. It is fairly safe to say that it was the United States-dominant unilateral world order and its very need to promote democratic values that determined Washington's Taiwan policy.

Not long after the United States was celebrating its unilateral moment, new challenges turned up. The September 11 attacks changed the world's strategic landscape. The attacks signified the coming of a new era: a different type of political actor, individuals, started to challenge nation-states. War has been privatized. The world order again is under transformation. Effectively, the American unipolar moment ended. Taiwan's role again changed in the U.S. strategic landscape.

3. War on Terror and a “Trouble-Making” Taiwan

During George W. Bush's presidential election campaign, he called China a “strategic competitor.” In an interview with ABC's *Good Morning America* program in 2001, Bush pledged that “if Taiwan were attacked by the PRC, the US has an obligation to use whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself.” In April 2001, Bush also successfully defended his decision to sell Taiwan 4 Kidd-class destroyers, 12 P-3C Orion antisubmarine aircraft, and 8 diesel submarines in spite of facing protests from

the PRC.³⁴ Taiwan received an unprecedented level of political and military support from Bush.

However, after the terrorist attack on the United States in 2001, the whole picture changed. Beijing promptly offered its support for the “war on terror,” and the Bush administration regarded China as a partner. Opportunities arose to allow a move to greater levels of cooperation between Beijing and Washington. Because of the huge demand for the PRC’s cooperation and aid in fighting terrorism, particularly in information collection, Bush repositioned the PRC from a “strategic competitor” to a “constructive partner.”³⁵ Bush moderated his hard-line position on Beijing, and his tone was further softened when he moved from “a failure to support” to “direct opposition to” any unilateral action that affected the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.³⁶ U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell succinctly summed up the corresponding change in attitude of the Bush administration toward China, commenting that the China–United States relations in 2003 were at their best since U.S. president Nixon’s opening gestures toward China in 1972.³⁷ The U.S. Taiwan policy reflected this change.

Only one month after September 11, the APEC meeting in Shanghai became a flashpoint across the Taiwan Strait. Beijing and Taipei could not agree on a candidate for the delegate of Chinese Taipei. The DPP government decided not to attend the conference. The leaders of the United States, Russia, and the PRC all had agendas separate from the APEC’s own agenda: Washington needed Beijing’s cooperation and support for its antiterror war; Moscow needed Beijing’s support to fight against Chechnya’s independence movements; and Beijing needed Moscow and Washington to classify Xinjiang’s independence activities as terrorist attacks.³⁸ Taiwan’s absence did not draw any attention in the APEC—it “did not even generate any ripples,” in Wang’s words.³⁹ At the Bush–Jiang summit, which was held on 19 October, there was no mention of Taiwan’s absence at all, although a wide range of other issues were discussed. Douglas Paal said in an interview, “Bush did not discuss the issue of Taiwan at length with Jiang because the Shanghai summit of the APEC forum is not the appropriate place or time to discuss the matter.”⁴⁰ However, according to Swaine, Chen Shui-bian was inexperienced and misjudged the situation—he underestimated the impacts of these changes on Taiwan and still undertook actions apparently intended to achieve Taiwan’s permanent separation from the Chinese mainland, which was not acceptable to the United States since

this might provoke a crisis across the strait, while the U.S. interest was in preventing any unilateral shifts in the status quo.⁴¹ Bush told the Taiwanese representative Lee Yuan-tsu at the APEC conference in Mexico in 2002 that the United States did not appreciate Chen Shui-bian's provocative actions, and it is said that Lee was shocked by the emotion with which Bush conveyed his views.⁴²

It happened more than once that the United States strongly opposed Taiwan to make moves that would potentially offend the mainland. Taipei's strategy to push forward its gradual independence agenda under the name of democracy was blocked repeatedly. Under conditions of economic decline, political confusion, and diplomatic dilemmas, there was not much left apart from identity politics as Chen's survival strategy for the 2004 election. The DPP's 2004 election banners read "separate sovereign states on each side of the strait," and the party even proposed a referendum and new constitution to prove the point that Taiwan was a sovereign state. Along with the presidential election in spring 2004, Taiwan was scheduled to hold a "defense referendum."⁴³ According to the DPP government, a referendum was the best way to practice and deepen Taiwan's democracy, but it met vigorous opposition from the United States. Washington warned Taipei many times that it did not support either side unilaterally changing the status quo and that Taiwan did not have a blank check from the United States.

The United States delivered some serious warnings to Taiwan over Chen Shui-bian's attempt to hold a referendum, and said that Taiwan had betrayed the United States and the most supportive president ever, Bush. However, when Taiwan asserted that the referendum was intended to deepen Taiwan's democracy and had nothing to do with unification/independence, the United States described the explanation as an insult to the intelligence of Washington.⁴⁴ The U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in his regular news briefing on 1 December 2004, "[W]e would be opposed to any referenda that would change Taiwan's status or move towards independence."⁴⁵ This was the first time that the United States publicly stated that it opposed any possible referenda moving toward independence. The United States demonstrated a similar line of arguments when Chen Shui-bian initiated to join the UN under the name of Taiwan. According to Swaine, from the moment the DPP became the ruling party in 2000, the relationship between Taipei and Washington almost immediately began to deteriorate, and it steadily worsened over time.⁴⁶ The deteriorating relationship between Washington

and Taipei put the long-lasting support from the United States into question and would consequently impact the extent to which the DPP could go in redefining Taiwan's relationship with the mainland. By the end of Chen Shui-bian's term in office, Washington regarded Chen as "extremely untrustworthy,"⁴⁷ and his administration as "amateurish" and "trouble-making."⁴⁸

After all, an independent Taiwan was not compatible with the interests of other states, even for the United States. Supporting Taiwanese independence would trap Washington into inflaming relations with the PRC and the cost was simply too high. The Taiwan issue is never about Taiwan itself, and one cannot even simplify it to China-U.S. relationship. As a big and dominant power, the United States has a grander agenda than just the bilateral relationship to consider when it comes to Taiwan. Certainly, one could not argue that democratic values were not cherished by the United States. After all, the U.S. self-justifications for its invasion of the Middle East and interventions in other areas were often revolving around democratic values. As Shih and Huang argued, the United States always pushed China to accept "universal values" while engaging with China.⁴⁹ However, the potential trouble that Chen could have brought would not serve the U.S. global strategy the best. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, even for a dominant power such as the United States, distribution of national power at different lines is impossible. While the U.S. military force was operating in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the least the United States needed was an unstable Taiwan Strait. In contrast to the previous period, democratic values had to give way to more immediate threats, namely, terrorist attacks. Hence, the *de facto* alliance was insignificant when U.S. national interests were in question.

Plus, the Chinese mainland is becoming a bigger and bigger player in international society. In fact, the economic growth of the mainland has brought it to the position of the second largest economic body, with a GDP over \$12 trillion in 2017, and it is predicted to overtake the United States in 2050. The U.S.-China relationship has been transformed into one of great powers, and it is characterized by complexity. This development, together with the emergence of other unconventional security issues, has massive repercussions on the world order. The United States needs China's cooperation on the Korean Peninsula issue, antiterror wars, and other international issues. The Beijing-Washington relationship has become complex and high level of interdependency locked both tightly into the international system. To put it simply, U.S. commitment

to Taiwan's security is potentially too costly. It is extremely hard to imagine that the United States would sacrifice its relationship with the Chinese mainland and unconditionally back Taiwan's demands. Effectively, Taiwan is not able to provide the type of support to fit the best interests of the United States at this day and age. It is clear that political identity is not the key in determining the strength of an alliance. The same as the Washington-Beijing rapprochement, when strategic interest clashes with ideology, the former won over the latter.

The above analysis demonstrates that the *de facto* alliance between Washington and Taipei confirms Carl von Clausewitz's famous assertion: "in alliances, it lies in the unity formed by common interests."⁵⁰ More specifically, the United States would show a strong commitment when Taiwan serves to realize American global strategy; and Washington would lean away from its commitment to Taiwan when the latter is not in a position to fulfil U.S. strategic objects. Applying this logic, the following section analyzes why the new world order will bring the United States to "say goodbye to Taiwan," to use Mearsheimer's words.⁵¹

4. The Future World Order and U.S. Taiwan Policy

It is widely acknowledged that strategic ambiguity lies at the core of U.S. policies on the Taiwan issue. The strategic ambiguity is generally considered as a strategy of "dual deterrence": no use of nonpeaceful means from the mainland, and no proclamation of independence from Taiwan. Scholars like Goldstein also warned that the ambivalent strategy contains the seeds of danger.⁵² The American strategic ambiguity aiming at playing a balancer role, which was rooted in the Cold War structure, is not a fit policy anymore. Indeed, some American observers already initiated different proposals on how to retreat from the long-lasting commitment.⁵³ The suggestions have been mixed, but the message is clear: China's rise as a superpower is inevitable, and the Taiwan Strait is too muddled a water for the United States to get directly dragged into.⁵⁴ However, the proposals often go with suggestions of upgrading Taiwan's military capacity and further strengthening of U.S. assistance to Taiwan.⁵⁵ Either way, the current American Taiwan policy is in question. I will unpack this point from the perspective of future world order.

As mentioned above, the current world order is shaped by the post-WWII order, with Europe and the Asia-Pacific as two important regions. Under the U.S.-led liberal order, economic globalization has brought a

high level of integration and interdependency between and among states. By the same token, it has also brought many unconventional challenges, such as terrorist attacks, mass migrations, financial crisis, heavy pollution, and other global issues, and they are calling for global levels of cooperation and compromises. In response to this development, there had been resistance and protests in parts of the world. While the two pillar regions, namely Europe and the Asia-Pacific, have largely embraced globalization, 2016 marked a different year, with Brexit in the United Kingdom, the rise of right-wing politics in continental Europe, and Trump's electoral victory in the United States. Many cannot help but ask: is the liberal order heading to its end? There is no sure answer to it; nevertheless the world order is in transformation.⁵⁶ No matter what is in stock, the U.S. Taiwan policy has no escape but to be considered under the new world order.

There have been many discussions about the world order since the September 11 attacks. Acharya argues that globalization has locked states like the United States and China into the system, and it is too costly for everyone to break it. He expects that a multiplex world will emerge. A multiplex system suggests a world order under which the United States will still be a dominion while power diffusion to emerging powers such as the BRICs and international institutions will be taking place. Hence, it is a world where China will be a strong power but not as close to challenge the U.S. hegemonic position.⁵⁷ Hurrell is in the same league. Via looking at the case of Brazil, he proposes that the new world order has to take into account the emerging powers.⁵⁸ Sakwa also expected a more plural world system with regional blocs playing a more significant role.⁵⁹ From this perspective, a functional new world order looks a lot like the current order, but it will come with a weakened United States in relative terms because the BRICs are developing quickly. For a weakened United States, the cost of entrapment to confront the Chinese mainland is too high—higher than any previous period. Earlier discussions tell us that the strength of the Washington-Taipei *de facto* alliance is determined by U.S. strategic interests. Under this scenario, strengthening its commitment to Taiwan will not serve U.S. strategic interests.

a. The Death of a Multiplex Order?

American scholarship, declinists and their critics included, universally opts the U.S. preeminence as necessary for international stability and

recommends steps to the U.S. revival and restitution.⁶⁰ Among the huge amount of work that has been done, China's role is arguably the most topical perspective.

If we closely observe American foreign relations, it is not too difficult to conclude that for the United States, the process of renegotiating its relationship with other states is also a process of counterbalancing any potential challengers, China included. The rise of China has led the United States to believe that "the strategic leadership in the region, the Asian Pacific, is more in question than at any time since the Vietnam conflict, and arguably since the end of the WWII."⁶¹ If we look back to the Obama era, the U.S. strategic design was to gradually retreat from the Middle East and pivot back to the Asia-Pacific region, due to its potential fear that the United States would be marginalized in the region. Under Obama, the centerpiece of the U.S. rebalancing also included lifting strategic status of Southeast Asian countries, heavy involvement in the South China Sea, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Taipei was actively seeking membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was considered as a way of cutting back its massive economic dependency on the mainland. The TPP was primarily strategic, although many Chinese observers take it as a U.S. device to contain China's rise.⁶² Washington was rather ambiguous about Taipei's potential role in its new strategic design.

Trump marks a different style of leadership from his predecessor. He campaigned on an "America first" slogan, targeting fairer trade deals, less foreign intervention, and stronger borders. Trump takes that globalization has hurt American citizens, and much of his attention has been drawn to American domestic politics and economic revival in particular. Trump scrapped the TPP on his first day in office and made changes in other issues such as the Paris Agreement and travel ban. In some cases, he reversed Obama's signature achievements. Some argue that this signals the United States is turning away from globalization,⁶³ or America is not interested in the post-WWII order anymore. At 2018 Davos in January, Trump's adviser Anthony Scaramucci actually said that the post-WWII world order is no longer suitable for the current world.⁶⁴ Trump's foreign policy is characterized by unpredictability and incoherence.⁶⁵ Ironically, Trump's foreign policy philosophy proved only one thing: the United States is not going to share its power or govern the world together with other powers and international institutions. To put it simply, the vision of a multiplex world is not going to take shape under Trump. If Trump's

successors inherit his ideology in the next few decades, then the United States will retreat from expanding the liberal order and we will enter into a classic power competition phase. If the liberal forces bounce back, then we will enter into the multiplex world order, which we discussed earlier. We will proceed with the first scenario here.

Indeed, many do not agree with Achaya's "multiplex world" prediction, particularly after Brexit and Trump's presidency. They envisage that neoliberalism will further retreat and Western focused globalization is receding.⁶⁶ Brands argues that the America's new world order is dead. So is the age of integration.⁶⁷

The rising of populism seems to send the signal that modern politics would bounce back to counterbalance globalization. Consequently, nation-states will still be the major machinery driving international relations. According to Godement, *realpolitik* is reemerging, and "hard power attributes will increase in value."⁶⁸ In fact, back in 2014, Mearsheimer already predicted the return of great power politics in full force.⁶⁹ However, this does not suggest an immediate end of globalization or the end of the U.S. global intervention. After all, since before the outbreak of WWI, the United States has been determined to be the world leader; and Wilson designed and worked very hard to achieve a "peace without victory" for WWI to weaken all the European powers.⁷⁰ Trump's recent moves in Afghanistan and his constant comments on North Korea confirm that the United States still holds a huge strategic interest in leading and directing the world order, and it has no intention to retreat from the world stage. However, whether the United States still holds both relative and absolute capacities to dominate is a different issue.

There is no doubt that the United States is still the leading power in the contemporary world, and other states are not even close to compete with the United States in military and economy strengths in a near future. However, this does not mean that the United States has the necessary capacity to bring back the unipolar moment. As widely discussed, the United States is declining in relative terms. Each of the emerging powers, namely, the BRICs or conventional European powers, do not have the capacity to balance or challenge the United States, but the power disparities are narrowing and any two of them could cause big headaches for the United States. He Yafei, former vice-minister of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commented that global governance is undergoing a historical process of transforming from "Western governance" to "co-governance by East and West."⁷¹ It is hard to visualize what He's

“co-governance” looks like at this stage, but it is not too difficult to see a world where the emerging powers, China included, will have a bigger say regarding their core interests. This in turn connects to the much debated topic: what role China plays in the future world order. We have heard enough of the revisionist arguments, which drew the “China threat” conclusion. Many American theorists, such as Nye and Mearsheimer, are keen followers of this line of arguments.⁷² Meanwhile, there are also scholars such as Ikenberry who have faith in China and its determination to consolidate the current order.⁷³ It is beyond the scope of this article to engage with these long-lasting debates, and I will just map out the possible scenarios in the China-U.S. relationship to demonstrate that the United States will abandon Taiwan eventually.

b. China and the New World Order

The Taiwan issue and the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific are still colonial legacies. China is still at the stage of recovering sovereign territory and healing the colonial scars. Meanwhile, the United States has 766 bases in 77 countries, and concerns about how to sustain its worldwide neoimperialist presence.⁷⁴ The “China fear” is far from convincing, and it is nothing but American imperialism rhetoric. There are too many steps and stages to walk through before China is on an equal footing with the United States.

Power transition between Britain and the United States, arguably the only peaceful power transition in human history, well demonstrates that the rising power needs to hold not only relative but also absolute superiority in all aspects, that is, politically/morally, economically, and militarily.⁷⁵ WWI left a war-torn Europe, and the Versailles system also planted the seeds of confrontations in Europe. Germany was punished too heavily to survive, which soon led to WWII. Traditional European power such as Britain and France were burdened heavily by war loans from American banks such as JP Morgan.⁷⁶ Moreover, leftist politics were changing the political landscapes across the world, which had a huge impact on Britain. Ireland called for independence; India sought for more autonomy; Muslims requested an independent state from the Hindis; the Labour Party even won the general election in 1923.⁷⁷ While all this was going on, Britain, as the existing hegemon, simply did not have the capacity to prevent the American takeover. In fact, according to Tooze, America was the first world dominion in the real sense.⁷⁸ Mead also notes

that the American share of the world's GDP, and its military advantage is much greater than anything Britain enjoyed.⁷⁹ Ringmar also echoes this finding and argues that the British Empire formed largely on trade, and the state itself was not even strong.⁸⁰ Moreover, some key political figures in Britain are strong supporters of Atlanticism due to the historical links between the United States and Britain, and they had no intention to wage a preventive war against America.⁸¹ Hence, Britain showed complete indifference to Germany's "Germany-Anglo alliance" initiative to stop sinking into "colonies of the United States." Hence, the United States was not only a rising power, but enjoyed a rise without real challenges or opposition from the existing power, the United Kingdom. During and after WWI, both strong powers Britain and France had no choice but to willingly submit themselves to the United States might because they desperately needed financial aid and loans from the United States. If we redirect our attention back to the current world, it is pretty easy to see that China does not have any of the advantages which the United States enjoyed as a rising power. Fundamentally, for the United States, there is no danger of being replaced by China as a hegemon, or even being challenged as a leading power. China in no way has the capacity to overtake the United States or to threaten the United States. What the United States fears is potential global power redistribution. To put it in another way—it is about whether the American sphere of influences will be challenged. The United States has indeed stepped into a stage where it might need to take into account of other states' core interests.

As aforementioned, globalization has changed the nature of world politics. All nation-states face the same enemies. The United States and China have potential common threats and the United States needs China's cooperation for managing the Korean peninsula and the Asia-pacific region. Guaranteed American national interests demand basic protection of China's core interests. As mentioned before, when it comes to the Taiwan issue, China enjoys an advantage if we use the concept of balance of interests to look at this problem. The Chinese government repeated claims that Taiwan is considered as part of its core interests; and the Anti-Secession Law legalized the conditions for using nonpeaceful means to prevent Taiwan's *de jure* independence. Under the condition, the security dilemma of entrapment could become reality, if Washington were to fulfil its duty of as a *de facto* ally. Douglas Paal warned, the potential cost and price the United States would have to pay is "difficult to predict or control" in strengthening the security tie between

Washington and Taipei.⁸² China does not have the capacity to challenge the U.S. supremacy, but it does have the capacity to prevent the United States from treading on issues concerning its core interests. After all, it is a significant regional power. As Acharya argued, emerging powers will be playing a dominant role in their respective regions while socializing the United States in the era of a declining American world order. Because an independent Taiwan is not acceptable to China, Taiwan's efforts to seek independence are separating it from the strategic interests of the United States.⁸³ Taiwan is not able to serve the U.S. best strategic interests anymore, and the Taiwan issue would become a big burden for Washington if it involved in direct military clashes across the Taiwan Strait.

Moreover, the United States needs to work with China to protect American interests in the region more than ever. If China's core interests, namely the Taiwan issue, are not protected, it is impossible for China to cooperate with the United States just on American terms. All in all, China is not capable of creating a new world order, but it is able to influence how the new world order is shaped. Considering that the Taiwan issue is a matter of core interests for China, it is just a matter of time for the United States to abandon Taiwan.

c. Possible Collapse of Western Alliance?

As noted earlier, the America-led liberal order relies on two important regions: the Asia-Pacific and Europe. American strategic calculation has to take European politics into account. With Brexit and the rising populism in European countries such as France, the Netherlands, Austria, and so on, many wonder about the future of the European Union (EU), particularly on the security front. We may recall that the American Western allies, taking the vehicle of NATO, has been taking the duty to counterbalance Russia's expansion in Europe. Indeed, the EU's swift enlargement after the Cold War has already reached Russia's buffer zone, such as Romania. The United States has had a pretty easy and friendly political environment in Europe and the EU-U.S. alliance has been stable and strong, although there were few value clashes over the Iraq War. However, Trump's presidency seems to drag this relationship in a slightly different direction. He declared the NATO was obsolete and "a musty relic of old thinking" during his presidential election campaign.⁸⁴ A few months later in April 2017, he changed his mind, and declared that the NATO is "no longer obsolete."⁸⁵

Trump criticized Germany over trade and defense spending of the NATO. One week after his inauguration, he received his first foreign leader: Theresa May, the prime minister of the United Kingdom, which signifies that the two countries enjoy a special relationship and the UK-U.S. alliance is strong and solid. However, Trump's scheduled state visit in June 2017 was postponed again and again due to strong anti-Trump protests in the United Kingdom. His random comments and attacks on Muslims and on London's Muslim Mayor Khan after London's terrorist attacks have pushed the British MPs to call on May to stand up to Trump. Although the personal tie between Trump and May seems to be fine and the pair were seen hand in hand in front of the cameras during May's visit, May had to criticize Trump's far right view.⁸⁶ The list of Trump's troubling interactions with Europe can go much longer.

According to Spiegel, one of Europe's largest news magazine published in Hamburg, Trump is "disinterested in the trans-Atlantic partnership and the long-cultivated alliances with Western allies."⁸⁷ It might be a bit too naive to believe that the United States is going to abandon its Western allies, but one is really not sure about where the United States really stands in shaping and reshaping the world order. Any challenge on the NATO or the Western Alliance would potentially change the EU-Russia buffer zone. The integration of the EU has already been questioned by some due to Brexit and similar voices in other member states; and the United States, under Trump, is developing turbulences that were not seen between the United States and Europe for a long time. Trump has already made clear about his trust in Putin, and about scraping the hard line policy against Moscow.⁸⁸ Godement argues that Trump is less interested in imposing sanctions for eternity on Russia than his predecessors.⁸⁹

The American policy shifts under Trump have not gone unnoticed. Although the security tie is still in good form, European leaders such as the German chancellor Merkel have already warned that traditional Western alliances are threatened by Brexit and Trump's presidency. After the G7 summit in May, Merkel called European leaders to "take destiny into our own hands."⁹⁰ The European Union on Foreign Relations council published an article of a French historian Godement, citing that the EU should accelerate its own free trade deals with Asia, with a special mention of Japan. In addition, Godement intriguingly proposes that the FTA could go with "ambitious features beyond trade in goods."⁹¹

In the coming years, trade relations and the U.S. security commitment to Europe will be the major issues determining not only the fate of EU, but also the fate of the world order. European strategic landscape shifts could ruin American global strategic design since WWII, no matter the changes within the EU or between the EU and the United States. Once materialized, they would have serious implications on the world order. The balance-of-power theory could easily predict the collapse of the 70-year-old post-WWII order. Under the scenario, the United States would have to give up on Europe or stretch its absolute limit to keep a friendly Europe and a friendly Russia, if possible at all. In that case, Taiwan would be too insignificant to serve the U.S. best national interests.

No matter what shape the world order is going to take—a multiplex world, a full return of power politics, or a collapse of the Western Alliance—Taiwan will not be able to serve the U.S. strategic interests. And the examinations on U.S. Taiwan policy at the beginning of this article have shown that Washington backs up Taiwan only when the latter serves its strategic interests. Hence, Washington is expected to abandon Taiwan to avoid entrapment.

5. Conclusion

I am not suggesting that the United States will retreat from the Taiwan Strait soon. In fact, it is expected that the United States will still be involved in the cross-Strait relations. As this paper is being finalized, the United States just sent two warships through Taiwan Strait on the 7th July in the name of “monitoring the situation in neighbouring areas”.⁹² The Taiwan issue, together with the South China Sea, India, and ASEAN, will be a key bargaining chip in American hand for a long time to come. The United States has not gone beyond the traditional views that have formed its Taiwan policy since 1979 when it switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. With Trump running the White House, uncertainties are hanging above our heads, but structural constraints will ensure Taiwan’s position as an instrument of the United States for a while. Trump told Chris Wallace on Fox News, “I fully understand the ‘one China’ policy, but I don’t know why we have to be bound by a ‘one China’ policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade.” We are not yet sure what the president wants, and his remark led to Richard Bush’s open letter and also led to fear in Taiwan.⁹³ It is bad news for Taiwan that the Trump administration sends

confusing signals, and it does not stress democratic values in foreign policy. However, it would be mistaken to assume that the United States could make an immediate withdrawal from Asian-Pacific or world politics. As a heavily asymmetrical de facto alliance, Washington and Taipei are respectively trapped in one of the dilemmas described by Snyder. For the United States, to avoid entrapment is to abandon Taiwan; and fulfilling its de facto alliance duty means to clash with the Chinese mainland. Muddling through the troubled water might still be the U.S. Taiwan policy in the near future, but it will not last. Beijing will be in no position to be permanently pressured by the United States for its own sovereignty issues. Peaceful unification is the only way to solve the security dilemmas embedded in the de facto alliance between Washington and Taipei because peaceful means leaves the security dilemma pointless.

Putting together the possible scenarios, we reach the conclusion that world order ultimately determines how the United States defines its national interests and its Taiwan policy in turn. This is a transitional period, and it is not yet clear what kind of world order we will enter into. As suggested above, strategic ambiguity will be the name of the American game in the short term, but Taiwan will inevitably play a less significant role in U.S. grand strategy. To put it differently, from a long-term perspective, the United States will say goodbye to its commitment to Taiwan. Taiwan is still important for the American national interests, but it will serve as one small part of the jigsaw. There are many more pieces the United States needs to put into consideration in its strategic design and in its interactions with China.

However, this does not suggest that the Taiwan issue will be easy to solve. At present, the most significant issue is the rising Taiwanese national consciousness.⁹⁴ The U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific will last, but the key to untie the knot is in the hands of the Chinese across the Taiwan Strait.

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