

US-Taiwan: West's Last Foothold in China

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In Washington's ongoing and ever-growing confrontation with China, it continues to place pressure on Beijing over Taiwan.

However, as China continues along a path soon to exceed the US economically, militarily, and technologically, Taiwan's reintegration as part of a single China is all but inevitable. Recently introduced legislation attempting to reinforce US influence over the island territory is - in the short-term - only going to ratchet up tensions further between Beijing and Washington.

While US moves are sold as “supporting Taiwan,” in reality Taiwan stands most to lose from these resulting tensions.

In the long-term, it will likely prove a poor investment for Washington regarding its Indo-Pacific strategy.

US Investing in a Problematic Relationship with Taiwan

While many assume Taiwan is a country and that it has close ties with the United States, in reality Taiwan is not a country. Under the universally recognized “One China Policy” Taiwan is considered part of China with one single government representing “One China.” Even the US, officially, recognizes the “One China Policy.” For example, the US does not have an official embassy in Taiwan.

In practice, however, the US uses Taiwan as a foothold of Western influence within Chinese territory, much the way it and its European allies used Hong Kong until very recently.

The US carries out highly provocative arms shipments to the authorities in Taiwan and instead of an official embassy, conducts diplomatic affairs out of what it calls the “American Institute in Taiwan.”

The US government has also established a presence for other arms of US “soft-power” including the so-called “Taiwan Foundation for Democracy,” a [franchise](#) of the US

government's National Endowment for Democracy. Through this Taiwan-based institution, the US is able to exercise political control over both Taiwan and opposition groups throughout the region who all share an uncoincidental animosity toward Beijing.

More recently, the US has proposed a series of bills to both pressure China overall, and specifically ratchet up tensions between the two global powers over the Taiwan issue.

Reuters in its [article](#), "Pushing against China, US lawmakers plan pro-Taiwan bill," would claim:

Democratic and Republican members of the US House of Representatives will introduce legislation this week seeking to boost US support for Taiwan, part of an effort in Congress to take a hard line in dealings with China.

Called the "Taiwan Peace and Stability Act," it aims to further deepen this "unofficial" relationship between Taiwan and Washington. While in official statements the US continues to recognize the "One China Policy," unofficially this act and others like it are aimed at encouraging Taiwan's independence movement and the souring of economic ties between Taiwan and the mainland.

US-Taiwan Strategy Fundamentally Flawed

Reuters also noted the recently introduced EAGLE Act, or the "Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement Act."

While the topic of "ensuring American global leadership" is surrounded with discussion and debate over how to achieve it, the question of whether or not the US should "lead" the world remains unaddressed by policymakers in Washington.

China has between a four and five times larger population than the US. It has access to plenty of resources. China's population is hardworking and well-educated. According to a Forbes [article](#) titled, "The Countries With The Most STEM Graduates [Infographic]," China graduates in a single year millions more in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) than the US does.

These STEM graduates will go onto further enhancing China's research and development efforts, technological innovation, overseeing advances in manufacturing, and the construction of modern infrastructure both at home and abroad as part of Beijing's burgeoning One Belt, One Road initiative.

When added together it is clear that China's surpassing the United States both economically and technologically is an inevitability.

With this backdrop it is perfectly clear why Washington's current obsession with maintaining geopolitical primacy over the planet is fundamentally flawed. It also makes perfectly clear why Washington's strategy toward Taiwan is fundamentally flawed.

Utilizing [tools](#) like Harvard University's Atlas of Economic Complexity, one can explore the economic ties of a particular nation or territory over the course of approximately 20 years.

Taiwan's economic relationship with both the mainland and the United States plays out in a very illustrative manner. In 1998 mainland China hardly registered in terms of imports or

exports which were at the time dominated by the United States and Japan.

By 2008 Taiwan's economic relationship had become balanced between its American and Japanese trade partners and the Chinese mainland. By 2018 the tables had completely turned in favor of mainland China.

Even the US government's International Trade Administration [admits](#) that China is Taiwan's primary trading partner with nearly twice the amount of total trade with Taiwan than with the US.

If one counts Hong Kong, Chinese trade with Taiwan is nearly four times greater than that with the US.

More than just trade, investments in both directions across the strait reflect an already ongoing economic if not political integration of Taiwan within "One China." It is a process that will influence socio-political factors over the long-term no matter how much money the US invests in political interference in the short-term.

Time is on Beijing's side. Washington warns constantly of a possible military intervention by Beijing regarding Taiwan, but it is clear China's economic rise is a far more persuasive and constructive means toward integrating Taiwan than military might. This is a lesson that, had Washington learned it, it might not have found itself in such a disadvantageous position both in the Indo-Pacific, or upon the global stage.

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