



**HARRIS OR TRUMP: NEXT
PRESIDENT'S PRIORITIES IN THE
PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE WITH
TAIWAN**

BY SHIRLEY KAN

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The following is the tenth in a series on the challenges facing the next US presidential administration in managing the most crucial Indo-Pacific relationships. See part one in the series [here](#), see part two [here](#), part three [here](#), part four [here](#), part five [here](#), part six [here](#), part seven [here](#), part eight [here](#), and part nine [here](#).

Amid concerns of backsliding as in past transitions, the new US president's overall priority is to communicate clearly and promptly about progress in the partnership with Taiwan to sustain deterrence against provocations from the People's Republic of China (PRC). After Joe Biden won the election four years ago, this author [wrote](#) that "the Trump and Tsai administrations have repaired the US-Taiwan relationship, and the question is whether Biden's administration will reverse gains in the [strong partnership](#)," adding that "there likely will not be a major rollback of progress, returning to weaker engagement." This expectation has been generally true. Indeed, drawing on his unique authority as president and former senator who voted for the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), P.L. 96-8, Biden declared repeatedly that the [US military would help](#) to defend Taiwan. But both candidates show signs of stepping backwards, with Kamala [Harris](#) refusing to

"get into hypotheticals" and Donald [Trump](#) saying "Taiwan should pay us for defense." One priority is to sustain President Biden's clear declaration.

Concerns, consistency, and changes

Every president since 1979 has cited the bipartisan TRA. On Capitol Hill, Congressional oversight of the president centers on the TRA and its [legislative intent](#) for creative ambiguity to enable the bilateral, non-diplomatic relationship in spite of the [US "one China" policy](#). Nonetheless, common approaches also have included Presidents Bush's and Obama's [freezes](#) of congressional notifications of arms sales.

There have been differences that changed the approach. For example, Biden's State Department re-imposed unnecessary restrictions on contacts by itself and the rest of the Executive Branch with Taiwan that then-Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#) completely removed.

Moreover, the next president could re-ignite a debate about cooperation with the PRC, but it would be prudent for she or he to continue the bipartisan, realistic re-assessment of PRC threats. Biden's [National Security Strategy](#) of 2022 points to the PRC as "the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it"—in line with Trump's changes. Similarly, Congress has bipartisan re-assessments, particularly that conducted by the [Select Committee](#) on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

Further, the strategic environment has worsened in the last four years. Factors include the PRC's increasing aggressiveness toward Taiwan and the Philippines, Russia's further invasion of Ukraine since 2022, and Israel's conflicts since 2023, as well as the Beijing-Moscow strategic axis tightening in cahoots against Washington and its allies.

While not the only reason, arming Ukraine has exacerbated delays in delivering weapons to Taiwan worth \$18.7 billion, as Sen. [Josh Hawley](#) (R-Missouri) wrote in December 2022 to the Department of State. It has acknowledged the problem, continuing

to ask to work with industry to end administrative and production delays, and fix supply chains at the US-Taiwan [Defense Industry Conference](#) in September 2024.

Realism, urgency, and cultures

At the same time, the war in Ukraine has compelled Taiwan (formally called the Republic of China, or ROC) to commit seriously and urgently to military reforms for asymmetric defense, [longer conscription](#), and more resources. For example, the Ministry of National Defense previously resisted acquisition of more Stinger and Harpoon missiles. US presidential support needs to remain in alignment with ROC (Taiwan) President Lai Ching-te's realism and reforms of Taiwan's problematic diplomatic and military cultures, especially given [gaps between US and Taiwanese military cultures](#).

Strategy, security, and stability

Top leadership is needed for a US strategy. Briefly, what are specific priorities no matter who is the president? The president will have to lead US and allied actions to impose costs on the PRC for its [destabilizing](#) behavior, including the Joint Sword series of military exercises. Expediting [weapons deliveries](#) is a well-known priority, particularly for [new F-16V fighters](#) that this author first proposed in 2017.

But major arms acquisitions are not sufficient. Taiwan requires more munitions, training (especially for fighter pilots), and interoperability with the US. Related priorities include building on Taiwan's willingness to acquire asymmetric capabilities as urged by both the Trump and Biden Administrations. Advice in modernizing [operational concepts](#) for joint, decentralized warfighting will build on Taiwan's defense reforms and training by US Joint Training Teams ([JTTs](#)), military services, and National Guards. The president will support cooperation in unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and counter-UAS capability.

He or she will encourage Taiwan to increase its defense budget, reaching at least its own goal of 3% of GDP. Bilateral talks about cost-effective spending will need to resolve differences about Taiwan's

Indigenous Defense Submarine ([IDS](#)) program, planned to cost almost [\\$9 billion](#) for seven boats after the first prototype.

Defense industrial resilience is a new area of cooperation among allies and partners. In October 2024 in Honolulu, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment chaired the first meeting of the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience ([PIPIR](#)). The ROC (Taiwan)'s Vice Minister of Defense for Armaments, [General Hsu Yen-Pu](#), attended, after talking with US officials and industry at the Defense Industry Conference.

Increasing Washington-Taipei cooperation between coast guards is a complementary priority, particularly to counter Beijing's provocations in "gray zone" coercion.

As Ukraine's civilian resistance demonstrates to Taiwan, a priority is to strengthen its [whole-of-society resilience](#) (as the Atlantic Council recommends, for example). Lai has broadened defense and resilience beyond Taiwan's military to the society, a development with US support. His National Security Council (NSC) has led coordination for resilience, explaining to this author in June 2024. Taiwan's new realism is seen in its [Zero Day](#) drama (publicized in July).

Building up this whole-of-society resilience will need to include critical infrastructure protection, defense against cyber attacks, and stockpiles, including phone and Internet connections and supplies of energy sources, food, medicines, and water. Taiwan's people need real experiences and exercises without power or phones.

Moreover, Taiwan's sensitive subject that would benefit from the US presidential experience is continuity of government amid the PRC's threats of "decapitation" by targeting the leadership and command centers. Taiwan needs to solve its problem with having only a short bench of publicly named officials for [presidential succession](#) and thus for the commander-in-chief. Taiwan's president and vice president should not be in the same place but still appear together.

Reinforcing priorities

The president will decide on Lai's "stop-over" on the way to visit the ROC (Taiwan)'s diplomatic partners, consistent with established practice. He or she will build on Biden's leadership in growing multilateral support for Taiwan, such as by the [Group of 7](#) and the Global Cooperation and Training Framework ([GCTF](#)) involving the US, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, and Canada.

The president will be compelled by the PRC's gaslighting manipulation of UN General Assembly [Resolution 2758](#) to disarm that political warfare by countering effectively that the resolution never stated that Taiwan belongs to the PRC's jurisdiction.

The president's leadership will be important for a bilateral agreement to [eliminate double taxation](#), including for investments in the key semi-conductor sector. Another priority will be agreements in the [US-Taiwan Initiative](#) on 21st Century Trade.

She or he will need to restore credibility and consistency by sending a Cabinet-rank official to Taipei. Biden has failed to allow such visits in accordance with the practice since 1992.

In sum, such presidential priorities will strategically strengthen [Integrated Deterrence](#) across military and non-military domains. Reinforcing that deterrence, the partnership will improve democratic Taiwan's economic and societal resilience, and international inclusion and legitimacy.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.