



**ISSUES FOR CONGRESS AND TRUMP'S
TRANSITION RAISED BY US
MISSIONS' STRATEGIC PLANS**

BY MICHAEL WALSH

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There is a [significant](#) lack of coherence and consistency in the [production](#) of unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans of the US Department of State and USAID. This includes the mission-level foreign policy plans for dependencies and areas of special sovereignty.

Under the first Trump administration, the US Department of State and USAID produced three separate *Integrated Country Strategies* in the context of Chinese affairs. They include: 1) [China](#); 2) [Hong Kong and Macau](#); 3) [American Institute in Taiwan](#). That nomenclature is problematic. First, there are two governments that currently claim to have sovereignty over “China.” Second, neither Hong Kong nor Macau are recognized as independent states by the US government. Third, the term “American Institute in Taiwan” is unconventional as it fails to refer to an independent state, dependency, or area of special sovereignty.

Since its inauguration the Biden administration has addressed two of these concerns. However, those

interventions have reduced some of the [inherent characteristics](#) of the unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans of the US Department of State and USAID. Among other things, they have increased inconsistency. They may also have reduced accuracy.

Unfortunately, these knock-on effects are problematic. The production of lower quality mission strategic plans not only undermines public confidence in the mission strategic plans of the US Department of State and raises questions about the competence of the US diplomatic workforce. It also violates the [policies and procedural guidelines](#) designed to ensure and maximize “the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information” disseminated by the US Department of State.

The US Congress may therefore want to consider the [inherent and system-dependent characteristics](#) of the strategic plans of the US diplomatic missions as it weighs [reforms](#) for the US Department of State and USAID. This includes the mission strategic plans of the US missions to the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and Macau, and Taiwan

People’s Republic of China

As noted by the Central Intelligence Agency, the People’s Republic of China is [organized](#) into four kinds of province-level administrative divisions. These include municipalities (*shi*), provinces (*sheng*), autonomous regions (*zizhiqu*), and special administrative regions (*tebie xingzhengqu*). The political status of Taiwan remains disputed. While the Chinese Communist Party declares that Taiwan is a province of the People’s Republic of China, the US government declares that it is [claimed](#) “by both the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the authorities on Taiwan.” Per the US Department of State, the two special administrative regions—Hong Kong and Macau—are [semi-autonomous entities](#) that exist “pursuant to international agreements and maintain their own governments apart from the People’s Republic of China.” Of the province-level administrative divisions, the US government only [categorizes](#) the special administrative regions as dependencies and areas of special sovereignty.

The Trump administration

Under the Trump administration, the US Department of State and USAID produced three mission-level foreign policy plans in the context of Chinese affairs: 1) [Integrated Country Strategy for China](#); 2) [Integrated Country Strategy for Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions](#); 3) [Integrated Country Strategy for American Institute in Taiwan](#). This nomenclature was problematic for the following reasons:

- In the first case, the term “China” is ambiguous. There are two governments that currently claim sovereignty over “China.” One is the government of the People’s Republic of China, the other is the government of the Republic of China.
- In the second case, the term “country” implies inaccuracy. The US Government classifies Hong Kong and Macau as dependencies and areas of special sovereignty.
- In the third case, the term “American Institute in Taiwan” is unconventional. It is the name of a US diplomatic mission, not an independent state, dependency, or area of special sovereignty.

The Biden administration

Under the Biden administration, the US Department of State and USAID produced three mission-level foreign policy plans in the context of Chinese affairs: 1) [Integrated Country Strategy for the People’s Republic of China](#); 2) [Integrated Mission Strategy for Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions](#); 3) [Integrated Country Strategy for American Institute in Taiwan](#). This nomenclature addressed some of the issues with the mission-level foreign policy plans produced under the Trump administration. However, it resulted in decreased consistency in the production of the unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans of the US Department of State and USAID:

- In the first case, the use of the long-form name for an independent state is unconventional. The vast majority of the mission-level foreign policy plans make use of the short-form names of independent states, dependencies, and areas of special sovereignty.
- In the second case, the replacement of the term “country” with “mission” is unconventional. At present, the Integrated Mission Strategy for Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions is the only mission-level foreign policy plan that makes use of that alternative terminology. Even the [US Consulate General in Curacao](#) refers to [its mission strategic plan](#) as an Integrated Country Strategy.

Issues for Congress

As US Congress weighs [reforms](#) at the US Department of State and USAID, members may want to consider the following issues:

Core Concepts. As a matter of [policy](#), the Integrated Country Strategies are “mission strategic plans” that are supposed to articulate the “whole-of-government priorities in a given country” (18 FAM 301.2). This raises a couple of questions:

1. Should mission strategic plans articulate the whole-of-government priorities for that specific mission? Or should they articulate the whole-of-government priorities for a particular country (and/or dependency and/or area of special responsibility) for which that specific mission has accreditation?

Naming Guidelines. As a matter of practice, there is a lack of consistency in the naming of mission-level foreign policy plans of the US Department of State and USAID. Most use the term “Integrated Country Strategy” combined with the [official short-form name](#) of the country (and/or dependency and/or area of special sovereignty) of accreditation. However, a few use something else (e.g., “Integrated Mission Strategy” combined with the official short-form name;

“Integrated Country Strategy” combined with the [official long-form name](#), [official mission name](#), [unofficial mission name](#), or [geographic region](#)). This raises a couple of questions:

2. Should the Country Teams be required to use a standard method for naming their mission strategic plans? If so, what should it be?

Global coverage: US diplomatic missions do not produce unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans for every independent state, dependency, and area of special sovereignty outside of the United States. This begs a couple of questions:

3. Should the US Department of State be required to produce unclassified mission level foreign policy plans for every independent state that maintains diplomatic relations with the United States? What about those that do not (e.g., Iran; North Korea)?
4. Should the US Department of State be required to produce unclassified mission level foreign policy plans for every dependency and area of special sovereignty of independent states that maintain diplomatic relations with the United States? If not, should it be required to produce them for any?

Autonomous regions: US diplomatic missions do not produce unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans for autonomous regions of independent states (e.g., Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang). That raises the question:

5. Should the US Department of State and USAID be permitted to produce unclassified mission-level foreign policy plans for any autonomous regions? If so, under what circumstances?

Transition recommendations

The US Department of State has made a [public commitment](#) to ensuring that the American people have access to quality information. However, there are

serious issues with the accessibility, accuracy, [availability](#), [completeness](#), compliance, [consistency](#), credibility, [currentness](#), efficiency, [precision](#), traceability, and understandability of the strategic plans of the US diplomatic missions produced under the Trump and Biden administrations. These dimensional issues are problematic as they [lower](#) “the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information” that is disseminated by the US Department of State. That not only violates compliance with the information quality standards of the US Department of State. It undermines public confidence in the strategic plans of US diplomatic missions and raises questions about the competence of the US diplomatic workforce. In pursuit of outperforming the Biden administration, the Trump Transition Team should therefore explore potential interventions that could be taken on [day one](#) to improve the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity characteristics of the next series of mission strategic plans. At the corporate level, these interventions might include the revision of the [Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\) Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies](#). At the agency level, these interventions might include the revision of the [policies and procedural guidelines](#) for [Functional Bureau Strategies](#), [Joint Regional Strategies](#), and [Integrated Country Strategies](#).

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