

BOOK REVIEWS

## US–Taiwan Relations: Will China’s Challenge Lead to a Crisis?

Ryan Hass, Bonnie Glaser and Richard Bush. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023. v + 177 pp. \$23.40 (pbk). ISBN 9781815739999

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*US–China Relations* is a fine short book written by three noted American thinktank fellows (and former officials) designed to articulate what they see as US core interests and essential policies with regard to Taiwan. They bemoan the fact that US policy is increasingly made by leaders not deeply steeped in the intricacies of the US–Taiwan–China triangle. The hoped-for audience of this book is US policy makers, but it is a widely accessible work providing the necessary historical background to understand the policy recommendations at its heart. It is a policy-oriented book, written from within the Washington, DC beltway perspective.

The book is organized into four substantive parts: a brief introduction, which summarizes the authors’ policy recommendations; a chapter on the historical background to the current conflict (covering the 1700s to 2016); a chapter on US–Taiwan relations from 2016 to the present (the authors cover events up to the end of 2022); and a chapter focusing on the future of US–Taiwan relations, discussing seven possible scenarios for the future and expanding on their policy recommendations in the Introduction. In addition, the book contains a number of helpful appendices that include key documents, statistics, chronology of key meetings, and so on.

The main arguments the authors make are that the US is “at its best in supporting Taiwan when it is resolute, disciplined, self-assured and steady” (p. 8). The US must not focus solely on the military threat that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) poses to Taiwan, but also bolster the self-confidence of the government and people of Taiwan to resist Chinese coercion short of conflict. The authors do not ignore the need to increase Taiwan’s defence capabilities, but they see the PRC campaign to convince the people of Taiwan that unification is inevitable, that time ultimately favours China, as the more significant, and difficult, threat. They note that while the US Department of Defense is designed to deal with military threats to the US and its allies and friends, there is no comparable overarching US government agency that deals with the kinds of political challenges Taiwan faces. They provide various recommendations about how both deterrence and the confidence of Taiwan can be sustained and strengthened.

The authors argue that the best way to preserve stability across the Taiwan Strait is to insist that the US is willing to abide by any jointly, peacefully reached decision by China and Taiwan that the people of Taiwan, through a democratic process, accept. They do not imagine that any such decision is imminent. Keeping the future open is, in their view, the best way to manage what appear to be intractable positions and to preserve the (relative) peace across the Strait. They argue that a determination by the US that Taiwan must never be incorporated into the PRC will precipitate conflict. At the same time, a US position to try to preserve an open-ended future across the Strait also allows for the possibility of a future internationally recognized Taiwan state. Such a situation is not the first choice, or preferred outcome, by any of the three involved parties, but it is the second ranked choice that offers the best chance to maintain the status quo.

While thoughtfully and carefully written from a US national interest perspective, one wonders how viable such an overall policy is. For the authors, a crucial element of their recommendations is that the PRC must continue to believe that time is on its side, that one way or another, Taiwan will become part of the PRC. Obviously, to the extent that the PRC leadership comes to believe that time is not on its side (and assuming that incorporation of Taiwan into the PRC is a central goal of the leadership), this is likely to push the PRC in the direction of using extreme military force to try to obtain control over Taiwan. The key question becomes how long the PRC will continue to believe it can play the long game. While its military capabilities vis-à-vis Taiwan will continue to increase, US support for Taiwan is also increasing. How does the US reinforce a PRC view that time is on its side as the US increases its contacts with and rhetorical (at the very least) support for a democratic Taiwan? The management of this balancing act of trying to reinforce the PRC's perception that it can take a long-term approach while at the same time enabling Taiwan to be confident that it will not be coerced into a future its people don't want seems extraordinarily difficult. That management becomes all the more difficult when political elites in the US are polarized and, in many cases, largely uninformed about the nuances of the China-Taiwan-US triangle and US policy. As US elite and public opinion is increasingly critical of the PRC, the kind of resolute, steady and self-assured policies the authors advocate seem all but impossible to sustain.

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## China's Strategic Opportunity: Change and Revisionism in Chinese Foreign Policy

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In the book *China's Strategic Opportunity*, Yong Deng presents a refreshing analysis of China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping's leadership. Rather than focusing on conventional international relations theories like realism and power transition theory, the book emphasizes the Chinese concept of "strategic opportunity" as a key analytical framework. The concept directs attention to "how the Chinese elites evaluate the international environment and choose what they believe to be the best course of action to achieve their national agenda" (p. 3).

The book delves into China's evaluation and shaping of its international environment, empirically examining policy patterns across various domains. Chapter one explains why the concept of strategic opportunity is a useful framework for analysing China's foreign policy. Focusing on US-China relations, chapter two investigates how China's foreign policy has changed from a previous low-profile approach to a more assertive major-power diplomacy. Chapter three examines the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with a specific focus on how China builds international belief in its commitment and credibility regarding the project. Chapter four unpacks China's economic statecraft, while chapter five addresses China's active institutional tactics. Chapter six takes a closer look at China-Europe relations from the perspective of multipolar diplomacy. The concluding