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## Individual Article

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Needs Revision – And Soon  
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## The US's Strategy Towards Taiwan Needs Revision – And Soon

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This opinion article touches on the insecurity of the current US policy approach towards Taiwan, that being strategic ambiguity, and argues for a better path oriented toward trilateral alliance building.

### I. Introduction

Taiwan is, at least in the eyes of US policy, an issue better left to ambiguity. A precedent was set in the heat of the Cold War by President Jimmy Carter, which came in the form of the 1979 “Taiwan Relations Act,” and scholars have run with the idea since. Schelling tells us that we risk the loss of flexibility when pursuing clarity, and Glenn Snyder preached that too much commitment to a strategy opens the door for entrapment. More recent proponents of ambiguity in the region echo these ideas, as Taiwan has yet to be given a defense guarantee, and the administration takes on the assumption that any overly ambitious moves might strike the match that blows the roof off the Indo-Pacific arena.

This assumption warrants reconsideration. The tension in the Indo-Pacific, the region which encompasses the coasts of California to the Bay of Bengal and everything in between, has been described by the Department of Defense as “the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security.”<sup>1</sup> It’s not a point of contention that tensions have risen to a point where it seems the tide could shift badly very quickly. No, the discourse falls to whether the US should remain ambiguous in its strategy when confronting the issue, or if an unambiguous policy needs to be attained. A change is bound to occur; that much is clear. In what form exactly, and to what degree, still appears undecided.

Such a change may be closer than it seems. In recent years, the US, Japan, and the Philippines, the region’s three powerhouses outside of China, have seemingly all tried to increase shared defense spending and open discussion for counterstrike capabilities. This openness and possible shift towards a more trilateral defense strategy can be seen in the expansion efforts of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (ECDA), a joint-offensive by the Philippines and US, which in the last three

years<sup>2</sup> has added multiple strategic military sites, for a total of nine bases, along the Northern and Eastern borders of the island nation, some of which lie within 160 miles of Chinese controlled waters.<sup>3</sup>

To add to this, Japan has made it abundantly clear that it views Taiwan's stability as of the utmost importance to the nation's security, with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi straying from the traditional post-war view of "self-restraint" and instead asserting that Chinese action on Taiwan would likely result in Japanese retaliation.<sup>4</sup> However, the three nations' leaders met at a trilateral summit in 2024, affirming that they "recognize that there is no change in our basic positions on Taiwan,"<sup>5</sup> alluding to a strategy that aligns with ambiguity in the region. More recently, President Donald Trump met with the former Prime Minister of Japan, the two leaders seemingly agreeing that Taiwan's independence is a sure thing.

The three nations have not produced a united, joint strategy since the administration changes in both the US and Japan; however, as of February 2026,<sup>6</sup> President Trump did meet with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, the chief in command of the Philippines since 2022, again affirming the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. I write the following as my own assessment and understanding of US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific, and further a declaration of more efficient avenues, as the world shifts towards a more dangerous future.

## **II. Strategic Ambiguity, and Its Much-Needed Remodeling**

The act of being politically "careful", among other measures, should be put front and center when discussing the driving force that determines how the US and its allies surrounding the Indo-Pacific have made their policy choices concerning the region for nearly fifty years. This carefulness is more commonly known as deterrence. While not specific to US policy on Taiwan, deterrence sits at the core of the US's stance on Taiwan, which dates as far back as the late 1970s.

Deterrence, however, isn't the issue this article wishes to show as inefficient. In fact, it is in the very title of the strategy which I argue should be employed. Rather, it is the route taken by the US in the name of deterrence, that being the policy of strategic ambiguity. Strategic ambiguity is, as the name suggests, a policy that allows the US to neither support nor deny support to Taiwan. The US did at one point maintain a defense contract with Taiwan (1954- 1979), something which stemmed from its commitment up until the late 70s to support the Republic of China's military, which fled to the island in the mid-50s following its defeat by the then infant PRC. In the previously

mentioned Taiwan Revision Act of 1979, the US shifted and has since refused to acknowledge Taiwan as a sovereign state and submitted that the PRC is “the one sole government of China,”<sup>8</sup> thus creating the “One China” policy, while simultaneously creating an informal relationship with Taiwan, supplying the state with defense weapons. These conditions persist today and are problematic; arming the military of a sovereign state you refuse to recognize to defend itself from the nation you do recognize, to me, is paradoxical. And for years, that’s exactly what the US has been going for.

The US maintains it will defend Taiwan if it falls victim to invasion by China, however, it has historically refrained from making any outright promises of defense, hence the term strategic ambiguity. The thought process is that the US’s display of uncertainty simultaneously deters China from invasion while also holding Taiwan back from any reckless political moves. And for the last few decades, this tactic has seemed to ward off a full-scale PRC invasion. That’s not to say the mainland hasn’t employed its own tactics, most of which are focused on bending the rest of the world’s arm into a lack of support for Taiwan through inflammatory threats.

But here’s where ambiguity policy starts to stretch thin and show through: Aside from threats, the US’s focus on convincing China to avoid extreme conflict, such as full-scale invasion, has allowed the PRC to work inside a grey zone, which the Brookings Institute describes as “coercive actions below the threshold of armed conflict.”<sup>9</sup> And that zone is getting blacker as the weeks go on, with China operating surveillance missions closer and closer to Taiwanese airspace, as well as performing military drills with the intention of invasion.

The Indo-Pacific and the world sit at a crossroads, as US policy on Taiwan is largely in the air. It’s clear that China’s desire for reunification with Taiwan is coming to a boiling point, while Taiwanese nationalism is at an all-time high, as 62% of the island's citizens identify solely as Taiwanese.<sup>10</sup> Further, Taiwan has grown wary of US support for its independence, and as of this writing, may too be at the cliff’s edge, with Taiwanese officials fearing the US's removal of troops from the Indo-Pacific to bolster forces in the Middle East and its focus on the War with Iran may give China the perfect opening to “exercise influence.”<sup>11</sup>

Enter trilateral defense, a strategy which originally stems from the joint efforts of the US, Japan, and Australia, then known as trilateral deterrence, and was used as a mechanism mainly for the North Korean nuclear threat, but also to aid East Asian security more generally.<sup>12</sup> In the past, this was a strategy of nuclear deterrence, being that three countries with nuclear warheads would pressure a smaller nation that also had such capabilities, with the aim of deterring that nation from the use

prospect of nuclear war. Trilateral defense, or trilateral alliance architecture, is most notably in current use by the US-Japan-ROK alliance to combat the North Korean threat, which is a pact that forms but a small part of the growing “spider-web” of alliances in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, the trilateral alliance architecture is this: a recognized three-way agreement to show dominance to or uphold the defense of a territory threatened by a major power, which is maintained by a signed deal (i.e., the 2023 Camp David summit between the US, Japan, and South Korea) and continued joint-military exercises and communication.<sup>13</sup> In the case of this article, that territory, or state, is Taiwan, and the alliance is that of Japan, the Philippines, and the US.

Such a strategy trumps ambiguity, as the fact of the matter is that the US will be committing to the defense of Taiwan, something which the region needs. With a new policy of “strategic clarity,” found in the verbal commitment of the trilateral alliance, the US would be showing China that it will, in fact, defend Taiwan if the PRC makes any extreme moves outside of the status quo, which both protects US interests and maintains order in the Indo-Pacific. This, as opposed to strategic ambiguity, which is beginning to crumble and is only enabling China to tighten its grip around Taiwan, seems much better. If you need further reasoning for why Taiwan-China relations remaining stable is vital for the US, consider its reliance on Taiwan for nearly 90%<sup>14</sup> of the world’s superconductor and advanced-chip export, of which the US is one of the largest importers, as a viable cause for assured protection.

### **III. Conclusion: The Necessary Alliance**

It is my own opinion that a US-Japan-Philippines alliance would be the best positioned for a defensive strategy in the hopes of deterring China from further escalation on the Taiwan strait. As previously stated, the US and Philippines have continued to increase a joint presence in the region, and the Trump administration has upheld communication with Japan. During the Biden administration, a “new trilateral age” had begun to prosper,<sup>15</sup> with the three nations beginning to introduce Chinese countermeasures in the form of joint operations and shared infrastructure. While it is unclear whether President Trump will maintain this strategic alliance, his administration has used wording in multiple documents and briefings that suggest the US’s policy of ambiguity may be on the chopping block.<sup>16</sup> While Mr. Trump is known to have a distaste for China, it is unwise to assume he would implement a similar strategy to that of the Biden Administration; however, not unlikely. Meanwhile, President of the PRC, Xi Jinping, has been waging an ongoing internal war<sup>7</sup> on his

military officials, in specific purging multiple top-ranking individuals who previously stood as barriers to a possible invasion of Taiwan. It is the hope of mine, and I am sure millions in Taiwan, that a sturdier strategy, such as a trilateral alliance, is introduced so that conflict may be avoided. So, to finalize the sentiment of this article, I present this statement:

Strategic ambiguity remains the U.S. policy toward Taiwan, but its time has passed, and Taiwan relations now depend on the institutionalization of trilateral alliance architecture among the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, transforming a Taiwan contingency from a bilateral gamble into a coalition problem for Beijing – a strategy once considered politically and strategically untenable.

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