Rethinking US-Taiwan Relations after the Cold War: Creative Ambiguity vs. Assertive Democratization

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore whether it is possible for the U.S. to pursue parallel relationships with Taiwan and China, that is, whether U.S.-Taiwan relations can be "decoupled" from the Washington-Taipei-Beijing triangle. It will first provide a brief overview on how the U.S.-Taiwan relations have evolved since 1949, when the reality of two Chinas set in with the founding of the People's Republic. Then it will discuss the framework of current U.S. policy toward Taiwan. In light of significant developments within each country involved in recent years, this paper will question the policy's continued validity. To test how far the argument can go for strengthening U.S.-Taiwan bilateral relations, unaffected by U.S.-China relations, this paper will evaluate Taiwan's importance - on the world stage and to the United States; in other words, whether Taiwan is important enough to the U.S. as a "vital interest." Presumably adjusting or discarding the current "one China" policy can only be justified if Taiwan is a vital U.S. interest, worthy of risking China's ire. Finally, this paper will examine the determinants of U.S. policy toward Taiwan in the post-Cold War era, and speculate on several scenarios for the shape and direction of future U.S.-Taiwan relations.

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honors Japan’s war dead (including 14 World War II-era Class A war criminals), cannot be explained away by the machinations of Chinese state-party interests with complete power and control over the nationalist discourse. Similarly, the nationalist rhetoric emerging in contemporary South Korea, which seeks to include its old Cold War enemy North Korea in a new story of pan-Korean unity and identity, cannot be explained away by the persuasive skills of South Korea's new leftist government elites. These phenomena suggest the need for an explanation that recognizes the intrinsic power of the nat First, T-R relations before, during, and after the Cold War are reviewed, with an emphasis on post-Cold War relations. It is concluded that institutionalization is not a causal factor in intensifying T-R cooperation. Second, the level of democratization in these countries is discussed with regard to the level of mutual cooperation. Using Turkey and Russia’s scores in the Freedom House rankings on democracy, it is demonstrated that cooperation rapidly intensified in the late 1990s as both countries regressed in terms of the democratic nature of their political system.