

The Taiwan Factor and US-China Strategic Competition



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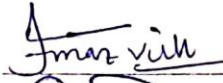


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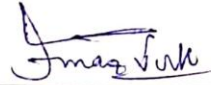
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late Nana Abu, Chaudhary Muhammad Yaqoob. Your wisdom and love have guided me throughout my life. I wish you were here to see this accomplishment.

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Contents

LIST OF TABLES	XII
LIST OF FIGURES	XIII
LIST OF SYMBOLS, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	XIV
ABSTRACT	XV
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Historical Background	2
1.2 Problem Statement	5
1.3 Hypothesis	6
1.4 Variables	6
1.5 Operationalization of Variables	6
1.6 Research Objectives	6
1.7 Research Questions	7
1.8 Significance of the Research	7
1.9 Theoretical Framework	8
1.10 Research Methodology	8
1.10.1 Research Design	8
1.10.2 Data Collection	9
1.10.3 Data Analysis Technique	9
1.11 Literature Review	10
1.12 Research Gap	21
1.13 Organization of the Study	21
2 Theoretical Framework	23
2.1 Realism	23
2.2 Defensive Realism	24
2.3 Offensive Realism	25
2.4 Offensive Realism, Strategic Ambiguity and Taiwan	29
3 Indo-Pacific Geopolitics: US-China Competition and Strategic Imperatives in Taiwan Policy	33
3.1 Indo-Pacific Geopolitics and US-China Strategic Competition	34
3.1.1 Rise of China	34
3.1.2 US' Pivot to Asia	36
3.1.3 US-China Strategic Competition and Taiwan	39
3.2 Strategic Motivations of the US for Enhanced Cooperation with Taiwan	39
3.2.1 Importance of Taiwan's Geo-strategic Location for the US	40
3.2.2 Increasing Strategic Rivalry between US and China	41
3.2.3 Preservation of US' Credibility among its Allies	41
3.2.4 Challenges of Chinese-controlled Taiwan for the US and its allies	42

4	From Ambiguity to Clarity: Evolution of US Policy towards Taiwan and its Implications	44
4.1	Obama’s Administration Approach to Taiwan	45
4.2	Trump’s Administration Policy on Taiwan: Offensive Revision of Ambiguity	47
4.3	Biden’s Approach: Shifting from Strategic Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity . . .	51
4.3.1	The Taiwan Policy Act of 2022	54
4.4	Implications of Increased US Support for Taiwan	57
4.4.1	Straining US-China Relations	57
4.4.2	Diminishing Possibility of Peaceful Resolution of Taiwan Conflict	58
4.4.3	Potential Push for Taiwanese Independence	58
4.4.4	Providing China a Pretext to Take Assertive Actions	59
4.4.5	Misperception and Miscalculation: Possibility of Military Conflict over Taiwan	60
4.4.6	Disruption of Global Supply Chain of Semi-conductors	60
4.4.7	Challenges to Other States: Balancing US-China Tensions in Taiwan Conflict	61
4.4.7.1	Strain on Pakistan's Foreign Policy	61
4.4.7.2	Balancing Dilemma for India	62
4.4.7.3	Possible Repercussions for Europe	62
5	Conclusion	64
5.1	Summary of the Findings	65
5.2	Discussion and Testing of the Hypothesis	66
5.3	Theoretical Implications	68
5.4	Practical Implications	68
5.5	Contributions to the Field	69
5.6	Limitations of the Study	69
5.7	Recommendations for Future Research	69
	Bibliography	71

List of Tables

4.1	Summary of Trump Administration's Policy on Taiwan.....	50
4.2	Overview of Biden Administration's Policy on Taiwan.....	55
4.3	Comparison of US Approaches to Taiwan Across Different Administrations	56

List of Figures

3.1: Strategic Location of Taiwan and First Island Chain	40
4.1: Changes in Taiwan's National Identity	59

LIST OF SYMBOLS, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIT	American Institute in Taiwan
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, United States
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CHIPS	Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EU	European Union
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy
KMT	Kuomintang
MDT	Mutual Defence Treaty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
TAIPEI	Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative
TECRO	Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office
TPA	Taiwan Policy Act
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
TRO	Taiwan Representative Office
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
TTA	Taiwan Assurance Act
TTA	Taiwan Travel Act
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract

With the intensifying US-China great power competition in the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan has increasingly become a significant geopolitical flashpoint. The study hypothesizes that the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China is likely to increase US support for Taiwan. By analyzing evolving geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific, the research identifies primary strategic motivations behind enhanced US cooperation with Taiwan. Moreover, the study analyzes how US policy towards Taiwan changed amid increasing US-China strategic competition. The research also assesses the implications of this increased US support, particularly concerning regional stability and the possibility of military escalation. Grounded in the theoretical framework of offensive, this study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data, and content analysis as the research tool. The study argues that the strategic significance of Taiwan has increased in the US security realm as the US seeks to counter China's influence. Under Biden administration, the US has shifted from its traditional approach of strategic ambiguity, adopted by its predecessors, to more explicit support for Taiwan which is showing the signs of strategic clarity. This support is manifested in increased military and economic support, boosted diplomatic ties, and significant legislative actions. Finally, the study argues that enhanced US support for Taiwan risks escalating tensions with China that might lead to military conflict and disruptions in global semiconductor supply chains while fostering pro-independence sentiments in Taiwan and provoking severe responses from China. It could also pose foreign policy challenges for other states – including Pakistan, India and Europe.

Keywords: US-China strategic competition, China's rise, Indo-Pacific Region, US-Taiwan relations, Taiwan, Biden administration, strategic ambiguity, strategic clarity, military supp

Chapter 1

Introduction

In contemporary international affairs, the strategic competition between the United States and China is a defining feature. In recent years, the Indo-Pacific region has come to prominence as a key centre of this global geopolitical rivalry. China's objectives in the Indo-Pacific were articulated by President Xi Jinping in the 20th National Congress: exercising authority over nearshore region, protecting its claims of sovereignty on Taiwan and South China Sea, and increasing economic integration via several initiatives including Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Nikkei Asia, 2022). On the other hand, the US has readjusted its strategy with a host of policies to maintain its dominance and counter growing influence of China. These include particularly the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and alliances like the QUAD and AUKUS. At the center of this strategic competition is Taiwan - a democratic island nation that possesses considerable geopolitical importance. The emerging US-China relationship, manifested in increasing strategic tension and power dynamics, has brought Taiwan to the forefront. Taiwan has become an important element in understanding the broader facets of US-China competition.

From the outset, US approach to Taiwan operated under the principle of "strategic ambiguity". It is a cautious strategy of the US that neither confirms nor denies that should Taiwan be attacked by China, the US would respond militarily. By keeping ambiguity, this approach of the US intends to deter both unilateral moves by Taiwan towards independence and Chinese aggression (Boon & Sworn, 2020). However, in recent times, the escalating US-China strategic competition and China's expanding influence in the region have resulted in a notable evolution in this policy. By implementing the "Pivot to Asia" policy, the US under Obama administration showed an initial change towards greater focus and increased presence in the Indo-Pacific, although Taiwan was not a primary focus during that period (Harris & Trubowitz, 2021). However, the Trump administration altered US policy with a more assertive stance, and strategic ambiguity underwent an offensive revision. The US started considering Taiwan a strategic asset in its efforts to contain China's rise (Jie, 2022). Under the Biden administration, the shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity in

theory has become more evident since President Biden has made it clear on four separate instances that the US would come to defend Taiwan (Xiang, 2024). With US-China rivalry intensifying, the US has bolstered its support for Taiwan which is manifested in legislative, diplomatic, military, economic, and technological domains. This evolution reflects a broader strategy to counterbalance China's growing influence and advance US strategic priorities in the region, consistent with offensive realism.

The primary motivations of the US in enhancing cooperation with Taiwan stem from increasing US-China competition, Taiwan's important strategic location, its crucial role in the American defense framework, importance in curbing Chinese expansion and significance in countering China's regional ambitions and keeping US credibility among allies. This recent US evolving policy and escalation of US support for Taiwan has profound implications for Indo-Pacific stability and global security. It risks exacerbating US-China tensions, potentially diminishing prospects for a peaceful Taiwan resolution as the US policy shifts and support might push Taiwan to take unilateral decision of independence, and could provoke severe Chinese reactions. Moreover, these may disrupt the global semiconductor supply chain and pose challenges to the foreign policies of other regional players, including Pakistan, India, and European nations as they balance their economic and strategic alignments.

The thesis employs the theoretical framework of offensive realism to analyze US strategy regarding Taiwan. The framework of offensive realism gives understanding by focusing on increasing US support to Taiwan to thwart China's rise as a regional hegemon and to preserve its own influence. The US views strategic position of Taiwan as vital in the broader US-China rivalry. Against this background, the US is shifting towards strategic clarity and emphasizing Taiwan's role as a strategic asset. This approach is in consistency with offensive realism and the framework's emphasis on balancing power and limiting the rise of potential hegemons.

1.1 Historical Background

Taiwan, then known as Formosa, was ruled by the Qing Dynasty as a part of the Fujian province starting in 1683. However, Taiwan was a frontier area, and the Qing's control over the island was limited. The local population in Taiwan was a mix of Han Chinese settlers and indigenous people (Kironka, 2023). Later in the 19th century, the struggle between the

Qing Dynasty and Meiji Japan was based on control of Korea and broader influence in East Asia. In the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), Japan decisively defeated the Qing Dynasty. The Qing Dynasty was compelled to surrender Taiwan to Japan as a result of Treaty of Shimonoseki signed in 1895. Japanese ruled Taiwan then for the next fifty years (He, 2007).

However, the defeat of Japan in the World War 2 in 1945 led to the end of its imperial ambitions. In accordance with Japan's surrender conditions, Taiwan was relinquished to the Republic of China (ROC), led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT) because Chiang Kai-shek backed the war efforts of US in the Pacific, and Presidents Roosevelt and Truman favoured Taiwan's return to ROC. This transfer was recognized by the Allied Powers, but it left unresolved issues with regards to status of Taiwan. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded on the China's mainland and recognised as the legitimate government of Chinese people after Chinese Communist Party of Mao Zedong won the Chinese Civil War. Meanwhile, the vanquished Nationalist Party, known as the Kuomintang and commanded by Chiang Kai-shek, moved to Taiwan and declared itself the legitimate government of all China (Charney & Prescott, 2000).

With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and PRC backing of North Korea in the fight, the US started to see Taiwan as a key defense against China. The US kept recognizing the Republic of China (ROC) as China's real government and suspended recognition of the PRC for thirty years. The Korean War deepened mistrust between the US and China, but it brought the US and Taiwan closer. During the war, the CCP planned to attack Taiwan to join it with mainland China, but President Truman stepped in. He dispatched 7th Fleet to the Strait of Taiwan. This move effectively stopped China and Taiwan from changing the status-quo. In 1954, the US and the ROC signed the Mutual Defence Treaty (MDT) as a result of the conflict. Despite the treaty's 1979 termination, it laid the groundwork for US interests in Taiwan's security for a very long time (Huang, 2023).

Later in 1968, following the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the US sought to improve ties with China with a hope to gain China's support in withdrawing itself from the Vietnam conflict. As a result, the Shanghai Communiqué was signed in 1972, in which the US recognized the One China Policy. The US established formal relations with China on December 15, 1978, and cut off official diplomatic ties with Taiwan by withdrawing its

military presence from the island and leaving the defense treaty. The US then encouraged China and Taiwan to engage in comprehensive bilateral dialogue for conflict resolution. Despite this, the US maintained an ambiguous approach to cross-strait relations. Covertly, it continued cultural, commercial, and unofficial diplomatic and security ties with Taiwan in order to strengthen its defense against China. This relationship was formalized through the Taiwan Relations Act in April 1979. This act guaranteed defense cooperation and arms sales of a defensive nature to Taiwan (Kirby et al., 2006). Then, through Taiwan Policy Review in 1994, the US allowed American and Taiwanese officials to visit each other and strengthened economic and military ties with Taiwan. In 1995, the US decided to give a visa to Taiwan's president, and it provoked criticism from China. In 1996, tensions rose in the Taiwan Strait when China held military exercises, and in response, the US deployed an aircraft carrier.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, US-Taiwan relations were complex since US was trying to balance its diplomatic engagement with China and simultaneously maintaining unofficial ties with Taiwan. In this era, the US maintained the approach of strategic ambiguity towards Taiwan, and the TRA continued to guide US policy. In the early 2000s, Taiwan's domestic politics witnessed a shift when Chen Shui-bian sworn in as President of Taiwan in 2000, who supported for a separate identity of Taiwanese and increased Taiwan's international recognition (Sullivan & Lowe, 2010). During this period, the US its support for Taiwan's defense but also encouraged cross-strait dialogue to avoid major escalation. In 2008, the next-President Ma Ying-jeou adopted conciliatory posture toward China. His administration tried to improve cross-strait relations through increased economic cooperation and dialogues (Matsuda, 2015). The US supported these efforts but at the same time, continued to uphold Taiwan's security commitments as per the TRA.

However, with the win of President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, ties between Taiwan and China became strained again. Representing the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Tsai's administration rejected the "One China" principle and made efforts in a bid to increase Taiwan's international presence (Li & Zhang, 2016). This led to increased friction with Beijing. In response to growing regional tensions and China's assertive actions, the US reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan. The Trump administration, and later the Biden administration, increased arms sales to Taiwan and conducted more frequent high-level official visits to Taipei.

From China's perspective, Taiwan is the final piece of its historical efforts to rectify the century of humiliation. Reunifying Taiwan is perceived as necessary for restoring China's honor and completing the historically unfulfilled task of integrating the lost territories. China contends that its relations with Taiwan and One China Policy are based on the 1992 Consensus. It was an informal agreement between Beijing and the former Taiwanese government, and it involved a mutual understanding that there is only one China, though both sides might have different interpretations of it. Furthermore, China considers any effort towards Taiwanese independence, particularly with US support, as a major step that undermines China's core national interests and a crucial limit that must not be breached (Shih & Huang, 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement

The increasing great power competition between the US and China creates many challenges for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan issue has become an essential facet of this competition. Amid this rivalry, Taiwan has become a focal point of US strategic interests. Taiwan has witnessed increasing US support as US has increasingly started viewing Taiwan as a strategic asset in its efforts to counterbalance mounting influence of China in the region. Theoretically, the US has shifted its policy of strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity which shows US' offensive revision of the former's approach. This shift calls for important questions regarding the implications of amplified US support for Taiwan with regards to regional stability, US-China relationship and potential for military conflict.

The problem lies in understanding how this growing US-China competition influences US policy on Taiwan, what primary motivations drive US support, and the implications of this support for global stability. This research aims to explore these aspects and offer a detailed examination of the developing geopolitical environment and its implications for regional security. By exploring the Taiwan factor within the context of US-China strategic competition, this research adds to the scholarly discussion on international relations and strategic studies, and provides unique insights that can apprise scholars about the complexities and risks associated with this critical geopolitical issue.

1.3 Hypothesis

The growing strategic rivalry between the US and China could increase US support for Taiwan.

1.4 Variables

Independent Variable (IV): The growing strategic rivalry between the US and China

Dependent Variable (DV): Increased US support for Taiwan

1.5 Operationalization of Variables

To investigate this hypothesis systematically, it is essential to operationalize the above variables through measurable indicators:

Growing strategic rivalry (IV): Competition for regional influence in Indo-Pacific, military presence, alliance building and economic dominance

Increased US support for Taiwan (DV): Diplomatic engagements, military Support, legislative actions, economic support and public statements and policies

1.6 Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze the evolution of the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region in recent years, with a particular focus on the US-China competition.
- 2) To identify and evaluate the primary motivations of the US in enhancing cooperation with Taiwan.
- 3) To examine the changes in US policy towards Taiwan amid increasing US-China strategic competition.
- 4) To assess the implications of increased US support for Taiwan in terms of regional stability and the possibility of military escalation.

1.7 Research Questions

- 1) How has the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region evolved in recent years, particularly concerning the US-China competition?
- 2) What are the primary motivations of the US in enhancing its cooperation with Taiwan?
- 3) How has US policy towards Taiwan changed against the backdrop of increasing US-China strategic competition?
- 4) What are the implications of increased US support for Taiwan in terms of regional stability and the possibility of military escalation?

1.8 Significance of the Research

This research thesis addresses a critical and timely issue in contemporary international relations. The research is important for several key reasons. First, the geopolitical relevance; the Indo-Pacific region is increasingly turning into the center of global strategic competition where Taiwan is positioned at its core. Understanding Taiwan factor in the US-China rivalry provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of international relations. Secondly, the study offers strategic insights by shedding light on the strategic calculus that drives US engagement with Taiwan. Thirdly, the research has policy implications as it digs deep into evolving US policy towards Taiwan and potential risks and implications associated with it.

Most importantly, this research fills the literature gap: previous research has covered Trump administration and its predecessor's policies towards Taiwan, but the literature often lacks a comprehensive analysis of the specific policies and actions of the US towards Taiwan under the Biden administration, as well as recent geopolitical developments. This study integrates an examination of the policies of the Biden administration and its predecessors towards Taiwan. Additionally, recent works have not applied the theoretical framework of offensive realism to examine US policy towards Taiwan. This study fills these gaps by integrating offensive realism to provide a new, fresh analysis on US motivations and strategies. By examining recent US initiatives, legislative acts, diplomatic engagements, economic and military support to Taiwan through this lens, the thesis offers a more detailed and theoretically grounded understanding of current US-China-Taiwan dynamics.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes the theoretical framework of offensive realism to analyze the growing US-China strategic competition and its impact on US support of Taiwan. Offensive realism, a variant of neo-realist theory in international relations, maintains that in an anarchical international structure, the natural thrust for power and security drive states which lead them to adopt aggressive strategies to maximize their influence and ensure their dominance (Mearsheimer, 2002).

Regarding US-China relations, offensive realism helps explain as to why the growing strategic rivalry between the two powers might lead to increased US support for Taiwan. According to offensive realism, the US perceives China's rise as a threat to its global dominance and regional power (Ibid.). As China is looking to increase its horizon and control in the region particularly over Taiwan—a strategically important location in the Indo-Pacific region—the US is likely to enhance its support for Taiwan to neutralize China's escalating power and to maintain its dominance in the region. This framework guides the analysis of how the US has adjusted its policy towards Taiwan amid China's growing military and economic power, the strategic motivations that are driving US support for Taiwan and the implications of this renewed support. The first chapter of the thesis discusses the theoretical framework of offensive at great length to explain its relevance in the study of US-China strategic competition and US support for Taiwan.

1.10 Research Methodology

This section provides the approach and methods used to study the research questions and test the hypothesis. It outlines research design, data collection and data analysis technique.

1.10.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology with a descriptive research design. This design is particularly suited for documenting and analyzing the evolution of US support and policy towards Taiwan in the purview of US-China strategic competition. This approach is suitable for understanding and explaining the nature of US-Taiwan relations and the broader geopolitical implications. It allows for a comprehensive examination of Taiwan factor within the broader US-China rivalry. This approach enables to document the historical trajectory of policy shifts, legislative changes, and strategic adjustments. It also helps to analyze drivers

behind US policy changes, and the implications of increased US support for Taiwan in terms of regional stability and potential for military escalation.

1.10.2 Data Collection

In this research, secondary sources are used in the data collection process. Existing data was analyzed and comprehend especially important policy documents rather than collecting fresh data. A wide variety of sources, including a vast body of literature, are used.

The following secondary sources were consulted for this research: The study begins with an examination of scholarly papers and peer-reviewed publications. These sources provide detailed analysis of geopolitical importance of Taiwan, US foreign policy, and the strategic competition between the US and China. These academic publications give atheoretical frameworks that support the study. Second, official US documents and government reports are examined —such as the National Security Strategy and Indo-Pacific Strategy. These are helpful as strategic primacies and objectives of the United States are explained in these publications.

In order to comprehend the legal and policy frameworks that guide US support for Taiwan, this research also looks at records and official statements and pertinent legislative acts, which are the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), Taiwan Assurance Act (TAA), Taiwan Travel Act (TTA), and Taiwan Policy Act (TPA). The research incorporates studies and briefs from research institutes and think tanks. The reports and scholarly literature is especially important as it provides a thorough analysis of the historical and current dimensions of the US-China-Taiwan triangle. To further consolidate and support the research, press conferences, speeches and public declarations about Taiwan which are made by US presidents are also used. These materials are helpful since they highlight the changes and priorities in American approach towards Taiwan. By secondary sources, the research provides a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the changes in US policy towards Taiwan, increased US support for Taiwan, its implications and the motivation behind these changes.

1.10.3 Data Analysis Technique

This research makes use of content analysis technique to analyze the data that is collected from secondary sources. Under this method, an in-depth analysis of different documents is

conducted. Mainly these include legislative records, policy papers and statements made by US officials in public. This data analysis technique is beneficial for examining US' Taiwan policy in the face of US rivalry with China.

This research, by going through the process of coding and classification, identifies main patterns and themes that outline US support towards Taiwan in the secondary sources. Furthermore, it assesses the changes in US policy priorities, and understands the causes behind these changes. Overall, it aids in building connections across various secondary data sources.

1.11 Literature Review

Vincent Wei-cheng Wang in his research discusses that the relationship between the US and Taiwan has seen increased support from the US in recent years. It is a reflection of a shift in policy to bolster Taiwan's position. This change is influenced by a decline in cross-Strait relations as well as the deteriorating US-China relations. The author maintains that the evolving nature of US-Taiwan relations emphasizes the need for continued attention to the dynamics of the region because shifts in policies and behaviors among the key players can have significant implications for the broader geopolitical landscape. Thus, maintaining a balance in the triangular dynamic is extremely crucial for setting aside future challenges and opportunities in the US-Taiwan relationship (Wang & deLisle, 2021). While the paper discusses the factors contributing to the positive US-Taiwan relations, such as US-China increasing competition, it does not dig deep into the specific mechanisms through which these changes have occurred, such as policy initiatives and diplomatic strategies. There is a need for deeper analysis into the precise mechanisms and diplomatic strategies.

S.V. Lebedev discusses the evolution of US 'strategic ambiguity' policy towards Taiwan. To him, the US approach of maintaining strategic ambiguity regarding Taiwan, initiated during the Eisenhower administration and it was to preserve the status quo in the Strait of Taiwan by deterring both Taiwanese independence and Chinese military intervention. However, during Trump's presidency, there were signs pointed to a possible shift from the long-standing strategic ambiguity policy. This change in approach finds its roots in domestic factors and a transaction like foreign policy (Lebedev, 2024).

When Biden assumed the presidency, the US took a clearer stance on Taiwan, which turned

out to be further away from strategic ambiguity. The US has enacted fresh laws, dispatched well-known personnel, like Nancy Pelosi, to visit Taiwan, and intensified military engagement with Taiwan. This move is attributed to the president's stance on human rights and democracy, the Chinese military provocations as well as similar US moves to counterbalance China. The shift has serious implications. One possible consequence is that the Taiwan Strait will become more intense and instable due to the fact that China will become more aggressive (Ibid.). Lebedev presents the wide-ranging analysis of the strategies of the past various US leaders and how a shift away from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity is made. Nonetheless, the impacts the global factors on this shift are not fully covered. The part dealing with the effects of strategic stability are insufficiently examined as well.

In "US-China-Taiwan in the Age of Trump and Biden: Towards a Nationalist Strategy", Dean P. Chen takes a close look at the changes in US-China-Taiwan relations in the age of Trump and Biden. The book examines the way these changes reflect a broader shift in American foreign policy. This shift moves from a global outlook to a more America-first approach. Chen begins by examining some key policies such as strategic ambiguity and the One-China Policy, and how they've evolved over time. The book shows how long-standing policies that have shaped US-China-Taiwan relations have changed over time. It points out the continuity and shifts in US policies from Trump to Biden's era. During Trump's tenure, his approach toward Taiwan marked a significant departure from tradition. Chen suggests that Trump's approach was more about focusing inward and putting national concerns first. This is consistent with Jacksonian nationalism. On the other hand, multilateralism and democratic principles have received greater attention under the Biden administration. This shift demonstrates how US foreign policy has been impacted by both internal political factors and external challenges (Chen, 2022).

The book highlights the rising competition between the US and China and it takes note of how both administrations' policies have influenced Taiwan's strategic environment. Furthermore, Chen argues that the US Congress' disillusionment with China has influenced its approach to Taiwan. In short, the book chronicling trace the ideological shift in American foreign policy, from Wilsonian liberalism to Jacksonian nationalism with regards to Taiwan (Ibid.). Chen offers a through analysis; however, it covers only the first half of Biden's presidency, up to 2022. As a result, it lacks a specific focus on the more recent policies and actions under the Biden administration.

In his book, "The Struggle for Taiwan: A History of America, China, and the Island Caught Between," Sulmaan Wasif Khan provides thorough examination about the historical and geopolitical factors that play their role in influencing relationship between the US, China, and Taiwan. This comprehensive account spans from middle of the 20th century to the present. Khan begins by explaining the Taiwan's geopolitical significance by tracing its contentious status back to the Allied declarations during World War II as it assured the return of Japanese-held Taiwan to China. However, the ensuing Chinese Civil War led to a difficult situation when Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek, after his defeat retreated to Taiwan under US protection (Khan, 2024). Then, Khan meticulously details the US policy through various administrations by highlighting key moments such as the Taiwan Straits Crises and the restoration of US-China relations. Khan also discusses the increasing tensions during the Trump era and the potential for conflict under US-China dynamics. He argues that while war is not inevitable, avoiding it requires careful consideration of historical lessons and strategic foresight. This book provides a thorough historical perspective but fails to give a comprehensive analysis of recent US policy changes.

The book "US-Taiwan Relations: Will China's Challenge Lead to a Crisis?" by Ryan Hass, Bonnie Glaser, and Richard Bush offers a nuanced exploration of emerging dynamics between the US, China, and Taiwan. It particularly focuses on the potential for military conflict. The authors provide a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis. The book highlights the growing concerns in Washington regarding military prowess of China and its ramifications for Taiwan. This alarm has spurred discussions on whether the US can continue to deter a Chinese attempt to forcibly annex Taiwan. The authors argue that Taiwan faces a military threat but it is also subject to an intensifying political campaign by China designed to erode the ability of the Taiwanese people to present their will. Hass, Glaser, and Bush critique the prevailing focus on military solutions and suggests that US policy should prioritize fortifying Taiwan's economy, political autonomy, and international dignity. They emphasize that maintaining credible military deterrence is necessary but insufficient on its own (Hass et al., 2023).

The authors propose a balanced approach that includes political, economic, and diplomatic measures to support Taiwan. The book provides a detailed analysis of China's strategies for unification with Taiwan; it contrasts the military threat with the political efforts to sway public opinion in Taiwan. The authors argue that while the risk of a Chinese military invasion

exists, it is not an inevitability. Instead, the decision will depend on various factors which include political developments in Beijing, Taipei, and Washington. The authors caution against taking measures such as permanently stationing US forces in Taiwan or formalizing a defense pact, which could provoke China and escalate tensions (Ibid.).

According to Sangsoo Lee, the US policy on Taiwan has been gradually shifting from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity. This evolution is driven by President Biden's emphasis on prioritizing democracy and human rights alongside Xi Jinping's military threats to annex Taiwan and China's adoption of a gray zone strategy. The policy change intends to curb the rise of China. Taiwan's strategic significance within the wider Indo-Pacific region and US-China relations further contributes to the change of US policy towards Taiwan. A mix of factors at home and abroad influences the changing way the US deals with Taiwan. These include domestic politics, threats to global security, and rivalry with China (Lee, 2023). Lee's research doesn't look at the specific actions the Biden team has done or and it does not offensive realism to make sense of these shifts.

Chiang Liao believes that strategic ambiguity gives the US room to maneuver in its Taiwan policy. This approach helps to prevent tensions from rising between Taiwan and China. The paper stresses that ambiguity helps keep peace and stability in the region. It does this by preventing miscalculations and misunderstandings that might turn into a crisis with strategic clarity. The study highlights how crucial it is to keep a strategic ambiguity. This approach lets the US back Taiwan without starting a fight with China. It also has an impact on the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. This research talks about the importance of strategic ambiguity but does not fully look into the changing dynamics between the US, China, and Taiwan.

Jingdong Yuan talks about the "One China" policy that the US has followed for more than 40 years. This policy now faces challenges. These challenges come from China's growing economic strength stronger military, and increased pressure on Taiwan. Washington has taken action to address these issues. It has introduced new laws, held top-level talks between officials, backed Taiwan's presence on the world stage, and stepped up weapon sales. Yuan points out that the choices and steps the US takes to address the shifting situation in the region will have a huge impact on Taiwan's security and overall peace in the Taiwan Strait (Yuan, 2023). However, the study has not looked at how more US backing for Taiwan might

affect the area's stability in the long run.

Voloshina discusses in "The End of the US Policy of 'Strategic Ambiguity' toward Taiwan?" that there is still a debate whether the Biden administration has shifted away from this ambiguity towards strategic clarity regarding Taiwan. Voloshina highlights the significance of understanding the political foundation and implications of the US stance on Taiwan. The analysis presented in the paper suggests that the shift could have far-reaching consequences for US-Taiwan relations and regional stability in Asia (Voloshina, 2022). Overall, the paper underscores the complexity of the Taiwan issue within the broader US foreign policy in the region. The paper was written at the onset of Biden Administration and does not encapsulate the recent developments occurred under Biden administration.

Graham Allison's book "Destined to War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" presents a hypothetical scenario that Taiwan, if it is recognized as an independent nation, would rank among the world's most prosperous democratic states. Taiwan has established a market economy which even surpass those of the Philippines and Vietnam. Despite this, China is determined in preventing any independence of Taiwan state. Historically, no nation has challenged China over this issue. However, Allison speculates that if the US president declares a stronger commitment to defend Taiwan as per the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and he signaled a change from the traditional policy of strategic ambiguity, then this new stance might be perceived by the President of Taiwan a support for pursuing independence. Consequently, Taiwan could announce to seek full UN membership and reject the 1992 Consensus (Allison, 2017).

In response, China might initiate another Taiwan Strait Crisis by launching ballistic and cruise missile tests into Taiwanese waters to disrupt commercial shipping. Taiwan's food, natural resources and energy are highly dependent on imports; thus, a prolonged blockade could severely damage Taiwan's economy and lead to severe food shortages (Ibid.). The book takes a hypothetical scenario and does not provide a detailed examination of the specific policies and actions of the Biden administration towards Taiwan that could influence US-China-Taiwan dynamics.

Hoo Tiang Boon, in "Strategic Ambiguity and the Trumpian Approach to China-Taiwan Relations," delves into the concept of strategic ambiguity under the Trump administration. He links the shift in US policy to number of reasons, such as populism in US, influence of

Congress, establishment of foreign policy, and Trump style of foreign policy which was transactional and personalized. The analysis challenges the perception of the US strongly favouring Taiwan amidst escalating US-China competition and notes that Trump's approach added more greater risk in cross-strait relations, yet preserved overall balance. The paper suggests that Trump's unique blend of domestic drivers, individual-level factors, and evolving US-China power competition led to a nuanced strategic ambiguity (Boon & Sworn, 2020). Research's focus is more on Trump administration's approach to strategic ambiguity and it does not include Biden administration policies and legislative actions.

Filip Grzegorzewski takes a detailed appraisal of the US policy regarding Taiwan during the Donald Trump administration. He notes that the main factor behind this change was to counterbalance China, in consistent with offensive realism. It was under Trump for the first time the US explicitly framed ties with Taiwan into a larger Indo-Pacific strategy, but it maintained core aspects of the 'One China' policy. The US increased its support for Taiwan through stepped-up arms sales, bolstering Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, countering China's international isolation efforts, and integrating Taiwan into global supply chain restructuring. This strategy sought to use strategic ambiguity as a means to counter Beijing's expanding regional dominance (Grzegorzewski, 2022). Although the 'One China' policy was not formally revised, the recalibration of strategic ambiguity heightened significance of Taiwan in power rivalry of US-China and it postponed the potential for peaceful unification. The paper applies the framework of offensive realism and analyze solely Trump administration.

G.I. Sheriff, in his paper, concludes that the US-Taiwan relationship significantly challenges regional stability by intensifying the ongoing US-China Cold War. The US support for Taiwan is viewed as a deliberate strategy to counterbalance China's rising strength. The paper argues for a non-interference principle and recognition of Taiwan as part of China to prevent further conflict escalation. China's increasing military drills around Taiwan and its strong statements against US support suggest a coming confrontation between China and the US (GI et al., 2021).

Yuan-kang Wang in his paper "Rethinking US Security Commitment to Taiwan" argues against ending the US promises of security to Taiwan because this move would not decrease but rather heighten the likelihood of conflict in East Asia. Contrary to the earlier

arguments, the paper asserts that maintaining the US security commitment to Taiwan is essential for regional stability. It considers Taiwan as a significant asset within the broader context of US grand strategy towards Asia. The paper argues that US is supporting Taiwan to save the democracy as Taiwan's democratic values and governance model contribute to regional stability and presents a model of freedom and human rights that contrasts with authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, Taiwan's strategic location influences the geopolitical landscape. Taiwan's economic strength and technological advancements also contribute to regional prosperity and cooperation. Thus, Taiwan's presence and the US strong security commitment towards Taiwan are vital (Wang, 2018). Although Wang's argument for maintaining US security commitments to Taiwan is insightful but may not fully consider unintended consequences of such commitments.

Alexey V. Stepanov's paper examines the significance of Taiwan for the US military policy towards China. It also considers the historical foundations of US policy, including the Three Communiques, the Six Guarantees and the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The analysis highlights how recent developments, such as Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, have highlighted critical role of Taiwan in US military strategy in the region. The current state of strong commitment and military assistance to Taiwan is portrayed as important element in the broader US strategy (Stepanov, 2022). The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for strategic foresight and diplomatic engagement to manage potential conflicts effectively given the delicate balance of power and interests.

Yao-Yuan Yeh's study examines the factors that influences American public support for military assistance to Taiwan particularly against the background of the Sino-US trade war. The research highlights that US national interests are a crucial factor that shapes public support for Taiwan's defense. When the US public perceives China's military as a significant threat, their support for Taiwan's defense increases. This support varies with the perceived level of threat from China. The study challenges the idea that moral factors significantly drive public support for Taiwan. Instead, the research finds that national interests and threat perceptions are more impactful in shaping public opinion regarding military assistance to Taiwan. Moral considerations, contrary to expectations, appear to play a less prominent role (Yeh & Wu, 2020).

In their article, Richard Haass and David Sacks claim that US strategic ambiguity no longer

works well to prevent conflict by keeping intentions unclear. This approach fails to stop Chinese aggression. The authors want a change to strategic clarity. They believe that a clear US promise to defend Taiwan is the key to keep the region stable and to stop Beijing's provocative plans. They note that China's growing military capabilities and President Xi Jinping's assertive actions have increased concerns about a potential conflict over Taiwan. The authors highlight that China now has the capability to challenge US interests directly. This has prompted the Biden administration to focus on strengthening ties with Taiwan. The article critiques the current US strategy of strategic ambiguity. They assert that strategic ambiguity is no longer sufficient against a China that has significantly increase its military prowess in recent decades and also, because the US no longer has a military advantage there. Haass and Sacks support the notion of strategic clarity, where the US clearly states its resolve to save Taiwan and even the potential use of military force and economic sanctions. Additionally, Haass and Sacks propose that Washington should complement military support with diplomatic efforts to signal the severe economic and political costs China would face if it acted aggressively against Taiwan. But Haass and Sacks also acknowledge potential challenges to implementing strategic clarity. Such a shift might strain US-China relations and provoke Taiwanese aspirations of formal independence (Sacks, 2023).

In contrast, authors like Bonnie S. Glaser and Bonny Lin argues that while the US need to increase its support towards Taiwan, an absolute commitment could lead to a Chinese attack especially if China perceives it as a threat to its interests (Lin, 2024). Likewise, Michael J. Mazarr and Patrick say that an unequivocal US support and commitment to Taiwan can be emotionally appealing but strategically it is problematic. Mazarr highlights that a security guarantee could provoke China and strain US regional relationships (Porter & Mazarr, 2021). Another analyst Michael J. Glennon argues that a clear security guarantee would breach the one-China policy and the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). This can have severe legal and diplomatic repercussions because one-China policy and TRA set the framework for US China relations and a security guarantee to Taiwan could breach these agreements (Sacks, 2023).

The paper by Robert G. Sutter sees the evolution of US policy towards Taiwan-China relations since middle of 1990s. The research paper asserts that although there have been fluctuations in US-China relations, US policy towards Taiwan has remained relatively stable. Sutter emphasizes the permanence in US policy which focuses on One China policy and

stability in the Taiwan Strait. The paper demonstrates that the US stance on Taiwan-China relations has an influence from a mix of geopolitical elements, domestic politics, and broader strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific region (Sutter, 2018). Overall, this highlights how the US has adopted a pragmatic approach to maintain peace and stability in the area considering the tricky relationships between the US, China, and Taiwan. Nonetheless, the study does not focus on recent policy shifts under Biden and their implications.

Another paper, titled “From Strategic Ambiguity Toward Strategic Clarity: US Taiwan Policy under Biden Presidency”, examines a significant transformation in US policy towards Taiwan under the Biden administration. It has shifted from the traditional approach of strategic ambiguity to a more explicit stance termed strategic clarity. This change is clear commitment by the Biden administration to support Taiwan if China attacks. This transition shows the evolving dynamics of US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region which impacts not only US-China relations but also broader regional stability. The paper notes that the situation in the Taiwan Strait has grown more dangerous as the possibility of conflict is becoming more imminent (Liu, 2023). However, there is limited discussion on the diplomatic efforts associated this policy shift.

Sahil Yar Muhammad concludes that China is highly likely to resort to military action to achieve unification with Taiwan as it is driven by its sovereignty. Against this background, the paper emphasize on the necessity for the US to strengthen its relations with Taiwan and cement the alliances with fellow democracies as a means of deterring China from taking aggressive action against Taiwan. Furthermore, the paper posits that if China succeeds in its ambitions regarding Taiwan, it could signal a significant shift in the world order. Such an outcome would likely lead to a quasi-multilateral world where other powers would prioritize their own interests over US pressures (Muhammad, 2021).

Another notable paper written by Dalei Jie examines the evolution of US strategic thinking regarding Taiwan. It says that the US now views Taiwan's alienation from China in its national interests and considers Taiwan a strategic asset. This shift is motivated by US interests in economic, political, and security domains as well as new considerations of Taiwan's inherent military value. Most importantly, it says that the increasing US-China strategic competition is a major driver of the US strategic thinking about Taiwan. In the US, there is an increasing belief that preserving Taiwan's separation from China serves US

strategic interests in Indo-Pacific in the best manner. It warns against focusing solely on Taiwan's strategic significance as this could provoke conflict with China (Jie, 2022). It concludes that the evolving US perspective on Taiwan is not compatible with Chinese views on the issue and this raises the concerns about the potential for conflict over Taiwan. Jie gives analysis about US strategic thinking regarding Taiwan but does not address the practical implications for US-China interactions.

Another book, "America's Coming War with China: A Collision Course over Taiwan" by Ted Galen Carpenter examines the growing independence movement within Taiwan and China's firm stance that Taiwan is a breakaway province of China, which has to be reunified, by force if necessary. The book argues that the current US policy of strategic ambiguity which endorses the One China policy but also simultaneously supply arms to Taiwan and implicitly promise the defense of Taiwan its defense creates a dangerous potential for miscalculation by all parties involved. Furthermore, Carpenter provides a detailed diplomatic history of the US-China-Taiwan conflict (Carpenter, 2015). This book critiques the US approach which tries to balance diplomatic engagement with China against its strong commitments to Taiwan. Carpenter contends that this ambiguous stance is unsustainable and it has the potential to provoke a military confrontation. This book offers long-term implications of US commitment to Taiwan but there is a need to explore legislative acts, diplomatic engagements, and military strategies shaping US-China-Taiwan dynamics.

Sheryn Lee writes that the prospects of conflict are raising because Taiwan is now increasingly considered itself an self-governing, independent entity. As a result, Taiwan's vulnerability in Northeast Asia demands its dependence on the US forward-deployed forces for defense. Taiwan is relying on US forward-deployed forces for defence because of its vulnerability in Northeast Asia. Beijing discourages any support or encouragement Washington may give to Taipei because it sees any such assistance to Taiwan as a threat to security of China. Lee explains that the aim of China is to unite Taiwan with the Chinese mainland as it is an important component of its campaign of national rejuvenation. The objective of China is the total unification of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. President Xi Jinping considers this an unswerving historical task for CCP. Also, For Xi to maintain his position of control and strengthen his grip on the CCP, Taiwan must be united. The historical context shows that China could not take control of Taiwan through force in 1950s because of Korean war and limited military capability of China. China feels national humiliation

because of its failure and disappointment to reunify Taiwan in its past attempt to seize it. However, Beijing has since employed gray-zone tactics, which include military and nonmilitary means, to bring the military balance in its favor (Lee, 2022).

Furthermore, Lee identifies several factors which drives American support for Taiwan. First, the strategic significance of Taiwan location along first Island chain in the East China Sea plays a role in American support. The US recognizes the importance of Taiwan's offshore islands and an independent Taiwan from standpoint of economy, politics and military since they deny China naval freedom and protect the interests of key allies like Japan. Secondly, the ideological justification for supporting Taiwan's democratic and capitalist government against an authoritative Chinese regime has become more prominent in the context of US-China strategic competition. Taiwan's contrast to mainland China's communist autocracy and its commitment to democracy align with American values and interests. American support for Taiwan is also motivated by the worries about supply chain and technological reliance on others. Protection of supply of vital technologies, particularly in the semiconductor industry, is crucial for the US and its partners as Taiwan is a major semiconductor manufacturer (Ibid.).

A RAND report's key findings indicate that Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Philippines – they key allies of US - oppose reductions in US support to Taiwan due to their concerns about regional stability. These allies believe that decrease in US support could increase the likelihood of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. Additionally, Japan, the ROK, and the Philippines view any waning support to Taiwan as a signal of a waning US commitment to their own security. This concern is particularly notable because these states have mutual defense treaties with the US. These treaties include an explicit promise of US to support them if attacked (Hornung et al., 2023).

Obaid in his research article explore the consequences of China's invasion of Taiwan. The articles posits that an invasion of Taiwan by China would result in a dramatic escalation of regional tensions which could potentially lead to a military conflict with the United States and its allies. Such a scenario would put the US in difficult place where it will have to respond to China's aggression while avoiding further escalation. Economically, the invasion would have severe repercussions. It would disrupt the global supply chain significantly. Politically, the international community would likely condemn China's actions and impose

sanctions as it happened in Russia's invasion of Ukraine where global community fiercely responded. Additionally, an invasion could shift the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region where China would gain increased influence and would challenge the existing regional order (Obaid-Ur-Rehman, 2022). This analysis could benefit from a more detailed exploration of the potential responses from key regional players – South Korea and Japan.

1.12 Research Gap

A careful review of existing literature reveals that there is a lack of focused study on the specific policies and actions of the US towards Taiwan under the Biden administration, as well as recent geopolitical developments. This study integrates an examination of the policies of the Biden administration and its predecessors towards Taiwan. It fills a notable gap in existing literature by applying the theoretical framework of offensive realism to these policies. By utilizing this framework and linking US policies towards Taiwan in the framework of Indo-Pacific strategy, the study analyzes US motivations and strategies and its link with US-China strategic competition. It examines recent US actions—including legislative measures, diplomatic efforts, and military and economic support to Taiwan. It offers a detailed and theoretically informed perspective on the changing dynamics between the US, China, and Taiwan.

1.13 Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter covers the historical background, research methodology, and literature review of the topic.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework of offensive realism which provides the theoretical foundation for the research thesis.

Chapter 3: Indo-Pacific Geopolitics: US-China Competition and Strategic Imperatives in Taiwan Policy

This chapter examines the changing dynamics of the US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region and the primary motivations behind the US efforts to enhance cooperation with Taiwan.

Chapter 4: From Ambiguity to Clarity: Evolution of US Policy towards Taiwan and its Implications

The chapter analyzes the evolution of US policy and support towards Taiwan in response to the intensifying US-China strategic competition and discusses the broader implications of increased US support for Taiwan.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter serves as the conclusion of the thesis which integrates findings and discussion while providing comprehensive summary of the research outcomes and testing the hypothesis that the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China could increase US support for Taiwan

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realism is a dominant theory in international relations and it offers critical insights into global power dynamics. Originating from the historical analysis of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides, realism has evolved from classical realism, which attributes state behavior to human nature, to structural realism or neorealism, which focuses on the anarchic international system. Within neorealism, defensive realism says that states seek to preserve the status quo rather than aggressively expand, while offensive realism, which is championed by John Mearsheimer, argues that states strive for maximum power and regional hegemony due to the anarchic system's constraints.

Offensive realism is particularly useful for analyzing US-China strategic competition and the Taiwan issue. Mearsheimer contends that states are driven by fear and the pursuit of dominance. Because of this, they engage in aggressive strategies to prevent rival hegemonies. This approach explains the US' increasing support for Taiwan in order to counterbalance China's rising influence and prevent its regional hegemony in Asia. The strategic ambiguity policy, traditionally employed by the US to deter both Chinese aggression and unilateral Taiwanese independence, has recently shifted towards a more explicit support for Taiwan, reflecting an offensive realist strategy. This shift underscores the US aim to maintain dominance and counteract China's strategic ambitions. In the following sections, this thesis utilizes Offensive Realism to analyze US policy towards Taiwan.

1.1 Realism

There are various theories within the academic discipline of international relations that simplify the geopolitical realities, and realism is considered the most dominant and prevailing theory to decode geopolitical competition being played on the world stage. The roots of realism can be traced back to Thucydides who wrote the book "History of Peloponnesian War" about the war that occurred between Athens and Sparta (Eckstein, 2003). A famous adage this book contains is still prominent: "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that it instilled in Sparta that made the war inevitable." Classical realism started from here when Thucydides marked power politics as a rule of human behavior. For classical realists,

Morgenthau, it is human nature that is egoistic, brutal, and selfish, driving the world towards conflicts and competition (Morgenthau, 1946).

Then comes the Structural realism or Neo-realism that has its foundation in the groundbreaking work of Kenneth N. Waltz: “Theory of International Politics”. Waltz, unlike classical realists, began his understanding of international politics with the international structure instead of with human nature. Waltz argues that understanding international politics requires more than a unit-level analysis: an examination of structure. He asserts that another distinction between neorealism and classical realism is how they perceive anarchy (Waltz, 1979). According to classical realists, anarchy is a condition that produces certain issues that need to be resolved by states. On the other hand, neorealists believe that states are fundamentally equal and functionally similar, but the difference arises because of how power is distributed differently among states. Moreover, domestic and international politics are totally different in ordering principles. Hierarchy exists in the domestic arena where each actor functions according to the given task, controlled by a governing central authority (Lobell, 2017). International politics, however, lacks a central authority that should have governed states. Meaning, there is no overarching power above the states.

There are several subbranches of realism; it is not a single theory; however, these all agree on a few common presumptions. First, international relations have conflictual nature as anarchy is the rule and order of the world. The point to be noted here is that anarchy does not mean chaos or lawlessness; rather, it means the lack of any central authority that governs international politics (*Ibid.*). Second, unit of international relations are states, not classes or individuals. These states serve their own interests, known as national interests. Thus, for neo-realists, domestic conditions do not affect the international politics; instead, it is the structure - an anarchic international structure. Even though they concur on the previously listed points, realism schools differ from each other on wide range of themes. Neo-realism is further categorized into two strands: Defensive Realism and Offensive Realism. This thesis incorporates offensive realism to understand the complexities surrounding US-China strategic competition and Taiwan.

1.2 Defensive Realism

The field of international relations has been greatly impacted by the book ‘Theory of

International Politics' written by Kenneth Waltz. As opposed to classical realists like Hans Morgenthau, who underscores individual-level and state-level elements to explain international activities, Waltz focuses on the anarchic nature of the international system (Ladyman, 1998). According to Waltz's structural realism, often known as neorealism, the international system's anarchic order is the causal force that molds the goals and inclinations of states. It is due to this anarchic nature that pushes states to prioritize survival above all other interests. The offshoot of neorealism, Defensive realism, maintains that states are not as much concerned for power as they are for security (Baylis & Smith, 2006). The concept of defensive realism says that preserving its power and standing in the system is a primary goal of any state rather than maximizing power. According to Waltz's defensive realism, the states behave in a defensive way to preserve the status quo rather than to tip it because the costs of increasing power are much higher than the advantages (Waltz, 1979).

Defensive realism regards the security dilemma that this is the major force that is shaping international relations. Since states are not sure about the intentions of other states in this international anarchic structure, they tend to exaggerate the dangers posed to them by other states (Tang, 2009). The increase in the security of one state is taken as a decrease in its security by another state. Resultantly, if a state improves its military capabilities, it generates an environment of distrust for another state. This spiral loop continues and it intensifies rivalry among states. However, defensive realism offers an optimistic analysis regarding the resolution of disputes (Jalil, 2019). According to defensive realism, informational problems are frequently the cause of disputes. As a lack of mutual knowledge of intents leads to security issues, more information sharing between states might reduce the security conundrum and promote collaboration. States can employ different measures to strengthen trust to achieve mutual security. These include the development of international organizations to settle disputes, strategic discussion, arms control agreements, and confidence-building measures.

1.3 Offensive Realism

Other structural realist approaches have challenged the defensive realism, an offshoot of neorealism. An alternative perspective on state priorities and motivations related to security and power can be found in John Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism. Mearsheimer contends that states can never be certain of how much power is adequate for survival, even while he shares

Waltz's structural perspective and acknowledges that states' survival is a crucial goal in the anarchic international system. States also find it more difficult to determine the exact amount of power needed for security due to the frequent changes in power among them. Consequently, the first and foremost objective of each state is to increase its share of global power, regardless of it being at the cost of other states (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The aforementioned observations significantly deviate from Waltz's proposition that states pursue power rationally since they view power merely as a means to an end which is survival. Offensive realism holds that states desire the greatest amount of power. As a result, the pursuit of power drives their foreign policy decisions. What poses the biggest risk to the influence and security of a country? The offensive realism paradigm offers a clear answer: the main danger to American interests is the emergence of a rival superpower that will challenge America's exclusive standing as the region's hegemon (Ibid.). The US is the only nation that can lay claim to domination over its region; it is not a worldwide hegemon, but it is unmatched as a great power.

According to Mearsheimer, the halting power of water prevents states from becoming a global hegemon and projecting their military might throughout the world. As a result of this hindrance, the world is doomed to constant great-power competition. A great power's ideal position would be that of a regional hegemon, with total authority over its territory. Thus, the primary objective of major powers is to establish themselves as regional hegemons. Presently, China is currently the only other major state with the military and economic might to challenge for regional hegemony (Goswami, 2022). Therefore, preventing China from assuming military and economic supremacy over the Asia Pacific region is the US' top strategic aim to ensure that it will have no peer adversaries to its level that maintain regional hegemony. Thus, the US seeks to thwart regional incursion by China and Russia. The premise of an offensive realism approach is that major countries, regardless of their domestic politics and ideologies, want hegemony and will behave forcefully when it serves their interests. China's and Russia's revisionist aspirations in the modern world are more motivated by systemic imperatives rather than due to authoritarian regimes. The US should focus its efforts on forming an anti-China coalition based on the balance of power in order to restrain Beijing's regional hegemonic ambitions (Scott, 2018).

The theory of Mearsheimer is a system-level realism theory that is inspired by defensive

realism of Walt and classical realism of Morgenthau. Mearsheimer adopts Morgenthau's supposition that states aim to amass the greatest amount of power possible for themselves. But the reason why they act in this way is because of the absence of a global governing authority as Waltz assumes. Mearsheimer contends that the anarchic system drives major powers to act aggressively and participate in power struggles. His main argument is that major powers are constantly vying for dominance and are terrified of one another (Jalil, 2019). Major powers' primary goal is to preserve their dominance and prevent other states from dominating their regions.

Mearsheimer's thesis is predicated on five fundamental tenets:

- 1) Anarchic international system
- 2) Great powers have the capability to destroy one another
- 3) The ultimate purpose of a state is its survival
- 4) Great powers are not aware of the intentions of other states
- 5) Great powers are fundamentally rational (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The first presumption holds that there is anarchy in the international system, with independent states deferring to no supreme authority. It denotes the absence of a supranational government or a central authority in the international system. Anarchic international systems hence result in conflicts and wars (Lobell, 2002). The second premise is that powerful nations can militarily attack one another in order to inflict harm or even total destruction. According to the third principle, a state's main objective is to survive. A state's survival comes first in all situations. The need for survival trumps all other objectives. States' suspicion of the motives of other states constitutes the fourth bedrock assumption. States dread one another and think there is no guarantee they won't launch attacks on one another. The states' intentions are fluid and contingent upon the opportunities afforded to them. The final tenet of offensive realism holds that states are rational actors with survival instincts and the limitations of the international system dictating their behavior (Schmidt, 2004).

These five presumptions combined to cause major powers to behave aggressively toward one another. The presumptions result in power maximization, self-help, and fear. Furthermore, relative power is of more concern than absolute power for states, and such kind of behavior often leads to security dilemmas (Toft, 2005). Moreover, hegemony is a key concept in offensive realism. According to Mearsheimer, reaching the position of hegemon

is almost impossible. No state has achieved the feat of worldwide hegemon in world history because continents are divided by vast oceans which prevent any single state from dominating other regions. A state can only become a regional hegemon, and the US is the only nation that has achieved regional hegemony in world history. The US was the only dominant force in the globe after the Cold War, and this idea shaped its actions. Since then, the US has surpassed regional powers to become a superpower, and it has made every effort to keep this esteemed position of power around the world (Mearsheimer, 2001). The United States had a significant role in impeding the aspirations of many states to establish regional hegemony which included Soviet Union, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany (Myšička, 2021). Accordingly, offensive realists contend that the fact that there was a lack of a local great power that could counterbalance the US is what allowed the US to become a regional hegemon (Popescu, 2019). European powers were found themselves caught in other threats in their region that ultimately provided free hand for the rise of the US. Had they stopped and contained the rise of the US, the US would not be a regional hegemon today (Ikenberry, 1989).

Mearsheimer claims that because the US dominates the Western Hemisphere but not Northeast Asia or Europe, it is the only major power to have attained the status of regional hegemon. Furthermore, as a regional hegemon, the US' fundamental objective is to preserve current international system and thwart the rise of a rival regional hegemon. Many scholars overlook this significant and persuasive argument of offensive realism. A regional hegemon is defined by offensive realism as a status quo power that seeks to thwart the rise of other regional hegemons (Elman, 2004). According to the notion of offensive realism, China would assertively challenge the rules-based international order which is spearheaded by the United States and would rise as a regional hegemon. The idea of offensive realism perfectly fits in the US-China strategic competition (Popescu, 2019). Both states are currently engaged in a struggle for supremacy. Beijing is vying for control over Asia, while Washington is attempting to prevent Beijing from this regional hegemony.

Offensive realism holds that the United States has to react to China's ascent and make an effort to contain its rise (Mearsheimer, 2014). Since the US-China rivalry is unavoidable, Taiwan will be a crucial factor in the hegemony battle. In offensive realism, a state is considered a hegemon if it possess sufficient power to subjugate other states within its system. Mearsheimer contends that achieving worldwide hegemony is not practical. For the

existing hegemon, the rise of a rival regional hegemon in a different region of the world is detrimental. Thus, the new potential regional hegemon will be hindered by the local powers. Local forces may be able to prevent the emergence of a possible hegemon. The powers have two options when dealing with an extremely powerful and hostile potential hegemon that is hard to contain, which includes buck-passing and balance (Ibid.).

According to offensive realism, states that achieve regional hegemony want to prevent other geographical areas from being dominated by rival powers (Wong, 2016). In the case of Taiwan, the US has started viewing it as a strategic asset in the Asia-Pacific region and consider its peaceful reunification against the US interest. Against this background, the US support for Taiwan can be seen with the aim to offset the growing sway of China and prevent China from achieving dominance in East Asia. By ensuring China does not dominate the Asia-Pacific region, the US aims to maintain a balance of power and prevent a single power from exercising undue influence (Hu, 2022). The US is apprehensive that if somehow China successfully reunifies Taiwan, it might lead to unchecked expansion and increased influence globally. There is no gainsaying that the US is pursuing an aggressive containment strategy since Donald Trump took office. As the US does not accept the peer competitor, it is making every effort to roll back China's rise. Since two tigers cannot live in the same mountain, the US wants to ensure Taiwan stays its ally because Taiwan is so vital to maintaining US dominance and alliance system.

1.4 Offensive Realism, Strategic Ambiguity and Taiwan

Strategic ambiguity is the deliberate policy of the US when it comes to Taiwan issue. According to this, the US does not explicitly state whether or not it would come to defend Taiwan if China were to attack it. This produces a multifold deterrence: preventing China from invading Taiwan and at the same time, preventing Taiwan from unilateral declaration of independence, a red line of China that could ultimately drag China to attack Taiwan (Wu, 2021). While the US is still concerned for the peace and stability in the Taiwan strait and maintained state-quo, it has more recently, notably under President Trump and Biden, started using offensive treatment of the strategic ambiguity policy. Against this background, the US has increased its diplomatic, military and economic support towards Taiwan (Hsieh, 2020). This clarifies that the US is driven by the interests of derailing China's rise. Hence, offensive realism is the most appropriate theory that will serve the purpose in this thesis to analyze the

policy of the US.

The biggest development of the twenty-first century is the growth and rise of China, a state with nuclear weapons and second-largest economy. In the eyes of the West, particularly the US, China's rise is a serious danger and security concern to their interests (Zhang, 2021). Taiwan issue and the South China Sea are particular instances where the policies of China are viewed as non-status quo, aimed to disturb the international order. John Mearsheimer is of the same view and believes that China's ascent is a direct threat to the US dominance, so the US should contain and roll back the rise of China. He contends that China is the most serious challenge to the US in the twenty-first century. A powerful China would be an assertive state seeking to establish regional hegemony rather than a status quo power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Although the present does not show any more aggressive policies of China, there is no guarantee that the aggressive intentions would not appear in the future. On this basis, the US wants to preclude the emergence of China as a regional hegemon. The US is offensively pursuing its strategic ambiguity policy and believes that peace will come only through balance of power.

The manner in which the global hegemonies hinder other regional powers from gaining control of distant regions is dependent upon the balance of power in the region. In cases where the major powers are evenly divided and do not have the potential to form a hegemony, the distant hegemony can safely avoid any conflicts in those areas. However, in the event that a regional hegemon starts to rise in a region, the superpower or global hegemony's first course of action should be to let the local powers handle the crisis and maintain control, instead of directly intervening in the crisis. Superpower will oppose the enemy if the major local powers do not confront the threat (Walt, 2018). Besides, Mearsheimer also emphasizes on inflicting security challenges on a competing regional power in a bid to impede its ability to operate freely in other continents. This tactic includes provoking security issues or disputes in the adversary's close vicinity to divert its military might, attention, and resources on dealing with local threats (Layne, 2002). The idea is to prevent the opposing power from becoming involved in different international events by keeping it distracted from security issues; in this case, entangling China to divert its resources towards Taiwan issue. Mearsheimer argues that this strategy is a logical reaction to the competitive character of international relations where governments aim to maximize their power and security at the expense of possible adversaries. This way existing hegemon fosters

complex geopolitical issues near a rival state to hinder its freedom of action beyond its immediate region. Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan points to the same strategy; objectives of which could be to push China to invade Taiwan as this way the US could impose sanctions on China, and China could have faced international backlash (Farooq, 2023).

Taiwan is an unsinkable aircraft carrier which holds a strategic importance. It is important to not let Taiwan fall into the hands of Taiwan as the location of the island help to contain air and naval forces of China within the first island chain (Tucker & Glaser, 2011). Taiwan and preventing it from falling into the hands of Beijing. That is the primary strategic reason we will fight and die for Taiwan. Another important reason is that if the United States abandons Taiwan, it will send a negative indication to other US allies in the region, notably Japan and South Korea. The US views Taiwan as a strategic card to counterbalance the increasing influence of China in the region (Mearsheimer, 2014). Thus, the US strategic thinking on Taiwan has become more irreconcilable with Chinese perspectives, leading to China's loss of faith on the long-term objectives of the US (Jie, 2022).

US National Security Strategy (NSS) 2022 explicitly characterizes China as the only peer competitor that has the intent and the military, economic, technological, and diplomatic capabilities to reshape the international order which is away from the US-led liberal world order (The White House, 2022). Taiwan played an instrumental role in US policy under President Trump and Biden in restraining China's ascent and counterbalancing its expansion. It is now considered as an asset in the US efforts against China's rise, which seen by inclusion of Taiwan in important strategic papers of the US, which include the important Indo-Pacific Strategy and the National Security Strategy (NSS) (Jie, 2022). Both Biden and Trump administrations adopted an offensive theoretical lens to deal with the issue of Taiwan. In other words, they pursued offensive handling of the strategic ambiguity policy, signaling a change that views Taiwan as an asset that is strategically vital for the US. Particularly, Biden, in theory, shifted from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity by explicitly stating that the US forces would defend Taiwan in an event of a Chinese attack.

According to offensive realism, the US, determined to be the sole regional hegemon in the world, would do everything in its power to stop China to reach to the same level, and Taiwan card may be used as a leverage in pursuit of this objective. The existing regional hegemons

often fear that the potential hegemon in other region would be able to move around the globe and generate difficulties in the backyard of existing hegemony. Against this background, the unification of Taiwan with China would give additional capabilities to China for projecting its power, impacting the security of the US allies, notably the Philippines and Japan (Kuntic, 2015). Furthermore, the unification would change the military balance in the region in favor of Taiwan, hindering the US naval forces capability to move freely in the Philippine Sea (Talmadge, 2022). Thus, the offensive strategic ambiguity policy is adopted by the US.

To conclude, it can be safely said that offensive realism can be used to examine the US's policy of strategic ambiguity in the Taiwan issue as well as its increasingly explicit support for Taiwan. The US's activities are aligned with offensive realism in terms of maintaining regional influence, limiting the rise of possible rivals, and balancing power. The shifting dynamics in the Taiwan Strait shows that the Taiwan issue has become a geopolitical flashpoint where competing interests of the US and China are concentrated.

Chapter 3

INDO-PACIFIC GEOPOLITICS: US-CHINA COMPETITION AND STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES IN TAIWAN POLICY

The Indo-Pacific region has become a central battleground in global strategic competition. It is primarily because of rising influence of China and the US efforts to counteract China's rise. President Xi Jinping speaking at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) presented different plans to make China a dominant global power. A few of these plans includes asserting control over nearshore waters, claiming sovereignty over disputed areas, and promoting economic integration with the aid of projects such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The economic growth and military upgrades of China demonstrate its determination to increase its influence in the region and to reshape regional dynamics.

In the wake of rise of China, the US has shifted its strategic attention to the Indo-Pacific region. The "pivot to Asia" of the Obama administration and later policies under Presidents Trump and Biden have aimed at counterbalancing the expanding power of China while ensuring that the US maintains its dominance. Some of these policies and strategies include the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and alliances, namely QUAD and AUKUS.

In the greater geopolitical confrontation between the US and China, Taiwan has become one of the critical pivots in their larger geopolitical contest. Taiwan's strategic location between China and key US allies makes it an important element in the US security framework. The island's location is significant to maintain the American defense arc which prevents any incursion by China into the Pacific region. Moreover, Taiwan's role in the US-China rivalry highlights its strategic value as a check against China's regional ambitions and preserving US credibility among its allies. Against this background, US has increased its cooperation with Taiwan.

The following sections will delve deeper into the specifics of geo-political landscape of Indo-Pacific region, particularly concerning China's rise, the US pivot to Asia, and the resultant strategic competition and tensions between the two superpowers with regards to Taiwan. Furthermore, this chapter will do a deeper examination of the strategic motivations behind US enhanced cooperation with Taiwan.

3.1 Indo-Pacific Geopolitics and US-China Strategic Competition

3.1.1 Rise of China

During the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jin Ping delivered a speech in which he said that China wanted to establish itself as the number one national power and aspired to realize the national rejuvenation (Nikkei Asia, 2022). The great national rejuvenation of Chinese nation also includes transforming China into a strong and vibrant maritime power, apart from economic power. China's emergence as a global powerhouse is altering the geopolitical environment through strategic economic expansion, military modernization, and increased maritime presence. Concurrently, China's military modernization, which include advancements in hypersonic missiles and naval capabilities, reflects its ambition to assert control over key maritime regions, particularly the South China Sea. Expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean region, China is further extending its strategic reach which is changing the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific in favour of China.

China's economy has expanded remarkably over the last few decades. In the late 1970s, China began enacting market-oriented reforms, and since then, its economy has grown at an extraordinary rate. It has gone from being primarily agrarian country to the second largest economy in the world. Numerous causes, such as export-oriented industrialization, extensive infrastructural development, and a rapidly growing consumer market, have contributed to this expansion. To start with, the BRI is a huge economic development and infrastructure project that was started by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. Its goals are to improve connectivity and foster economic cooperation between Asia, Africa and Europe. The initiative is divided into two main parts: the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt. The former aims at increasing maritime trade routes which will connect China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe; while the latter is more concerned with land infrastructure projects that connect China with Europe through Central Asia and the Middle East (Hu, 2016). China wants to reduce infrastructure gaps, ease trade and investment, and advance economic growth in member nations through the BRI. It entails building ports, highways, railroads, energy facilities, and other infrastructure projects. These are funded by a combination of Chinese loans, investments, and alliances with foreign organisations and host nations. With this, China hopes to increase its influence overseas, open new markets and forge stronger relationships with its partner nations,

However, the 'string of pearls plan' was coined by Booz Allen Hamilton in 2004 to describe China's approach, which suggests that the China will try to increase its naval presence by building civilian dual-use offshore facilities. Thus, China has precisely accomplished this goal with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI consists of a number of investments in ports throughout the Indian Ocean that could be utilised as a series of naval bases. These bases could be utilised to girdle neighbouring countries and these also take China closer to strategic choke points in the Indo-Pacific. These moves directly contradict the goals of the US, as well as those of its friends and partners (Jochheim & Lobo, 2023).

In addition to BRI, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement that was negotiated by 15 Asia-Pacific nations, which also includes 10 member states of ASEAN as well as states such as China, New Zealand, Japan, Australia and South Korea. Being the world's largest trading union, RCEP, was signed in November 2020 and covers a market of over 30% of the world's GDP. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Partnership (RCEP) seeks to lower tariffs, expedite customs procedures, liberalise trade and investment among its member nations, and advance economic integration in the area. RCEP increases market access for enterprises, improves supply chain efficiency, and fosters economic growth by limiting trade and investment restrictions. With the RCEP, China has the chance to strengthen its economic connections and influence with its neighbours. These actions have raised concerns among the US and its allies (Nam Tien & Thu Trang, 2023).

In order to maintain control on the near seas, China is increasing military capacity of PLA to perform military operations in the region. China has been making substantial investments in developing and deploying modern weapon systems with the goal of increasing power of its armed forces. For instance: Hypersonic missiles, which can travel at speeds several times faster than sound, are amongst the most notable advancement in missile technology. They represent a serious threat to the existing missile defence systems as these missiles can dodge traditional interceptions and reach their targets with unprecedented speed as well as more accuracy. Apart from hypersonic missiles, other modern weapons systems that are being developed by China include stealth aircraft, next-generation submarines, and cyber warfare capabilities (Garcia, 2019). In order to increase its capacity to project its influence and deter aggression, the People's

Liberation Army (PLA) has also been updating its weaponry. China aspires to increase its maritime presence while ensuring its core interests in the Indo-Pacific. This is partly evident through naval expansion – a result of military modernisation. A huge chunk of Chinese wealth has gone into making their navy more advanced and bigger in size. It has gone into building aircraft carriers, high-tech surface combat ships, and submarines with advanced stealth facilities and missile systems. The South China Sea has become the main focus area for China's naval Development plans because of Beijing's territorial claims and ambitious land reclamation and fortification on some contested islands. In order to strengthen its hold over key sea lanes as well as reassert sovereignty over these waters, China has decided to make military installations along these lines and station naval forces in these areas (Parameswaran, 2023).

China is working to effectively defend its maritime rights while maintaining its overall influence within both the Indian Ocean as well as South China Sea. For instance, within the Indian Ocean; China is modernizing its naval forces and increasing its naval presence through port visits, cooperative exercises and patrols on anti-piracy operations including humanitarian operations. Thus, this increased naval activity aims to secure maritime trade routes and cement strategic foothold of China in the region. Concurrently, assertive moves made by China in South China Sea have drawn considerable attention globally. China is reinforcing its territorial claims made on islands like Paracel Islands, Spratly's, etc through extensive patrolling operations using both naval warships and coast guards. China has been carrying out reclamation of land and built military bases on artificial islands. This expansion has sparked considerable tensions with neighboring countries and regional powers, who contest China's claims and views these actions as aggressive encroachments on their own territorial waters. Thus, expanding naval presence of China in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea is a reflection of a broader strategy to project power and secure maritime dominance across key maritime regions.

3.1.2 US' Pivot to Asia

At the 2011 Summit of Cooperation (APEC), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton highlighted US' commitment to the Asia-Pacific region by referring to the 21st century as America's Pacific century (Clinton, 2011). The US' policy in Asia remains as active as it was under the previous government. It actually focuses on two primary objectives, which are the containment of China in all domains and the preservation of US dominance in the region – the key to

sustaining global power (Denisov et al., 2021). The US views growing dominance of China and growing sway in the Indo-Pacific region as a significant threat. This concern has been reflected in its bilateral security agreements with nations in the Indo-Pacific area as well as in its National Security Strategy, Indo-Pacific strategy, and NATO strategic concept. Other steps include strengthening NATO ties with the nations in the area and enhancing US bilateral security partnerships with South Korea and Japan (Grossman, 2023). China's ascent signals to the US the arrival of a significant regional rival. The US perceives China's actions as a threat to US dominance worldwide and to US allies in the Indo-Pacific region (Singh, 2019). The US National Security Strategy notes, a "geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region" (The White House, 2022).

The dynamics of major power competition and geopolitical factors have continuously impacted the United States' strategic vision throughout its existence as a significant global power. The wisdom of geostrategic thinkers like Alfred Mahan, Halford Mackinder, and Nicholas Spykman has had a great impact on US foreign policy. This was particularly true when devising containment plans against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Now, it is being implemented in the post-Cold War period in reaction to rising China (Hu & Meng, 2020). Given increasing significance of the Indo-Pacific region in world affairs, the US has made a strategic adjustment in foreign policy priorities. US aims to show its commitment to the region to back the rules-based world order, keep its strategic edge, and push its economic goals. The Indo-Pacific's economic strength, strategic location, and changing security issues have made it a major focus for US foreign policy. China's rising power and capabilities, particularly its maritime goals, force the US to rethink and change its approach in this new strategic setting (Hu & Meng, 2020). The US tries to adapt to new global realities and become a key architect of the region's future by moving its main focus from the Middle East to Asia.

In addition, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) seeks to checkmate China's expanding power in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the IPS aims to alleviate concerns that allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India, have about China. In doing so, the strategy seeks to counter growing military presence of China in the Indo-Pacific by strengthening American allies and partnerships throughout the area. In line with this strategy, the country is unwavering in its resolve to fortify current alliances and partnerships while also fostering new ones (Taffer & Wallsh, 2023). Central to this strategy is the Pentagon's push to transform bilateral alliances into a framework akin to Asian version of NATO. Unlike the Cold War-era containment

strategy against the Soviet Union, the IPS is focused on selective areas to contain China where the US has key interests and can collaborate with its allies. To do this, a network must be established extending across the East Indian and Western Pacific oceans, so surrounding China from all sides. One of the IPS's core strategic goals is to prevent China from undermining US maritime dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Besides, the primary strategic goal of US convergences with its allies is to counter China's rising influence in the region. Through a network of alliances, the US is fighting the Chinese challenge, primarily through Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Australia, United Kingdom, and United States pact (AUKUS), and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). US position in the region is constantly threatened by enormous investments done by China both strategically and economically. With its partners and allies, US hopes to keep on playing a dominant role in this area (Abbas et al., 2022). The US has made it a priority to make alliances with regional players in the Indo-Pacific that share same interests, in an effort to enhance its presence and influence there. The QUAD is a strategic collaboration among democratic powers, comprised of the US, India, Japan and Australia. It provides a platform to states for discussion regarding regional security, military cooperation, cyber security, counter-terrorism and maritime safety (Smith, 2021). With its QUAD partners, the US intends to build its capacities for strategic deterrence while promoting peace and progress in this region. On the other hand, the newly formed trilateral security cooperation named AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) also adds weight on US attempts to form alliances within the Indo Pacific area. AUKUS aims to address regional security threats by enhancing defence capabilities - especially new technologies.

There is no gainsaying, that the US position itself as an indispensable force in the Indo-Pacific region. It controls an extensive oceanic border from its own coast to the Indian Ocean. This border is home to the Pacific Fleet as well as the significant alliance partners, including important non-NATO allies. The US possess several territories and bases there such as Guam in the Western Pacific, Denver in Australia, and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The purpose behind possessions of these military assets by the US in the Indo-Pacific is to preserve its own hegemony in the region. The US utilizes military force and freedom of navigation operations to counter naval dominance of China in the region (Stuart, 2012).

3.1.3 US-China Strategic Competition and Taiwan

China has been described by President Trump and Biden as a "long-term strategic competitor" of the US, which has led to the adoption of strict policies intended to confront China on several fronts. Because of this, US-China relationship has experienced a change that is now more confrontational and marked by growing rivalry on all fronts—economic, diplomatic, military, and political (Arežina, 2019). The strategic rivalry between the two superpowers has heated up as a result of China's ascent and the US's shift to the Indo-Pacific region. This rivalry has deep effects on regional security and stability and is multifaceted, involving military, scientific, ideological, and economic aspects. There is rivalry for influence and control as both China and the US want to reshape the regional order in a bid to suit their own interests and beliefs (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). The Trump and Biden administration has increasingly focused on containing China as US consider it the biggest threat to its long-term strategic interests (the 2022 National Security Strategy).

In the purview of intensified strategic competition between the US and China, Taiwan's role has become increasingly significant in the US security realm. The US has enhanced its cooperation with Taiwan in all domains to counter China's rising influence. It accurately reflects the core objective of the US strategy: increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. The coming section will discuss primary strategic drivers behind US increased engagement and cooperation with Taiwan.

3.2 US Strategic Motivations for Enhanced Cooperation with Taiwan

In the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan holds a crucial position. It serves as a tactical barrier between China and two important US allies - the Philippines and Japan. Control over Taiwan is crucial for maintaining the American defense arc and preventing Chinese expansion into the Pacific. The island's significance has resurfaced amid intensifying US-China strategic competition, with Taiwan's strategic location becoming a focal point for US security policy. In addition, preserving Taiwan's independence is seen as essential for upholding US credibility among its allies, countering Chinese military ambitions, and ensuring regional stability. Consequently, Taiwan remains a vital part in the broader geopolitical contest between the US and China. The coming analysis will delve deeper into these strategic motivations.

3.2.1 Importance of Taiwan's Geo-Strategic Location for the US

Taiwan holds a strategic position that is significant for multiple reasons. First, Taiwan is a key strategic location as it lies between China and two key allies of the US i.e., Japan and the Philippines, with South Korea also nearby and form a first island chain – an American defense arc. Acquisition of Taiwan by People's Republic of China would represent a serious break in the uninterrupted American defense arc that stretches from Alaska to Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. It constitutes "Maritime Periphery" of East Asia -a concept coined by Nicolas Spykman. With the China establishing a permanent gap in this American defence arc, this would be the first American rooted sea power retreat since 1945 (Steven Pifer et al., 2016).

If China were able to physically seize control of Taiwan, the PRC would gain a geographic chokepoint and access to the open sea. This would also prevent any opposing force from using Taiwan as a military standing area as it is close to China. Instead, an independent and neutral Taiwan would function as a buffer zone between China and Japan, relieving pressure on the United States to support one over the other and reducing China's ability to extend its power into the Pacific (Mitchell, 2017). Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs, Randall Schriver, says that the continued existence and survival of Taiwan is in the strategic interest of the US until the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to hold power (Hsiao, 2020).



Figure 1: Strategic Location of Taiwan and First Island Chain

3.2.2 Increasing Strategic Rivalry between US and China

The new US' interests in the inherent military value of Taiwan are resurfacing due to the increasing US-China strategic competition (Jie, 2022). The importance of Taiwan's strategic location was known to everyone; however, the military and strategic factors have not been in the US' calculations since the normalization of US-China relations in the 1970s. Earlier when the US hegemony and dominance were not challenged, the US did not have to think regarding the Taiwan, its reunification with the mainland and its military importance. The fact that now the US hegemony is being challenged in the Asia-Pacific increases the significance of Taiwan in the US security realm. The US has rediscovered Taiwan's military values and decided that it must remain separate from mainland China. Thus, the main force behind US strategic thinking towards Taiwan is the increasing strategic rivalry between the US and China (Heginbotham, 2015).

3.2.3 Preservation of the US' Credibility among its allies

Preserving its credibility has historically been at the core of American security objectives when it comes to Taiwan. The foreign policy establishment of the US believes that abandoning Taiwan would be a death blow to the US credibility among the US' Asian and European allies as a security ally and partner (Tucker & Glaser, 2011). According to Matt Pottinger, the US' credibility would be undermined if Taiwan were to be forcefully annexed. Also, it could possibly spark the spread of nuclear weapons as other nations might search for substitutes of the extended deterrence the US is providing currently (Global Taiwan Institute 2021). Similarly, Rush Doshi in his book, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, writes that that if Washington voluntarily withdraws its commitment to Taiwan, it would shock US allies in the Asia-Pacific - Japan, Australia and South Korea. He further states that it could even lead to bandwagoning if they think balancing is pointless which would ultimately weaken the US position in the region (Doshi, 2023).

Furthermore, regional partners would probably be concerned about the growing threat that China presents to the SLOCs, even if China never really started a campaign similar to this one. Even in the extremely improbable case of a crisis or conflict, they would be concerned about the credibility and legitimacy of the extended deterrent promises which are made by the US as their credibility and legitimacy could be eroded by a robust Chinese sea-based nuclear deterrent. As a result of these dangers, the allies would almost definitely look to the United

States for additional assurance. This would be in the shape of more strong defense agreements, increased military support, and more prominently forward-deployed American personnel in the region. There is also the possibility of nuclear forces being stationed on or close to the territories of allies, as well as the possibility of nuclear sharing.

3.2.4 Challenges of Chinese-controlled Taiwan for the US and its allies

Michael Beckley, a security expert says that under the Taiwanese umbrella, the island serves as a natural defensive barrier against the expansionism of China; however, Taiwan in Chinese hands could serve as a springboard for Chinese aggression (Green & Talmadge, 2022). In a similar vein, John Mearsheimer argues that China could be able to project more military power if it acquired Taiwan, which is essentially a massive aircraft carrier (Mearsheimer, 2014). According to this theory, Taiwan serves as a launching pad for Chinese regional hegemony. Regaining Taiwan is deeply linked to China's military might expansion and has much more to do with it than Chinese nationalism. The PRC, a land-based Asian power, currently confronts a marine perimeter that is dominated by American sea and air power. Taiwan gives China access to new capabilities it does not now have, such as submarine warfare and ocean surveillance. The efficiency of a Chinese submarine campaign in the Philippine Sea would be significantly increased by basing in Taiwan, enable their attacks against US surface troops. Presently, Taiwan must be crossed on China's main direct approaches to the Philippine Sea, either across the Luzon Strait between Taiwan and the Philippines or between Taiwan and the Ryukyu Islands, to the north side. Thus, control of Taiwan is important for China. Should the PRC lose Taiwan, it will find itself in a similar strategic predicament as Imperial Japan in the Philippine Sea before World War II (Bellocchi, 2023).

In addition, China's potential to threaten the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) —which are vital for oil transport and global trade in general for South Korea, Japan, and other countries—would be bolstered by the deployment of a sizable fleet of submarines off the eastern coast of Taiwan. Taiwan, for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), also represents naval power projection in the long run. As opposed to the US shoreline, there are numerous barriers to breaking out if China wants large fleet operations. The deployment of PLAN navy in a hostile security climate would be highly improbable between the South Korea-Japan gap as they are two important US allies or through the Philippines' numerous islands, another key ally of the US (Bellocchi, 2023). If China were to head south through the

many enigmatic island groups of Indonesia and Malaysia, it would not achieve its objectives in the Pacific. Although neither of them constitutes an ally of the US, nor they are affiliated with China. Thus, the importance of Taiwan significantly increases in this case.

With this geographic configuration, it is obvious that the PLA Navy's long-term geostrategic objective depends on controlling Taiwan as a base for operations. Therefore, in a scenario where there is a military competition, denying Taiwan to the PLA Navy as a base is equally significant to the US and its allies. The dominance of Taiwan would give a base of operations to the PLA Navy as the territory would be free from ally-controlled regions on the first island chain. In addition, the PLA Navy, by controlling Taiwan, would impede coordinated operations between the US and its two key allies, Japan and the Philippines (Bellocchi, 2023). The US would have to strengthen its positions in the Philippines as there would be a risk that the country might choose to align itself with China, the rising Asian power. This bandwagoning could result in significant pullback of US troops stationed in the Philippines and probably might result into the non-renewal of US and the Philippines' existing ten-year security arrangement, which started in 2016 (Mitchell, 2017). Also, the US military would be compelled to retreat and station in Guam and southern Japan. Meaning, a backup option for the US could be to revert to the second island chain, which includes the US-controlled Northern Mariana and Guam Islands, but it is a porous line with vast gaps that could be easily pierced. Therefore, it is likely that East Asia will become similar to Europe in the late stages of the Cold War, where allies of the United States would be demanding commitment in the face of uncertainties regarding the military balance. This also increases the likelihood of nuclear escalation if a crisis or conflict arises.

To conclude the chapter, the Indo-Pacific region has become a pivotal battleground for global strategic influence of US and China. China's swift economic and military expansion aims to reshape the regional order in its favor, which is represented by initiatives like BRI and RCEP. On the other hand, to counter China's influence and maintain its dominance as per offensive realism the US has bolstered its position through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and strengthened alliances like the QUAD and AUKUS. In this strategic rivalry, Taiwan has emerged as a critical element. It is particularly due to important geo-strategic location of Taiwan as the island is central to maintaining the US defense posture and preventing further Chinese expansion into the Pacific.

Chapter 4

FROM AMBIGUITY TO CLARITY: EVOLUTION OF US POLICY TOWARDS TAIWAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The US policy towards Taiwan have seen significant changes over recent years. These changes reflect major shifts in the geopolitical environment and increased US-China geopolitical contest. Historically, the foundation of US' Taiwan policy has been principle of "strategic ambiguity" meant to keep a balance between supporting Taiwan and maintaining relations with China. It means a commitment to the "One China" policy while deliberately keeping an unclear stance whether the US would defend Taiwan if China attacked. The purpose of this ambiguity was dual-deterrence: on one hand, it prevents Taiwan from declaring independence; on the other hand, it dissuades China from forcibly reunifying the island (Chen, 2019). However, the resurgence of US-China strategic rivalry has driven a reevaluation of this policy. During Obama's period, the "Pivot to Asia" strategy was a shift towards more engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, but Taiwan was not the primary focus since the US-China competition had not reached its pinnacle then. Later, the Trump government took a more provocative approach towards China and increasing clout of China in the region, and redefined US policy with a shift. This change was visible in the offensive revision of strategic ambiguity (Grzegorzewski, 2022). The shift was evident in increasing military support, legislative measures, and diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

During the Biden administration, US policy has shown a significant shift from "strategic ambiguity" towards "strategic clarity" (Roy, 2022). The evidence of this shift includes Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, clear public commitments to defend Taiwan, growing diplomatic and military support along with expanding economic and technological cooperation. Thus, offensive realism is reflected in both Trump and Biden administration's actions where the US is making strategic moves to counterbalance increasing China's influence while asserting its own strategic interests and dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. In the context of increasing US-China competition, the US has stepped up US support for Taiwan. It consists of legislative, diplomatic, military, economic and technological aspects.

These moves have serious repercussions for both the global security and the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. The already tense US-China relations would probably get worse if the

US maintain its support to Taiwan. Also, if the US is on Taiwan side, there may be less chances of a peaceful settlement of the conflict because Taiwan might be less inclined to sit on table talks with China and more inclined to intensify its efforts towards independence. This could witness a strong response from China. China perceives any step by Taiwan towards formal independence as a direct challenge to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. As a result, China would be compelled to take more assertive stance, and it might impose economic sanctions, issue military warnings, or even start a direct war. Given Taiwan's crucial role in semiconductor production, such actions could potentially disrupt worldwide supply lines of chips. Besides, the chance of misperceiving and miscalculating actions makes matters worse and increase the chances of conflict. The implications of these risks go beyond US-China-Taiwan triangle. In this changing context, other regional actors such as Pakistan and India find it hard to balance their foreign policies. Pakistan may find it difficult to be neutral if there would be any escalation in the Taiwan strait as the country relies on both US and China. On the other hand, India, although it aligns with the US in terms of strategic initiatives, will have to ponder over its economic relationships with China. Furthermore, European countries should review their positions, as currently they align themselves with US for security purposes and rely on China for economy, so as not to create internal divisions within Europe later in any escalation.

This chapter first examines the evolution of US policy towards Taiwan - particularly from the Obama administration to the Biden administration. The chapter also talks about key shifts in strategy, diplomacy, military support, and economic engagement of US towards Taiwan. Analyzing these changes, the chapter gives a detailed analysis of how increasing US-China strategic competition reshaped US-Taiwan relations. Besides, this chapter explores various implications of increased Washington's assistance to Taipei. It assesses its impact on regional stability and the possibility of escalating conflict.

4.1 Obama's Administration Approach to Taiwan

Under the Obama administration, US foreign policy shifted towards Asia with the "Pivot to Asia" strategy. The "Pivot to Asia", referred also as the "Rebalance to Asia", was a cornerstone of President Obama's foreign policy from 2009 onward. Through this, the US shifted its foreign policy focus to the Indo-Pacific region, which didn't get much attention before because the US was involved in the War on Terror and Middle East issues (Burgess,

2015). This plan aimed to boost US involvement and political clout in Asia in response to growing China's regional ascendancy. The "Pivot to Asia" wasn't just about restraining China back, but also about making US alliances and partnerships stronger, improving regional security, and pushing for more economic ties. While Taiwan was part of this bigger plan, it wasn't the main focus for the US at that time because the US had not labeled China as a big threat to its power like it did later in the Trump and Biden administrations. The focus was more on engaging with major regional powers and dealing with broader geopolitical and economic changes (Hoem, 2020).

Diplomatically, in its relations with Taiwan, the Obama administration pursued a careful balance. Even though the US continued abiding by the "One China" policy without formally recognizing Taiwan, it found ways of engaging with Taiwan through unofficial channels (Zhao, 2012). For instance, Taiwan's participation in international organizations whenever possible was always supported by this administration. Basically, such an approach indicated that US was committed to maintaining its very delicate relationship with China whilst ensuring Taiwanese security and international presence. Hence, Obama administration's strategy aimed at maintaining informal relations with Taiwan without provoking Beijing or violating, at least technically, core "One China" policy principles (Chen, 2020).

During this period, US arms sales and military support for Taiwan were still ongoing but were generally smaller than those made in the subsequent Trump and Biden administration. The Obama administration emphasized several arms deals that enabled Taiwan to defend itself in a better way. Apart from that, there were other notable sales of missile defense systems which advanced Taiwan's capacity against missile attacks and anti-ship technologies that were meant to enhance its naval warfare capacities. These assured credible deterrence capabilities for Taiwan in case of any acts of aggression from external actor (Chen, 2012). Despite the fact that these agreements were important, they were written carefully enough to avoid infuriating China much and maintaining the broader goals of stability in Asia Pacific area. Therefore, during that time the US position towards Taiwan was based on strategic ambiguity. This was because there were not any signs indicating an escalation of US-China strategic rivalry as opposed to what is observed in later years, although concerns about growing Chinese power were beginning to emerge.

4.2 Trump's Administration Policy on Taiwan: Offensive Revision of Strategic Ambiguity

Under the Trump administration, there were some notable changes regarding US stance on Taiwan. The previous principle of strategic ambiguity was 'upgraded' into a more unapologetic face aimed at countering China's increasing influence (Hu, 2021). It fits within the fundamental guidelines of offensive realism. Such shift could be observed in important areas within US-Taiwan relations such as national security papers, different acts followed by diplomatic involvement, military assistance and economic links. Strategically, Taiwan's role was elevated within US national security and defense frameworks. The US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy further highlighted Taiwan's strategic significance. Likewise, in terms of diplomatic relations, the Trump administration recalibrated US engagement with Taiwan. This move signals a change from the strategic ambiguity policy of the US. The US also ramped up military support for Taiwan with substantial arms sales. Economically, the Trump administration deepened economic ties with Taiwan in the form trade and investment and leveraged the semiconductor industry of Taiwan as a strategic advantage in the increasing US-China rivalry. The next parts will explore the particular strategic diplomatic, legislative, military, and economic aspects of the approach of Trump administration to Taiwan.

National Security Strategy (NSS) manifested the Trump administration's policy towards Taiwan. The 2017 NSS called China a revisionist power that posed the main strategic challenge to the US. In addition, it also stressed Taiwan's key role to address China's growing military strength in the Indo-Pacific Region. Taiwan's role was highlighted in keeping a free and open Indo-Pacific (The White House, 2017). At the heart of these plans was the strategic rivalry with China. They emphasized the importance of increasing US military preparedness and providing increased backing to partners such as Taiwan. To sum up, these papers indicated a growing acknowledgment of Taiwan as an essential partner for security and stability in the region, and it was aimed to counter Chinese ambitions within the region.

In 2019, the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy featured Taiwan prominently. This showed what the US wanted to achieve: to preserve its geopolitical dominance in the Indo-Pacific region and advance a liberal economic order. Its main aim was to counteract China's promotion of a new form of influence capable of shifting power within this region. According to this document, such a shift would lead to an increase in security competition

while consequently harming global interests of US through loss of dominance in the Indo-Pacific Region. There was an emphasis throughout the document that securing US freedom and access to the region heavily relied upon availability and potential for forging relations across it, which were vital for America's as well as world-wide growth at large. The authors of the strategy concluded that ensuring freedom of access and maintaining US leadership in this key region are essential for protecting US interests and supporting the international economic system (The White House, 2019). Thus, Taiwan strategic location can play an important role because it forms part of US first island chain.

From diplomatic and legislative perspectives, during Trump's presidency, a few key actions showed a change in how the US engagement with Taiwan. In December 2016, President-elect Donald Trump was in headlines when he had a phone call with Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. This chat was the first direct contact between a US President-elect and Taiwan's leader since the diplomatic change in 1979 (Lee, 2017). This move hinted at offensive revision of the 'One China policy' and 'Strategic Ambiguity'. Also, the passing of the Taiwan Travel Act in 2018 showed a shift in US policy – a change which was driven by the growing US-China rivalry. This law pushed for high-level official trips between US and Taiwanese officials. It made it easier to have more frequent talks and meetings at senior levels (Tadahiro, 2021). Moreover, August 2020 saw the historic visit of US Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar Taiwan in August 2020. This was the highest-level visit by a US official to Taiwan since the US ended its official diplomatic ties in 1979 (Aljazeera, 2020). This visit not only shows a substantial shift in US diplomacy but also strengthened the relationship between the two nations.

Apart from Taiwan Travel Act, other series of legislative initiatives were achieved which were aimed at bolstering US-Taiwan relations. In 2019, Taiwan Assurance Act was enacted against Chinese efforts to exclude Taiwan from international organizations. This Act showed the importance of supporting Taiwan's participation in the global arena (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, 2020). At that time, a trend was going on where states were switching their formal recognition from Taiwan to China. In order to counter this, in 2020 Congress passed Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act. This purpose of this legislation was designed to deter diplomatic allies of Taiwan from cutting off ties with Taiwan (Zhou & Zhou, 2020). Most importantly, then-President Tsai Ing-wen made a notable visit to Los Angeles in August 2018 with approval from Washington. Officially,

this visit was a stay on her way to Latin America, similar to previous trips by former President (Hale, 2023). Then the following year, in 2019, then-President Tsai went on a four-day visit to New York and Denver (Aspinwall, 2019). An important thing to note here is that the visit took place at the time which was matched with the height of US-China trade war and increased strategic competition. Overall, all these acts and diplomatic support represented a shift in the US approach to strategic ambiguity by actively engaging in efforts to contain China.

Militarily, in an effort to counterbalance China's growing power, the US significantly increased its cooperation and arms deals with Taipei. In 2017, which was first year of Trump, the US gave a \$1.4 billion arms package sale to Taiwan (The Guardian, 2021). Over the course of Trump's presidency, arms sales to Taiwan totaled \$18.2 billion. Under the Trump administration, the increased military support for Taiwan included several key components which was to enhance its defensive capabilities. The Javelin anti-tank missile sale played a key role in boosting Taiwan's defense against possible Chinese armor attacks (Chung & Chung, 2022). Also, the Trump administration approved a major arms deal that included Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems (Aljazeera, 2023). These agreements aimed to beef up Taiwan's sea defenses. These high-tech missile systems were meant to help Taiwan guard its coast and sea interests from potential Chinese threats. In the same way providing MQ-9 Reaper drones gave Taiwan's watching and scouting abilities a big boost (Makichuk, 2021). Also, the US boosted cooperation with Taiwan in areas of military training and intelligence. Rear Admiral Michael Studeman, head of Intelligence for the US Indo-Pacific Command, went to Taiwan in 2020. China opposed this visit (Makichuk, 2020). Besides this, the US kept up regular naval passages through the Taiwan Strait sticking to the idea of freedom of navigation.

From economic standpoint, during Trump's presidency, the US worked to improve trade and investment ties with Taiwan. These deals tried to reduce economic reliance on China and boost two-way economic cooperation. In the world of economic relations, the chip industry became a key part in the US-China power contest. Under Trump, the US spotted a big weak spot for China: chips. China depends on foreign chips. This big need for overseas chip makers showed China's weakness and posed a big risk to its place in global supply chains. It gave the US a chance to take advantage of this weakness (Ding, 2017). Taiwan plays a key part in these changing dynamics as the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company

(TSMC) makes almost 90% of the world's most advanced chips. The US incentivized TSMC to establish a \$12 billion factory in Arizona (Haldane & Haldane, 2023). This smart move aimed to cut China's influence and boost US economic safety. The US pushed hard for Taiwanese investment into the US to make US-Taiwan ties stronger. By getting Taiwanese firms to invest in the US, it wanted to create jobs and bolster economic collaboration between the two nations. This helps the US to reduce its economic reliance on China as the two big powers compete. In closing, the Trump administration's policy on Taiwan, unlike its predecessors, took a bolder position and modified the strategic ambiguity stance in a bid to counter China's influence. This new shift was manifested through strategic documents, legislative actions, diplomatic engagements, military support, and economic ties.

The table below gives a quick look at the overview of how US dealt with Taiwan under Trump. It shows the strategic, diplomatic, legislative, military, and economic dimensions.

Table 1: Summary of Trump Administration's Policy on Taiwan

Dimension	Key Points
Strategic Ambiguity	Offensive Revision of Strategic Ambiguity
	Alignment with Offensive Realism
Strategic Emphasis	National Defense Strategy (2018): Stressed role of Taiwan in keeping a free and open Indo-Pacific.
	Indo-Pacific Strategy (2018): Gave emphasis to Taiwan's strategic significance in maintaining US dominance in the region
Diplomatic Ties and Legislative Support	Trump-Tsai phone call (2016): First time a US President-elect and Taiwanese President talked since 1979.
	Taiwan Travel Act (2018): Encouraged high-ranking visit by officials between the US and Taiwan
	Taiwan Assurance Act (2019): Supported participation of Taiwan in international organizations
	Alex Azar's visit (2020): Highest-level US visit to Taiwan since 1979

	TAIPEI Act (2020): Aimed to discourage diplomatic allies from cutting ties with Taiwan
Military Support	Increased arms sales: \$1.4 billion in 2017, totaling \$18.2 billion over Trump's presidency
	Key arms deals: Javelin anti-tank missiles, Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems, MQ-9 Reaper drones
	Increased military cooperation: Regular naval passages in the Taiwan Strait; Rear Admiral Michael's visit to Taiwan (2020)
Economic Ties	Enhanced trade and investment relations to reduce dependency on China
	Semiconductor industry: TSMC's pivotal role; \$12 billion factory in Arizona to reduce China's influence
	Promoted Taiwanese investment in the US: Encouraged job creation and economic collaboration

4.3 Biden's Approach to Taiwan: Shifting from Strategic Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity

The US has long followed a "strategic ambiguity" policy toward Taiwan to maintain stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Different administrations stuck to this approach. It involved backing the "One China" policy while staying vague about whether the US would protect Taiwan if China attacked. This unclear stance aimed to deter both sides. It kept Taiwan from declaring independence and China from attempting to take the island by force. However, under President Joe Biden, there has been a notable shift from this traditional stance of strategic ambiguity. Biden still supports the "One China" policy, but his approach to Taiwan has moved towards "strategic clarity" though in theory (Liu, 2023). This means that the US is now more open about its commitment to defend Taiwan. This change can be seen through a series of public statements, high-profile diplomatic engagements, and more military, economic and technological support for Taiwan. These policy shifts are part of a bigger Indo-Pacific strategy that focuses on countering China's increasing influence. The passage of the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022 further shows the US commitment. Thus law provides Taiwan substantial military support and elevates Taiwan's status as a major Non-NATO Ally. Together, these measures

show the application of offensive realism in US foreign policy where proactive steps are being taken to maintain strategic dominance of the US and counterbalance China.

The following sections will examine the strategic, diplomatic, military, and economic and technological dimensions of US policy shift towards Taiwan under President Biden. It will also shed light on legislative aspect with emphasis on Taiwan Policy Act of 2022. These sections will reveal how the US has made shift from 'strategic ambiguity' to 'strategic clarity' in order to counterbalance China and to address the changing environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Biden administration has consistently demonstrated its commitment to Taiwan through public statements. President Biden has explicitly confirmed US support for Taiwan on multiple occasions (Grossman, 2021). He said four times that the US would defend Taiwan. For instance: During a televised interview with CBS, where President Biden was asked directly if the US would protect Taiwan should China launch an attack. Biden responded saying, "Yes, if in fact there was an unprecedented attack." When asked explicitly in the follow-up question if US forces would be deployed to defend Taiwan, unlike Ukraine, the President affirmed, "Yes" (The Guardian, 2022). However, the White House later clarified and walked back from statements. Despite this adjustment, the initial declarations shows the US has moved towards "strategic clarity" although in theory. These public declarations represent a notable departure from the more ambiguous language used by previous administrations since 1979 which were aimed at keeping China's leadership uncertain about America's potential response. Such acts provide strategic reassurances to Taiwan.

Also, the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the Biden administration continues emphasizing the importance of region and the necessity to offset China's influence. Taiwan plays a crucial role in this strategy. In the Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy, Taiwan's importance has notably increased. In the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Taiwan is written together with other major US allies. It reflects a strategic elevation of its role in regional affairs and increased importance within the US security realm (The White House, 2022). This shift in focus marks a significant development in US strategy and its efforts to checkmate China's influence in the region. Through these efforts, the Biden administration not only reaffirms its commitment to Taiwan but also strengthens its position as a key supporter of Taiwan that would defend it in case of Chinese attack.

Diplomatically, the Biden administration has continued and expanded the top-level official visits between US and Taiwanese officials. Even before Biden took office, the US and Taiwan were already building stronger ties. Taiwan's unofficial ambassador to the US got an official invite to President Joe Biden's swearing-in (The Strait Times, 2021). Since the US moved its official recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979, a historic precedent was set when for the first time a Taiwanese representative was invited to attend such a high-profile event. Other key meetups between high-ranking US officials and Taiwanese leaders were also conducted: visits from US Senators as well as meetings between US Cabinet members and then-President Tsai Ing-wen. One of the notable shifts in US policy was the visit of Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taipei in August 2022. This visit was a big change in US-Taiwan relations as it was the first time in decades that a sitting US Speaker of the House had been to Taiwan (Blanchette et al., 2023). Biden's administration has also backed Taiwan's inclusion in international forum despite strong opposition from China. The US helped Taiwan in involving in global health efforts and World Health Organization (WHO) (Voice of America, 2024). The US asserts that Taiwan's input in these meetings offers key expertise. The aim is to enhance Taiwan's presence on the world stage and make sure it has a say in global issues. These top-level talks and backing under Biden show a clear change and shift from previous administrations.

The US under Biden has also continued its military support towards Taiwan and even increased its arm sales to Taiwan to boost its defense. They have inked major arms deal such as giving advanced missile systems such as Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems and high-tech surveillance gear and MQ-9 Reaper drones (Capaccio, 2023). These weapon sales aim to improve the ability of Taiwan to protect itself from the Chinese attacks. Also, the government has expanded joint war games and training with Taiwan. These programs cover areas like cyber security, maritime operations, and war tactics. These exercises also increase Taiwan's readiness to defend itself and show that the US is more committed to the security of Taiwan. What is more important is, in 2023, President Joe Biden approved an unprecedented \$80 million grant to Taiwan to buy American military gear. It was a historic shift from previous administration military support. This was a historic turn as compared to military support given previously because this \$80 million grant is not a loan, unlike previous support. Rather, it is directly funded by American taxpayers (Wingfield-Hayes, 2023). This move is notable because it shows the first time in more than 40 years that the US is arming a non-recognized Taiwan with weapons using funds and resources of its own. This decision shows the growing US-China rivalry competition and

highlights the attempts of Washington to balance Beijing's regional influence.

Besides, the Biden administration has focused on strengthening economic and technological partnerships with Taiwan. In June 2023, the United States and Taiwan reached a significant milestone by signing "US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade." This agreement indicates a vital step in enhancing economic relations between the two nations and addresses several key areas. One of the notable aspects of the agreement is the modernization of customs and border procedures. This move is expected to facilitate smoother trade flows. Another important component of the agreement is the emphasis on anti-corruption measures (Liang, 2023). In technological domain, the US particularly focuses on the semiconductor sector due to Taiwan's pivotal role in global semiconductor production. For example, the US has invested in collaborative research and development initiatives, such as partnerships between US and Taiwanese companies. This is to increase semiconductor technology and manufacturing capabilities. A notable effort includes the US semiconductor industry's collaboration with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to develop cutting-edge chip technologies (Kuo, 2023). All these changes occur at a time of increasing US-China strategic competition.

4.3.1 The Taiwan Policy Act of 2022

The Taiwan Policy Act, under Biden Administration, reflects the US's developing approach to Taiwan. The Taiwan Policy Act departs from the principles of its predecessor, the Taiwan Relations Act. To confront China's rising military presence in the Taiwan Strait, this act supplies Taiwan with \$4.5 billion in military equipment over the next four years (US Senate, 2022). The Taiwan Policy Act also makes a significant change by recognising Taiwan as a "Major Non-NATO Ally". Under this status, the US can deploy military equipment and technologies to improve Taiwan's defences. The act also established the Taiwan Security Assistance Initiative to launch new projects that aim to accelerate the modernisation of Taiwan's defence equipment.

The Taiwan Policy Act provides extensive military assistance to Taiwan. It provides cutting-edge weapons like as underwater warfare technology, cruise missiles capable of striking ships and ground targets, air and missile defence systems, and long-range precision weapons. It also comprises manned and unmanned aircraft, intelligence gathering equipment, and command

and control systems. The Act's goals include improving critical infrastructure and cyber defences, as well as training Taiwan's regular and reserve forces (Ibid.). This Act represents a dramatic shift in how the US supports Taiwan as US-China rivalry deepens.

Furthermore, the Taiwan Policy Act contains various clauses that promote relations between the two countries. One of these is establishing the Taiwan Representative Office (TRO). This office replaces the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) and is based in Washington, DC, with operations throughout the United States. The TRO functions as Taiwan's unofficial embassy in the US. It promotes cultural, diplomatic, and economic relations. The formation of the TRO demonstrates Taiwan's rising significance for the US, both symbolically and practically. In contrast, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), supported by the US State Department, functions similarly to an embassy. It offers consular services and supports US interests in Taiwan (Ibid.). Apart from that, it has an important role in managing US-Taiwan relations and provides a means for the two parties to communicate and cooperate.

The detailed table will summarize the Biden administration's policy towards Taiwan, including its strategic, diplomatic, military, economic and legislative dimensions:

Table 2: Overview of Biden Administration's Policy on Taiwan

Dimension	Key Points
Strategic Ambiguity	A change from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity, with clear affirmation of support for Taiwan
	Alignment with Offensive Realism
Public Statements	Explicit affirmation of US support for Taiwan on four different occasions. Confirmed US defense commitments in interviews, though later clarified by White House
Strategic Emphasis	Indo-Pacific Strategy (2022): Elevated Taiwan's role alongside other major US allies.
	National Security Strategy (2022): Enhanced significance of Taiwan
Diplomatic Engagement	Invited to Taiwan's de facto ambassador for inauguration of Biden.

	High-level official visits, notably Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit (2022)
	Increased meetings and interactions between US and Taiwanese officials
	Lobbying for Taiwan's Inclusion in International Organizations
Military Support	Higher weapon sales such as Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems and MQ-9 Reaper drones
	Historic \$80 million grant to buy military equipment (2023): First time US taxpayers funded Taiwan
	Expanded joint military drills and training programs
Economic and Technological Collaborations	"US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade" signed (2023)
	Focus on semiconductor industry collaborations. Investments in R&D and manufacturing capabilities.
	Efforts to reduce economic dependency on China
Legislative Support	<u>Taiwan Policy Act of 2022</u> : Provides \$4.5 billion in military support for over four years Names Taiwan as a Major Non-NATO Establishes Taiwan Representative Office (TRO) in Washington, D.C.

The following table provides a comparative analysis of the US approaches and support to Taiwan across different administrations:

Table 3: Comparison of US Approaches to Taiwan Across Different Administrations

Aspect	Pre-Trump Era	Trump Administration	Biden Administration
Strategic Approach	Strategic Ambiguity	Offensive Revision of Strategic Ambiguity	Shift to Strategic Clarity
Diplomatic Relations	Careful balance; unofficial engagement	Recalibrated engagement; high-level visits and legislation	Increase in top-level visits; support for Taiwan's international presence
Military Support	Smaller arms deals; focus on defensive capabilities	Increased arms sales; advanced systems; military training	Substantial arms sales; \$80 million grant; enhancement in military cooperation

Economic Ties	Limited focus; broader economic ties with Asia	Strengthened trade and investment; focus on semiconductor industry	Increase in economic collaborations; US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade
Technological Collaborations	Not a major focus	Leveraged Taiwan's semiconductor industry	Collaborative R&D in semiconductor technology
Legislative Actions	Less emphasis on legislative changes	Taiwan Travel Act, Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act	Taiwan Policy Act of 2022
Public Statements	Carefully worded statements to avoid provoking China	Less explicit support in public statements	Explicit support and stronger public statements on US commitment to Taiwan's defense
Key Events	Strategic stability maintained; arms sales ongoing	High-profile visits (e.g., Trump-Tsai call, Azar visit); increase in arms deals	Statements by Biden for Taiwan's support; Pelosi's visit; increased military aid

4.4 Implications of Increased US Support for Taiwan

The US increase of support for Taiwan is reshaping the geopolitical environment since it puts pressure on US-China relations. Beijing sees this support as a direct threat to its sovereignty. It could potentially lead to more diplomatic tensions and little cooperation on global issues. Economically, tense US-China relations could disrupt global trade and supply chains - particularly in the semiconductor. This intensification decreases prospects of resolving the Taiwan issue peacefully on account that it could push Taiwan political elite towards formal independence. Moreover, the risk of military escalation is increased by potential misperceptions and miscalculations on both sides. On top of that, other nations like Pakistan, India, and European countries face difficult choices as they pursue their interests and balanced diplomatic path to be in constructive relations with both the US and China. The following sections will explore these implications of enhanced US support towards Taiwan.

4.4.1 Straining US-China Relations

More US backing for Taiwan will make the already shaky US-China ties worse. China will take this support as a challenge to its sovereignty since Beijing sees Taiwan as its breakaway province. This means diplomatic engagements between the two big powers might get more

heated (Aljazeera, 2024). The possible clash could also reduce chances to work together on shared world problems like climate change and health issues. These moves could result in a diplomatic deadlock. From an economic standpoint, the US and China rank among the world's biggest trade partners. Tense relations between these nations might result in new tariffs and trade barriers. These actions would throw global supply chains into disarray. This situation has the power to slow down economies in both countries and worldwide as it would send shockwaves across global markets.

4.4.2 Diminishing Possibility of Peaceful Resolution of Taiwan Conflict

Stronger US backing for Taiwan undermines the possibility of achieving a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan conflict. This approach leaves less room to negotiate and settle the matter because it gives Taiwan less reason to engage in diplomatic discussion with China. The island might feel more confident with American support and may think it doesn't need to make concessions, such as reunification with the mainland (Barrash, 2023). From China's perspective, negotiations under the shadow of US influence appears submitting to external pressure which is politically not acceptable to China. As a result, China could show resistance to diplomatic spaces and might rely on displays of hard power – military power and economic leverage – to establish its position. When each side doubts the intentions of the other, diplomatic engagement becomes a distant dream, and antagonism surfaces. The mutual distrust erodes confidence-building measures that are essential for any meaningful, purposive and constructive negotiation process.

4.4.3 Potential Push for Taiwanese Independence

As the US inclines more towards strategic clarity or bolsters its diplomatic, economic, and military ties with Taiwan, pro-independence sentiments within the island may gain momentum (Cunningham, 2024). This new security strategy of the US could embolden Taiwanese political parties and leaders who advocate for formal independence. The visible increase in US backing might lead to policy shifts within Taiwan, moving closer to formal declarations of independence - undoubtedly a red line for China (Chang-Liao & Fang, 2021).

Furthermore, the enhanced US backing reassures the Taiwanese populace of a safety net against potential Chinese retaliation which would reduce the perceived risks that are associated with pursuing independence. This reassurance can lead to a shift in public opinion with more citizens supporting the idea of formal independence as they would believe that US support will lessen

the impact of the economic and security repercussions from China (Wang et al., 2024). This shift in public sentiment can further pressure the Taiwanese government to adopt a more pro-independence stance as already according to different reports, nearly 67% majority of Taiwan's population identifies as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. This sentiment is particularly predominant among younger generations. (Beshay, 2024). From Beijing's perspective, any significant shift toward Taiwanese independence would be seen as a direct challenge to its core national interests and territorial integrity. China's response to such moves would likely be severe, which can involve economic sanctions, heightened military threats, or even direct military action to prevent Taiwan from crossing what it considers a red line – which is clearly written in China's anti-secession law (China Daily, 2005).

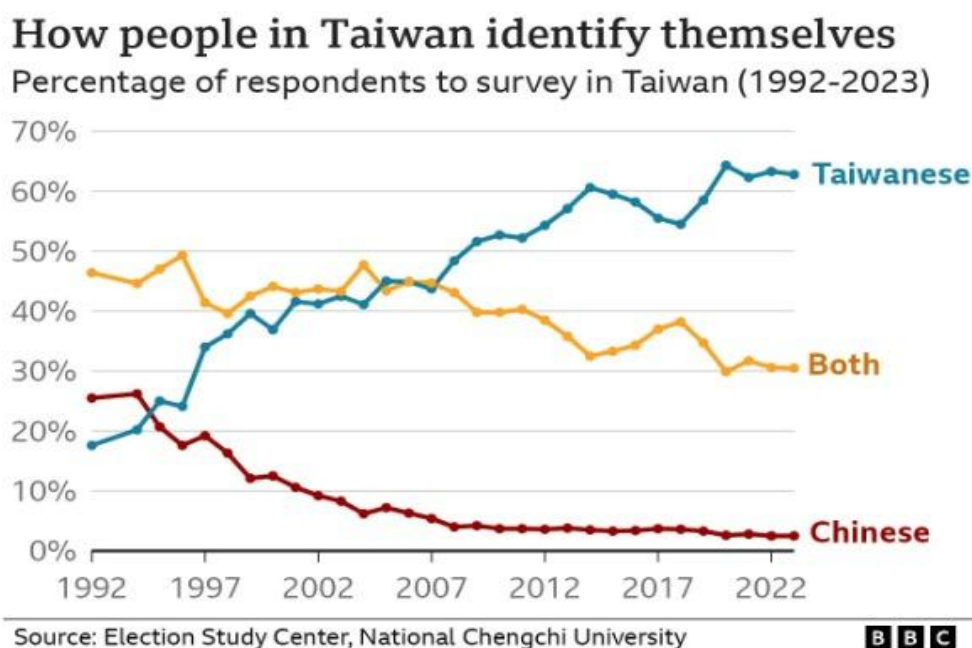


Figure 2: Changes in Taiwan's National Identity

4.4.4 Providing China a Pretext to Take Assertive Actions

Enhanced US involvement in Taiwan could be perceived by China as direct challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It will strengthen the belief of China that the US is trying to thwart its ascent by interfering in spaces where it is making new claims or has long-standing contentious claims. Presently, the policy of strategic ambiguity, which refrains from denying or pledging to deploy military force in the event of an Chinese invasion, has been contributing to the status quo. Making the pledge clear or increasing the support would encourage Taiwan

to declare its independence and this would enrage Beijing, ultimately raising the likelihood of an attack. Also, China would want to invade Taiwan before the moves of strategic clarity completed as this will be a window of opportunity (Harris & McKinney, 2024). Additionally, China might be able to assert that Washington is in charge of altering the status quo if the US changed its declaratory policy or increased its support towards Taiwan. Beijing might use it as justification to take measures short-of-war by declaring that the "one China" doctrine by the US is dead. Take, for instance, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022 after which China staged military exercises encircling Taiwan (Aljazeera, 2022). It is highly likely that such pressure campaigns and grey-zone tactics would further increase in the foreseeable future.

4.4.5 Misperception and Miscalculation: Possibility of Military Escalation over Taiwan

Scholars such as Robert Jervis and Stephen Van Evera have emphasized that war is often the result of misperception and miscalculation. This is relevant for Taiwan where both the US and China have high stakes and vital interests involved. As noted by Robert Jervis, cognitive biases in leaders can result in misinterpretations of an adversary's intention (Jervis, 1988). When it comes to Taiwan, Chinese and American leaders might view each other's moves as more threatening than they really are. Stephen Van argues that wrong judgments of relative power can create problems (Van Evera, 2013). For instance, China may overestimate its own military might which could lead to aggressive actions and escalation into war.

Both nations could misinterpret diplomatic and military signals. For example, if Washington sells arms to Taiwan as a way to deter aggression, Beijing may perceive it as a provocation. Conversely, China could hold military drills to demonstrate its might that might be regarded by the US as preparations for invasion. Hence in case of US-China-Taiwan relationships, such misconstrued signs may be perilous and result to war-like hostilities.

4.4.6 Disruption of Global Supply Chain of Semi-conductors

Taiwan is a powerhouse of the global semiconductor market as the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) dominates the market of chip making. TSMC nearly produces 90% of the world's most advanced chips (The Economist, 2023). Semiconductors are the backbone of modern technology and the stability of this industry is vital for the whole world as it powers everything ranging from smartphones and laptops to military systems. Thus, any conflict in the Taiwan Strait could result in catastrophic consequences for the supply chain of

semiconductor. The US actions might compel China to take assertive action, leading to blockades, sanctions and military conflict, which will impact the operations of TSMC and the broader supply chain (Kelly, 2024). The automotive industry, relies on chips, has already suffered significant delays and halt in production due to chip shortages amidst the Covid-19. A conflict in Taiwan could result in even more devastating damages to economy.

To avoid shortage of chips and mitigate the risk, states have already started diversifying their global supply chains. The US brought CHIPS Act in 2022 to invest in the microchip manufacturing on the US soil. Similarly, China is also increasing its efforts in local chip development, and so does India. However, this process is neither easy nor quick (Sacks, 2024). States might need decades to become self-reliant in microchip production, as it demands technical know-how, time, and money. This means Taiwan's security matters not just for keeping the region stable, but also for worldwide economic concerns.

4.4.7 Challenges to Other States: Balancing US-China Tensions in Taiwan Conflict

US-China competition over Taiwan poses significant challenges for other states – including Pakistan, India and Europe. Each state faces unique challenges while balancing their relations with US and China. These will be explored in detail.

4.4.7.1 Strain on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

The changing global political environment and growing rivalry between the US and China are already causing problems for Pakistan's foreign policy. As a country that depends on both the US and China for different economic and strategic reasons, Pakistan has to walk a tightrope. The US is the top buyer of Pakistan's goods and services while China plays a key role in investments and funding – particularly in CPEC. Thus, maintaining amicable relations with both the countries is a necessity for Pakistan to fulfill its national interests.

In case of Taiwan, Pakistan aligns with its longstanding diplomatic stance of 'One China Policy' and considers Taiwan an integral part of China. Pakistan has already faced repercussions in the shape of political instability in the country due to its neutral stance in the Ukraine war. The conflict in the Taiwan Strait will spread its tentacles to South Asia as well. So, the rising tensions across the Taiwan Strait would add pressure on Pakistan to choose sides. As the situation evolves, Pakistan may face intensified pressure to align more closely with one

of the two major powers, thereby constraining its ability to pursue an independent and balanced foreign policy (Jaspal, 2022).

4.4.7.2 Balancing Dilemma for India

As a key ally of the US, India has increasingly participated in US-backed initiatives like the Quad – a bulwark against expanding sway of China over the Indo-Pacific region. India might face a situation where the US would persuade to increase Taiwan support. India may find itself in a position where the US will force it to increase engagements with Taiwan. India faces a challenge because it relies on China for economic ties – one of its largest trading partners. If India supports Taiwan, it could jeopardize these important trade deals and shake up India's economy. India will also have to think about how backing Taiwan might affect its standing on Kashmir where China has stayed neutral so far. Taking a strong position on Taiwan could make things difficult for India and potentially influence China's neutrality on Kashmir and support Pakistan's stance (Azam & Sultan, 2023).

4.4.7.3 The Possible Repercussions for Europe

The growing support for Taiwan from the US and a shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity might pose problems for European countries. This change would push them to examine their stance on the island. In the past, the European Union has maintained the status-quo regarding Taiwan. Europe avoids direct confrontation with China and backs a peaceful resolution of Taiwan issue. However, a shift by the US to a more clear stance Taiwan could compel Europe to make a difficult choice: keep its current vague support or side more with Washington by strengthening political and economic ties with Taiwan. Europe's major powers would need to balance their economic dependencies on China and their support to US moves in Taiwan. China is key trade partner for many EU member states, and any move towards more EU support or strategic clarity could provoke economic and political retaliation from Beijing. This is not in the best interest of Europe given its current economic vulnerabilities, energy crisis and high inflation rate. The continent does not have the capability to handle potential economic losses from China.

Furthermore, Europe and the US have divergent strategic views on China. Where the US views China as a primary global challenger and keeps Taiwan at the front of its strategic calculations, Europe generally considers China more as an economic competitor and focuses more on the immediate threat that Russia poses to Europe as also evident in the Russia-Ukraine war (Choi,

2023). Thus, European nations may hesitate to fully commit to a US-led policy shift towards Taiwan and might react in a cautious and fragmented manner. This might lead to internal disagreements in the EU and potential disruption in transatlantic solidarity.

Summing up the chapter, amid increasing US-China rivalry, the US has increased its support for Taiwan; and under the Biden administration, US policy towards Taiwan has moved away from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity. This is shown by explicit commitments to defend Taiwan and increased diplomatic, military, economic and technological support. These changes reflect an application of offensive realism where the US is actively working to counterbalance China and preserve its strategic dominance in the Indo-Pacific. These moves have serious repercussions for both the global security and the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. If the US is on Taiwan side, Taiwan might be less inclined to sit on table talks with China and more inclined to intensify its efforts towards independence. As Taiwan play an important role in semiconductor production, such actions could potentially disrupt worldwide supply lines of chips. Other regional actors, including Pakistan and India, could face severe foreign policy challenges in the wake of any conflict in the Taiwan Strait given the fact that these states relies on both US and China

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter of the thesis summarizes the main findings of the study and discuss their implications. It begins with an overview of the key findings and how they relate to the research questions and literature review. After that, it explores the theoretical and practical implications of the research and sheds light on the contributions of this study to the field of international relations and strategic studies. Finally, the chapter address the limitations and suggest few key areas for future study.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

This study has successfully argued that the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China has significantly influenced US policy towards Taiwan. The research reveals that the intensifying US-China great power competition has led to a notable increase in the US' military, economic and legislatives support to Taiwan and signs of shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity. By applying the theoretical framework of offensive realism, this research shows that the US is actually guided by its need to counterbalance China's ascendancy and sway in the Indo-Pacific region, and to maintain its own hegemony. This increased support towards Taiwan has ramifications for the stability of region and the risk of military escalation.

As a result, four main findings have been established through this research. First, burgeoning economic and military might of China is reshaping the regional landscape - particularly in the Indo-Pacific. With the need to counter influence of China, the US is fortifying its regional partnerships and expanding its military and economic footprint in the region. Initiatives like the BRI and RCEP are increasing China's economic clout and regional integration. Furthermore, Military modernization at rapid pace is increasing China's regional dominance. Amidst this, strengthened alliances with regional partners – particularly QUAD and AUKUS - are a major element of the US strategy to balance China's power, guided by the theoretical framework of offensive realism.

Second, this study finds that due to increased US-China competition, Taiwan's strategic

importance has intensified in the US security realm and US support for Taiwan is driven by the need to counterbalance Chinese surging influence in the Indo-Pacific region, to preserve US credibility among allies and to prevent the erosion of US maritime dominance in East Asia. Taiwan acts as a buffer between China and US allies. It prevents Chinese expansion into the Pacific and ensures the integrity of the US defense arc stretching from Alaska to the Philippines. Also, preserving Taiwan's independence is crucial for upholding US credibility among its allies as abandoning Taiwan could undermine the US credibility as a security partner. Furthermore, Taiwan's control by China would shift the strategic balance in East Asia and it would potentially lead to increased military competition and demands for stronger US commitments in the region. Thus, Taiwan's position is significant for US defense strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

Third, under Biden administration, the US departed from its traditional policy of strategic ambiguity and adopted a more explicit and proactive stance in supporting Taiwan in the context of increasing US-China competition. Over the years, the US policy has evolved from a cautious approach of strategic ambiguity under Obama to a clearer stance with increased support for Taiwan under Trump and Biden. With the increasing US-China competition, the US established comprehensive relations – economic, military and technological – with Taiwan – showing the basic tenets of offensive realism. There has been a notable increase in US military and economic aid to Taiwan which reflects growing concerns about China's regional assertiveness and strategic competition. Each administration has strengthened legislative and diplomatic ties with Taiwan. This emphasizes strategic importance of Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite changes in administration, the overall pattern has been consistent: focus on countering China's influence and supporting Taiwan as a vital regional ally.

While Obama maintained cautious approach towards strategic ambiguity policy when it comes to Taiwan as competition with China was not at peak, the Trump administration took a significant shift by revising strategic ambiguity into a more assertive stance and offensive approach to strategic ambiguity. Since competition between US-China has intensified, the Biden administration has shifted from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity by reaffirming the One China policy while explicitly committing to Taiwan's defense in the wake of any Chinese attack. This change is clearly reflected in several key areas, including strategic emphasis in key document, diplomatic ties, legislations in support of Taiwan, military and

economic support. For example: Taiwan is now prominently featured in the Indo-Pacific Strategy; President Biden has publicly showed US support for Taiwan; Biden administration has continued and expanded high-level interactions, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan; the US Congress has passed several legislative acts to reinforce US-Taiwan ties; and the administration has increased arms sales and expanded joint military exercises and training programs with Taiwan.

Finally, research conclusively shows that a rise in support for Taiwan by the US could lead to more tensions with China. The US might face higher tension with China leading to lesser interaction at an international level and more standoffs situations specifically on global problems. It could make it difficult for other nations to maintain equilibrium between China and the US. Also, it has the potential to disrupt global semiconductor supplies and hamper supplies of semiconductor chips worldwide.

Moreover, the escalating US support undermines any prospect for a peaceful resolution to cross-strait dispute. This increased backing of the US lessens Taiwan's inclination towards negotiating with China; thereby, strengthening pro-independence sentiments. This may cause Taiwanese leaders to attempt to seek formal independence; consequently, risking a severe reply by China that could involve military threats, economic sanctions, or even direct military engagement. China might interpret the US backing as a direct challenge against its sovereignty, territorial integrity and dream of national rejuvenation which is not possible without the reunification of Taiwan into the mainland China. So, military escalation over Taiwan is possible due to misinterpretations and miscalculations by both the US and China considering each other's intention and military capabilities. Thus, it increases the risk of military escalation over Taiwan. In addition, regional states are more likely to face challenges in maintaining their economic relationships with China and while simultaneously endorsing US policies toward Taiwan as well as the latter's position on the matter.

5.2 Discussion and Testing of the Hypothesis

The findings of this study provide significant evidence to support the hypothesis that the growing strategic rivalry of the US and China could lead to increased US support for Taiwan. The evolving geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific sees the rise of China and its expanding influence – particularly through military modernization and BRI. This has

increased US concerns for maintaining its dominance. Therefore, the US has strategically boosted its ties with Taiwan as Taiwan can play the role of an important partner in maintaining the balance of power in the region.

This shift in US policy is apparent in several ways. First, the move from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity which is evident by the increase in high-level diplomatic visits and economic support, and legislative actions such as the Taiwan Travel Act and Taiwan Policy Act. Second, the considerable increase in arms sales and military cooperation with Taiwan shows the efforts of the US to increase defense of Taiwan against China. These actions clearly align with the broader strategy of the US i.e., countering China's rise. This support the hypothesis that the intensifying US-China rivalry is driving greater US support for Taiwan. Furthermore, the findings suggest that this strategic shift is not only reactive but also preemptive. By strengthening military and diplomatic standing of Taiwan, the US aims to dissuade China from considering military action. However, it is also clear that this increased support for Taiwan comes with great risks. The potential for military escalation between the US and China is now more pronounced because both the US and China are increasingly viewing Taiwan as a critical battleground for their strategic competition.

The implications of these findings are profound. The US support for Taiwan not only confirms the hypothesis but also shows the importance of the delicate balance the US must maintain in its relations with China and Taiwan as it risks provoking China that could lead to a military confrontation. In analyzing US increasing support towards Taiwan and theoretical shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity, the findings of the thesis also closely align with the existing literature. Various sources, including those written by Lebedev, Stepanov, Haass, and Sacks, highlight this strategic shift particularly under the Biden administration. Moreover, the literature supports the idea that US-China strategic competition is a driving factor behind the recent shifts in US policy. Studies by Chen, Grzegorzewski, and Jie demonstrate that escalating rivalry Sino-American tensions significantly shape the US strategic approach towards Taiwan. This is consistent with this research findings. On the other hand, scholars like Sangsoo Lee are also of the view that the US support for Taiwan is significantly influenced by shared democratic values. According to this view, Taiwan's democratic posture aligns with American values and the US is supporting Taiwan for its broader commitment to uphold democratic norms. However, the focus of offensive realism on power and security provides a different explanation for US

actions compared to theories that give value to normative and ideological factors. For offensive realism, the internal political system or shared values among states hold no significance as power maximization is the only aim of the state.

Thus, the research supports the hypothesis that the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China is a significant driver behind increased US support for Taiwan. However, this support also introduces new risks that could have far-reaching implications for regional stability and global security.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

By applying offensive realism, the research offers a robust theoretical framework for an in-depth look at the US motivations and approach towards Taiwan. The US shift of the principle of ‘strategic ambiguity’ speaks volume about why great powers continuously wants to maximize their security and influence when they counterbalance rising challengers. Offensive realism is all about this perspective. The findings of this research show how the US actions align with the theory of offensive realism and its focus offensive strategies to preserve power and counter potential rising state. Offensive realism is focused on the systemic pressures that exists within the international arena rather than domestic political factors. According to this perspective, the drive to offset China’s growing power is fundamental to the US strategy. In other words, it transcends changes in domestic leadership. Regardless of whether a Democratic or Republican administration is in power, the overarching goal will remain same: Balancing the growing influence of China while preserving US leadership in the Indo-Pacific. Hence, with the intensification of US-China strategic competition, the US support to Taiwan in the coming years will see increase.

5.4 Practical Implications

The findings of this study also have practical implications for US policymakers, regional states, and other stakeholders. The findings suggest that the US must maintain balance between increasing their support for Taiwan and managing the risk of aggravating a direct military conflict with China. Though increased military support to Taiwan is essential, it should not come at the cost of wider regional conflict. Policymakers need to consider strategies that provide support for Taiwan but also backs confidence-building measures and diplomatic engagement with China. Furthermore, regional states, tied to

both China and the US, must reassess their priorities and act accordingly. Regional states should bolster their own defense capabilities while pursuing strategic hedging between the United States and China to safeguard their national interests. Furthermore, states should start investing in alternative production of semi-conductors to avoid disruption in supply chains in case the conflict escalates. By following these considerations, US policymakers, and regional states can manage the US-China strategic competition in a better way.

5.5 Contributions to the Field

This research provides important contributions to the field of international relations and strategic studies. First, by focusing on the Biden administration's approach to Taiwan, this research gives an examination of recent US policy shifts. This detailed analysis fills an important gap in the literature by viewing Biden's policies with his predecessor's administrations. In addition, the study uses the theoretical lens of offensive realism to understand drivers and strategies of the US with regards to Taiwan. Offensive realism provides a novel outlook that adds to the existing literature. Moreover, the research analyzes recent US actions – specifically legislative measures, diplomatic efforts, and military and economic support to Taiwan. Thus, the study provides a timely analysis of Taiwan factor in US-China great power competition.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite the thorough contributions, this study has a few limitations. First, the primary focus of the study is US and Chinese perspectives. It does not explore the view and strategies of other regional actors with regards to Taiwan in detail. States namely Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asian nations also have significant interests when it comes to Taiwan and US-China rivalry. So, this could offer a more comprehensive view of the geopolitical environment. In addition, since the global geopolitical environment is continuously changing, the timeframe of the study may not fully cover the evolving nature of US-China competition and Taiwan's role

5.7 Recommendations for Future Research

This research opens new avenues for further exploration into the approach of the future administration towards Taiwan and their long-term effects. Future studies can investigate

how this support influences regional alliances, the responses of other major powers, and the potential for new diplomatic and economic realignments in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, examining the implications of US support for Taiwan on global trade and security dynamics could provide a deeper understanding about the evolving geopolitical landscape. Finally, future research could explore the strategies and motivations of other regional states in their efforts to support Taiwan.

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