

# The United States (US) - Taiwan Strategic Partnership: Impact Towards United States

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**Abstract:** The Taiwan politics and governance has always become a US concern especially after the year 2000 when the longstanding KMT Party defeated to Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the country elections. Utilizing the qualitative approach, this research sought the geostrategic, geopolitics and economy implication of the US – Taiwan Strategic partnership towards US. The research findings are Taiwan always becomes US factors in developing the geostrategic strategy in North East Asia. On the strategic rebalance towards the Asia Pacific, it is concern whether US strategy considers Taiwan’s security role narrowly in Taiwan Straits or broadly in the western Pacific. US perspective on Taiwan in strengthening its strategic partnership relations is Taiwan island as future Forward Operation Base. The island became unsinkable aircraft carrier and can provide a firm base if something happened within the regions. The importance of Taiwan to US economy can be seen from the role of supply global supply chain.

**Keywords:** Economy, Geostrategic, Strategic Partnership, Taiwan, United States

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## 1. Background

Taiwan has always become a significant and critical factor for the US in the Asia region and the implications for its national interest<sup>1</sup>. China appears bound to apply its One China Policy with the model of ‘One County, Two System’ internationally have diminished US influence to undermine Taiwan freedom of action<sup>2</sup>. Actions taken by China to further isolate Taiwan internationally and to shut it out from the international organization is parts of the challenges that have to face by US and Taiwan<sup>3</sup>. Geostrategic, politically and economically implications to the US in the relations through strategic partnership has shown in perspective in order to overcome with the suitable policy to maintain the relations.

In term of geostrategic implication, it is to describe about the significance of Taiwan to the US in its policy directions to the North East area. Geostrategic can be referred to as the geographic direction of a state’s foreign policy on which the state concentrates its efforts by projecting military power and directing diplomatic activity<sup>4</sup>. The geostrategy of a state is not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Meena, K. 2016. *Munesh Chandra Asked: What is the Difference Between Geo-politics and Geo-strategy?*. <https://idsa.in/askanexpert/geopoliticsandgeostrategy>. [29 July 2018].

motivated by geographic or geopolitical factors on which a state may project power to a location because of ideological reasons, interest groups or simply the whim of its leader<sup>5</sup>. The Taiwan politics and governance has always become a US concern especially after the year 2000 when the longstanding KMT Party defeated to Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the country elections. The US-Taiwan relationship is grounded in the basic values in which both countries have in common with sharing the commitment to democracy, free market, rule of law and human rights<sup>6</sup>. It is China that shadows the relation between both countries with heavily poses threat especially in term of military threats. The biggest complicated factors for the US in its policymaking are coming from Taiwan's own political circumstances<sup>7</sup>. The political reforms have made Taiwan politics more democratic and nationalistic but also more fluid and harder to predict<sup>8</sup>.

An economy is another factor concerning the relations between the US and Taiwan. Taiwan is a trading nation that heavily reliant upon the global exchange of goods and services thus required to maintain access to foreign markets to sustain its vibrant economy<sup>9</sup>. The island particularly small making them constrained in significant ways by absolute domestic production and limited in resources and need to access international markets for an economy of scale and specialization<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Geostrategic Implication

Geographically, Taiwan is located within the strategic location in North East Asia. Taiwan's geostrategic position is increasingly salient to US operational planning in the event of a regional conflict<sup>11</sup>. Situated at the edge of the South China Sea's shipping lanes, Taiwan is positioned 100 miles from east of mainland China, 200 miles from the Philippines and 700 miles from Hainan Island<sup>12</sup>. The island locations are the center between the East China Sea and the South China Sea while facing the Pacific Ocean in the east with the Taiwan Straits on the west coast. Taiwan is surrounding China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea in one of the most strain and tension regions in the world as shown in Figure 2.

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<sup>5</sup> Meena, K. 2016. *Munesh Chandra Asked: What is the Difference Between Geo-politics and Geo-strategy?*. <https://idsa.in/askanexpert/geopoliticsandgeostrategy/>. [29 July 2018].

<sup>6</sup> Project 2049 Institute. (March 2018). *U.S-Taiwan relations in a sea of change navigating towards a brighter future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

<sup>7</sup> Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report. 2009. *Taiwan's Political Status: Historical Background and Its Implications for U.S. Policy*. United States of America: Congressional Research Service. *Background and Its Implications for U.S. Policy*. United States of America: Congressional Research Service.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, C. 2001. Taiwan in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Model or Victim? Development Problems in a Small Asian Economy. *The China Quarterly* 2001: 33-60.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, S. 2011. The Defining Divide: Cross-straits Relations and US, Taiwan, China Strategic Dynamics. *Security Challenges* 7(1): 79-89.

<sup>12</sup> Bosco, J. A. 2015. *Taiwan and Strategic Security*. <https://thediomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>. [30 Apr 2018].



Figure 2: Location of Taiwan in North East Asia

Taiwan governance not only its main island but also the Pescadores archipelago island within the Taiwan Strait and two main islands of Quemoy and Ma-tsu Tao located nearby mainland China as shown in Figure 3.



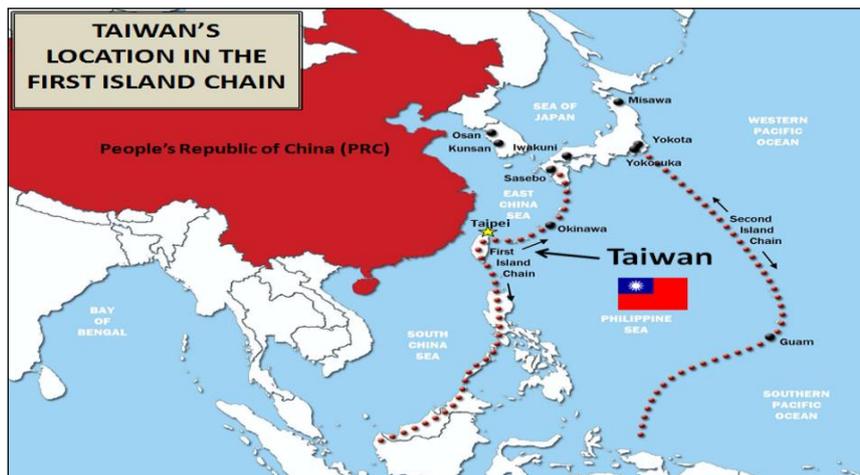
Figure 3: Map of Taiwan

Taiwan island is located among the world's busiest maritime and air routes which the US is not having an intention to leverage Taiwan's geostrategic location as a base for its troops, planes or ships<sup>13</sup>. However, it does have a critical interest in promoting a government friendly to the

<sup>13</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

US and community of democracies, allowing the people of Taiwan to pursue their own hopes and dreams for the future<sup>14</sup>. Based on this reason, any Chinese attempt to gain control of Taiwan through use of force or subversion, should be regarded as an attack on the vital interests of the US and therefore countered by any means necessary<sup>15</sup>. Lee (2011) has explained that US while professing strategic ambiguity on which a support for the one China policy in theory but not in practical has rediscovered its strategic interest in preventing China from gaining strong foothold so called first island chain. Taiwan location on the first island chain provides a buffer through which China power projection can be contained<sup>16</sup>.

China perspective on Taiwan describes that the island is one of the critical links in the first island chain that includes Japan, the Ryukyus, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia<sup>17</sup>. China sees the navigational choke points between those islands as constraining the People Liberation Army (PLA) - Naval forces access to the second island chain and from there into the open ocean far from China shore<sup>18</sup>. China coastline in the East Asia sea lacks the deep-water ports needed to service its naval bases<sup>19</sup>. China submarines must operate on the surface until they are able to submerge and dive deeply when reaching the area of Ryukus archipelagoes<sup>20</sup>. If China controls Taiwan, its submarines would have a far easier exit from Taiwan deep water port into the Pacific<sup>21</sup>.



**Figure 4: US Island Chain Strategy**

The island chain strategy is US strategy to surrounding the Soviet Union and China by sea during the Korea War in 1951<sup>22</sup>. The island chain strategy consist of three lines of island strategy comprises as First Island Chain, Second Island Chain and Third Island Chain on which two of the strategy as mention in Figure 4<sup>23</sup>. The First Island Chain begins at the Kuril Island and finished towards Borneo, Second Island Chain starting from Japan island towards Guam acting as strategic defense lines for the US and Third Island Chain begins at the Aleutian Island

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Lee, S. 2011. The Defining Divide: Cross-straits Relations and US, Taiwan, China Strategic Dynamics. *Security Challenges* 7(1): 79-89.

<sup>17</sup> Bosco, J. A. 2015. *Taiwan and Strategic Security*. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>. [30 Apr 2018].

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Revolvly. 2018. *Island Chain Strategy*. <https://www.revolvly.com/main/index.php?s=Island%20Chain%20Strategy>. [30 May 2018].

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

and finished up in Oceania as Hawaiian Island became key parts. During the Cold War the primary target of the doctrine was the Soviet Union but after its collapse in 1989, China became the major target<sup>24</sup>.

Besides that, Taiwan island is considering an unsinkable aircraft carrier to the US. It is called by General Douglas Mc Arthur on which the US consistently viewed Taiwan primarily as an important strategic asset that must not be allowed to fall under China control<sup>25</sup>. Taiwan holds the potential to be a second unsinkable aircraft carrier in East Asia provides an effective domain for intercepting China forces in transit to US assets in the Western Pacific<sup>26</sup>.

Another aspect to Taiwan security dimension related to its geostrategic location is its role in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)<sup>27</sup>. An example was in 2011 when the earthquake and tsunami devastated Fukushima, Japan, Taiwan has dispatches rescue teams and technical personnel with the largest financial contributor to Japan's recovery effort<sup>28</sup>. Others HADR efforts done by Taiwan were providing an assistance to the Philippines after it was struck by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, Indonesia in 2004 after the Tsunami and in 2010 to Haiti after the earthquake<sup>29</sup>.

### 3. Geopolitics Implication

Geopolitics is a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economic and demography on politics and foreign policy of the state<sup>30</sup>. In the case of Taiwan, US fundamental strategic interest in the political status has further complicated the prospect for reunifications hopes by mainland China<sup>31</sup>. The US has a critical role to play in supporting Taiwan's democracy and addressing its legitimate security concerns<sup>32</sup>. Taiwan and democratic future place as the strategic epicenter of America moral and political commitment to the region<sup>33</sup>. Any weakening of US resolve to ensure Taiwan continued significantly undermine that credibility throughout the region among friends, allies and adversaries<sup>34</sup>. US continues to assess that Taiwan is critical for the continued credibility of US strategic commitment throughout East Asia<sup>35</sup>.

In the early year 2000, it proved difficult for the US to manage its relations with Taiwan after DPP came into power for the first time which had previously dominated by the KMT<sup>36</sup>. Taiwan political transition and changes was regarded as uneasiness concern to US due to China strong

<sup>24</sup> Revolvly. 2018. *Island Chain Strategy*. <https://www.revolvly.com/main/index.php?s=Island%20Chain%20Strategy>. [30 May 2018].

<sup>25</sup> Bosco, J. A. 2015. *Taiwan and Strategic Security*. <https://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>. [30 Apr 2018].

<sup>26</sup> Lee, S. 2011. The Defining Divide: Cross-straits Relations and US, Taiwan, China Strategic Dynamics. *Security Challenges* 7(1): 79-89.

<sup>27</sup> Bosco, J. A. 2015. *Taiwan and Strategic Security*. <https://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>. [30 Apr 2018].

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary. 2018. *Geopolitics*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geopolitics>. [June 25, 2018].

<sup>31</sup> Lee, S. 2011. The Defining Divide: Cross-straits Relations and US, Taiwan, China Strategic Dynamics. *Security Challenges* 7(1): 79-89.

<sup>32</sup> Lai, J. Y. 2008. *Introduction Accounts of Taiwan and its History*. [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/61650/jv1\\_2.pdf?sequence=3](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/61650/jv1_2.pdf?sequence=3). [25 Mar 2018].

<sup>33</sup> Bosco, J. A. 2015. *Taiwan and Strategic Security*. <https://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>. [30 Apr 2018].

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Bergsten, F. C., Freeman, C., Lardy, N. R. 2008. *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities*, Peterson Institute for International Economics 2008: 169-187.

<sup>36</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

opposition to the new government<sup>37</sup>. From 2008 until May 2016, Taiwan KMT Party under President Ma Ying-jeou sought to reduce tensions across the Taiwan Strait by accommodating China in adhering One China principles<sup>38</sup>. These policies were initially welcome by Taiwan people to become an unpopular when China expand and modernize its ballistic missile across the Taiwan Straits and at the same time squeezed Taiwan international space<sup>39</sup>.

DPP when come back to power in May 2016 hold the position that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent state thus any changes in this status should be decided by Taiwan people with self-determination should guide Taiwan future<sup>40</sup>. The success of democracy in Taiwan is in the national interest of the US and the administration would be well advised to develop policy with an eye to deepening and strengthening Taiwan's democracy while bolstering its economic and national security prospects<sup>41</sup>. US administration must work with Taiwan to keep China from creating a sphere of interest that would undermine freedom of navigation, rule of law, international trade and human rights while increasing the chances of armed conflict<sup>42</sup>. It is imperative for the US to defend against Chinese hegemony especially in the Asia region<sup>43</sup>.

#### 4. Economic Implications

Taiwan is critical not only for its geographic location but also for its shared values and its position as a US key trading partner<sup>44</sup>. Taiwan's economic achievements are another reason why the US continues to care about the island<sup>45</sup>. Taiwan was America's 10th largest trading partner in 2016 on which they are excel in researching, designing and manufacturing the advanced technology that drives much of America's economy<sup>46</sup>. The global chip-making business which was invented by Taiwan in the 1980s and the high-tech island nation still occupies a strong position on the global supply chain<sup>47</sup>. Historically, during the Vietnam War, Taiwan was provided economic and technical assistance in support of US operations in Vietnam<sup>48</sup>. The island can provide the materials and resources to support any military operations within the regions. Its economy growing rapidly since the 1960s with the export-led growth strategy that moved the island from an agricultural to a flourishing industrial based capitalist economy<sup>49</sup>.

#### 5. Discussion

Taiwan is one of the unique countries in the world. A nation with only recognizes by only a few countries. The US is one of the countries that does not recognize Taiwan but maintain the unofficial relations since 1979 after changing its foreign policy to establish a relationship with

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<sup>37</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

<sup>45</sup> Bergsten, F. C., Freeman, C., Lardy, N. R. 2008. *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities*, Peterson Institute for International Economics 2008: 169–187.

<sup>46</sup> Project 2049 Institute. 2018. *U.S-Taiwan Relations in a Sea of Change Navigating Towards a Brighter Future*. Virginia: Project 2049 Institute.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Bergsten, F. C., Freeman, C., Lardy, N. R. 2008. *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities*, Peterson Institute for International Economics 2008: 169–187.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

communist China. It was very significant moves because Taiwan seems to be abandoned by the US and under constant threat of China. In order to proceed with the relations without jeopardizing the relationship with China, US Congress has approved the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) 1979 in April 1979 thus keep maintain the US influence and intention to Taiwan. Although China is not too happy with the act, the unrecognition of Taiwan as a country and do not have a diplomatic relationship with the international committee was more important. The US on the other hand when unofficially having an affair with Taiwan looking forward to strengthening its connection to Taiwan through Strategic Partnership. The year 2000 marks the new dimension in Taiwan politics which cause the new perspective on how US looking at Taiwan. The defeated long-standing KMT Party to DPP have significantly change the landscape of US – Taiwan strategic partnership relations.

The importance of implementation of the concept of Strategic Partnership in keeping the continuation of US-Taiwan unofficial relations. Strategic partnership ideas are the only way to keep the US having a relationship with Taiwan on which have isolated by China from the world. The development of the relations is clearly through the diplomatic approach from 1949 after the KMT form a government in the island until before the US breaking the diplomatic ties in 1979. After that, the continuation of relations based on the strategic partnership method simply change the US and Taiwan perceptions on how it should be progress without jeopardizing a safety and security in the region. In order to understand the relations through strategic partnership, it is important to understand the factors that cause this type of relations internally and externally. As conclusions in the Chapter Three, the internal and external factors that influence the strategic partnership between the US and Taiwan is significant and imperative to understand.

The internal factors consist of Taiwan politics and its domestic economy shaped the way Taiwan react towards the partnerships thus influence the US on how they should respond. Taiwan is acknowledged by the US having an excellence practice in politics by conducting the fair and free elections. It has set an example on how the democracy country behaves and bring the things in proper democratic ways. In comparing the two main political party which is KMT Party and DPP, it becomes clear that the DPP has been more Taiwan-centric in their perspectives and wary of China compare to the KMT Party. Taiwan is always becoming the backbone to the US when making a policy in Asia specifically East Asia regions area. The interest for its credibility and integrity among allies and friends always become a though the time when dealing with Taiwan especially China as a major power in the Asia nation has a strong attention towards Taiwan. Besides the politics, Taiwan's which have an advanced in economy and society undoubtedly contribute to the global efforts to address a range of challenges internationally. In term of its economy, Taiwan has a strong base of the economy from agriculture to the most sophisticated technological equipment base. This provides important not only to the US but also others country that has a trading and economy ties. Even though Taiwan is not recognized internationally because of China obstacle to it, the economy of Taiwan is one of the most progressive and advance globally. The US in perception on the Taiwan politic, economy and social progress looking at the important for the Taiwan people to have a strong defense and security posture. Shadowing by mainland China aggression and influence, the prominent and strong in Armed Forces to protect and secure its island is vital. The commitment by the US to arms the island through the arms sales, defense collaboration and cooperation is what the Taiwan government and people hope for although China is not to easy about it. At last, Taiwan has created a good life for the country with economically developed, democratic society and good relations with outside country although is not being recognized by most of the world country that conforms to US values and interest.

The relations through strategic partnership between the US -Taiwan have brought some impact to the US on how they are looking through this relationship. The US relations towards Taiwan in shape of the strategic partnership have a significant impact in the way of its perspective in formulating the foreign policy to comply with the national interest. Taiwan people have created a good life for themselves with an open, economic development and democratic society that conforms to US values and interests. Taiwan always becomes US factors in developing the geostrategic strategy in North East Asia. On the strategic rebalance towards the Asia Pacific, it is concern whether US strategy considers Taiwan's security role narrowly in Taiwan Straits or broadly in the western Pacific. It has shown the importance of Taiwan in the eyes of US besides an additional of its contribution to international development and security. Taiwan political stability is important to the US in shaping its policy towards the island and the regions. The US supported Taiwan's political liberalization from an authoritarian dictatorship to dynamic democracy with allowed the people a greater say in Taiwan's identity. Taiwan's economic achievements are often overlooked reason for why the US continues to care about the island. Strong economic ties between both countries indicated by the ranking of trading partnership with Taiwan in 2016 become the 10th largest trading partner to the US and becomes the second largest partner to Taiwan. The importance of Taiwan to US economy can be seen from the role of supply global supply chain. Besides that, US also become Taiwan largest sources of export orders in manufacturing thus indicate that the US-Taiwan commercials ties are significantly greater and more complex.

Based on the analysis, Taiwan is significantly important to the US in shaping its domain and influences in East Asia especially North East Asia. First, US perspective on the important to have the strategic partnership with Taiwan is due to its locations. The island of Taiwan is a strategic location to contain China as new rising power. China as a new world power in the new era of the 21st Century has maintained its influence and presence throughout the world. Its economy and military are significantly increasing and become dominant in the world domain. Secondly, Taiwan island is the vital buffer zone for the US in the Pacific. Its locations became a buffer zone between China and Pacific Ocean area which provides a sea lane passage through US. As a buffer, Taiwan significantly absorbs any aggression or threat from China to US interest in pacific. Thirdly, US perspective through strategic partnership is to use Taiwan as a nation to control the North East region. As a democratic country and have a common understanding of politics and ideology, Taiwan is the right partner to control most of the conflicting area in the world. China rising power, North Korea issues and the sea disputes in the South China Sea is part of the conflict area that might cause armed conflict. Fourth, US perspective on Taiwan is that the country must depend on US assistance and support. It covers not only in the economy but also in the military and international politics. As a small country, Taiwan economy cannot be sustained by having only domestically but have to depend on outside country. Although China has become importance economy partner to Taiwan, the dependable to China might cause disaster to Taiwan in the long term. The US as an ally is the prominent nations that can maintain the survivability of Taiwan.

Others element in the US perspective on Taiwan in strengthening its strategic partnership relations is Taiwan island as future Forward Operation Base. The island became unsinkable aircraft carrier and can provide a firm base if something happened within the regions. Although having a South Korea and Japan island to locate their troops and planes, Taiwan becomes more practical to become a forward base which covers not only the South China Sea area but also the East China Sea. The US when dealing with China will use Taiwan as the bargaining chip. The country support for the economic security of Taiwan besides military aids proved

important for its strategy to contain China aggression within the region. The stronger Taiwan means the stronger US to balance of power in North East Asia. In relations with it, the US show of force in the regions by having an aircraft carriers Task Force and naval ships will suppress and check any China aggressive actions.

The understanding of One China Policy in what China want is also differed with no merger at all between Taiwan island and mainland China. Since 1979, the perception of the policy is that it must towards the democracy and not a communist in ideology. In overall US perspective, Taiwan is vital and salient to US national interest. It is must to maintain and continue the relations without ignoring China as a main partner. Geostrategic, economy, military and political environment is very important to the US perspective towards Taiwan.

## 6. Conclusion

US relations towards Taiwan in shape of the strategic partnership have a significant impact in the way of its perspective in formulating the foreign policy to comply with the national interest. Taiwan people have created a good life for themselves with an open, economic development and democratic society that conforms to US values and interests. Taiwan always becomes US factors in developing the geostrategic strategy in North East Asia. On the strategic rebalance towards the Asia Pacific, it is concern whether US strategy considers Taiwan's security role narrowly in Taiwan Straits or broadly in the western Pacific. It showed the importance of Taiwan in the eyes of US besides an additional of its contribution to international development and security. Taiwan political stability is important to the US in shaping its policy towards the island and the regions. The US supported Taiwan's political liberalization from an authoritarian dictatorship to dynamic democracy with allowed the people a greater say in Taiwan's identity. Taiwan's economic achievements are often overlooked reason for why the US continues to care about the island. Strong economic ties between both countries indicated by the ranking of trading partnership with Taiwan in 2016 become the 10th largest trading partner to the US and it becomes the second largest partner to Taiwan. The importance of Taiwan to US economy can be seen from the role of supply global supply chain. Besides that, US also become Taiwan largest sources of export orders in manufacturing thus indicate that the US-Taiwan commercials ties are significantly greater and more complex.

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