

*Contending Notions of the Cross-Strait Status Quo in Taiwan and Across the Strait: Impacts on U.S.-Taiwan Relations**

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Abstract

This article analyzes Taiwan's cross-Strait policy and its impacts on U.S.-Taiwan relations. It specifically discusses the contending notions of cross-Strait status quo following Taiwan's presidential election of 2016. This article finds first that most Taiwanese people support peaceful status quo across the Strait while either opposing or being suspicious of unification in the future. Moreover, they do not pay equal attention to the political foundation of the status quo. Second, the convergence among DPP, KMT, Beijing, and Washington over cross-Strait relations lies in the maintenance of the status quo. However, while both KMT and Beijing regard the "1992 Consensus" and "one China principle" as preconditions for sustaining it, the Tsai administration rejects those terms. This divergence has led to a deadlock in cross-Strait relations.

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Third, for Washington, the bottom line remains as opposing any unilateral changes of cross-Strait status quo by either side. Tsai's status quo discourse without "1992 Consensus" continues to satisfy this precondition, and the Trump administration has strengthened its political and military links with Taiwan. Fourth, the relief of cross-Strait deadlock might depend on the possibility of Washington and Beijing achieving mutual understanding on a new definition of the status quo, for instance, maintaining peace across the Strait without touching upon the sovereignty issue. Fifth, Tsai has to cope with a dilemma regarding her status quo policy: how to continue to appeal to DPP's cross-Strait notion with a strong proindependence component, while navigating the realities of Taiwan's vulnerability vis-à-vis Beijing and continuing to gain Washington's support. Finally, Taiwan cannot just rely on Washington's good will. Taiwan should find a way to define its political interests, positions, and strategies so as to strengthen U.S.-Taiwan relations and maintain the balance of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations.

One can easily discover that issue of cross-Strait relations has always occupied the center of attention in the political arena and civil society in Taiwan. On the one hand, the crucial differences on cross-Strait policy between the two major political parties are regarded as "isolationism versus openness" in the economy, and "separation versus overlap (of sovereignty across the Strait)" in politics. On the other hand, the notions of "status quo" across the Taiwan Strait have been commonly acknowledged but interpreted diversely by most of the elites and people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. For decades, "status quo" was the catchphrase to describe the stalemate in the Taiwan Strait, a term that was convenient for all parties involved. Nevertheless, the cross-Strait status quo has never been static. Though Taiwan's constitutional order still suggests that the Republic of China (ROC) represents the whole of China and pursues eventual unification, survey after survey shows that most Taiwanese considers their identity to be separate from the current "China" ruled by the communist party. Thus, support for continuing Taiwan's status quo of maintaining an ROC-based separated authority out of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is overwhelming, while support for unification in the near future is limited to a few.

Conversely, Beijing has claimed Taiwan as a renegade province of China since the ROC government fled to the island in 1949. Failure to control Taiwan is viewed as the result of the activities of "secessionists" on