

TAIWAN-US RELATIONS UNDER TRUMP

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Executive Summary

1. Trump's handling of the Taiwan issue for 2017 sent ambivalent messages. Yet, a clearer posture is emerging, along with the Taiwan Travel Act signed into law in March 2018.
2. Trump's olive branches could be deemed as testing waters and adjusting to fit political issues in Trump's business-like calculations.
3. The first phone conversation with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (on behalf of Democratic Progressive Party) in end 2016 and the two friendly Acts on Taiwan in 2017 should not be taken at face value.
4. The Trump government faces serious challenges: many key positions are either de-nominated, or pending formal congressional approval. For several positions of critical importance to Taiwan affairs, the late appointments have undoubtedly reflected on the Trump government's incompetence and unwillingness in handling the Taiwan issue.
5. Taiwan is in a compound crisis of industrial reconfiguration, economic stagnancy and social transformation. With Tsai's reform efforts stalled in many aspects, Taiwan is quickly losing leverages in both Taiwan-US and China-Taiwan relations.
6. Taiwan is keen to adopt the "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy proposed by the Trump government. This strategic move is nevertheless risky and fraught with challenges.
7. The Taiwanese may have to recalibrate their understanding of the initiatives of the United States and re-evaluate bilateral relations realistically.
8. The Tsai government may need to initiate further discussions on the fact of a rising China, its magnetic attraction to capable talents and the seemingly intensifying measures aimed at unification.

9. The Tsai government would also need to cultivate connections and support in the US government and from Washington elites.
10. Taiwan's success in external relations would require rational thinking and an inclusive view that could accommodate China's role in a soft, yet resilient manner.