

**US-TAIWAN RELATIONS ARE WARMING:
SIGNIFICANT OR NOT?**

John F COPPER

EAI Background Brief No. 1469

Executive Summary

1. Since early 2018, there has been a striking warming of relations between the United States and Taiwan. This can be gleaned from different perspectives and involves economic, political, and strategic contacts and activities.
2. This trend coincides with the deterioration of US-China trade talks and President Trump applying tariffs on China's imports and taking other punitive measures against China. Many observers see the improvement in US-Taiwan relations as the United States playing the "Taiwan card" against China.
3. The US pro-Taiwan moves originated from both the US Congress and the Executive branch of government.
4. Some of the "instances" of Washington favouring Taiwan can be said to be important. Taiwan has reacted with glee about almost all them. In some cases it has patently overestimated their importance.
5. There has been much hype about many issues. Whether the matters discussed by pundits and the media are significant are difficult to discern, so are their shelf life. They may be discarded or fade quickly in importance once the "trade war" between the United States and China ends. A related question is whether Taiwan will suffer when that happens.
6. The Taiwan Travel Act and the visit of the National Security Council head David Lee to the White House to confer with National Security Adviser John Bolton were overstated.
7. President Tsai's stops in the United States during a 12-day diplomatic trip to the Caribbean underscored the improvement in US-Taiwan relations, but must be seen as part of Tsai's campaign for reelection in January 2020.

8. In August President Trump approved a very large arms sales package worth \$8 billion to Taiwan. It included fighter aircraft to enhance Taiwan's air defence capabilities. President Tsai loudly applauded the decision. However, this did not alter the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait.