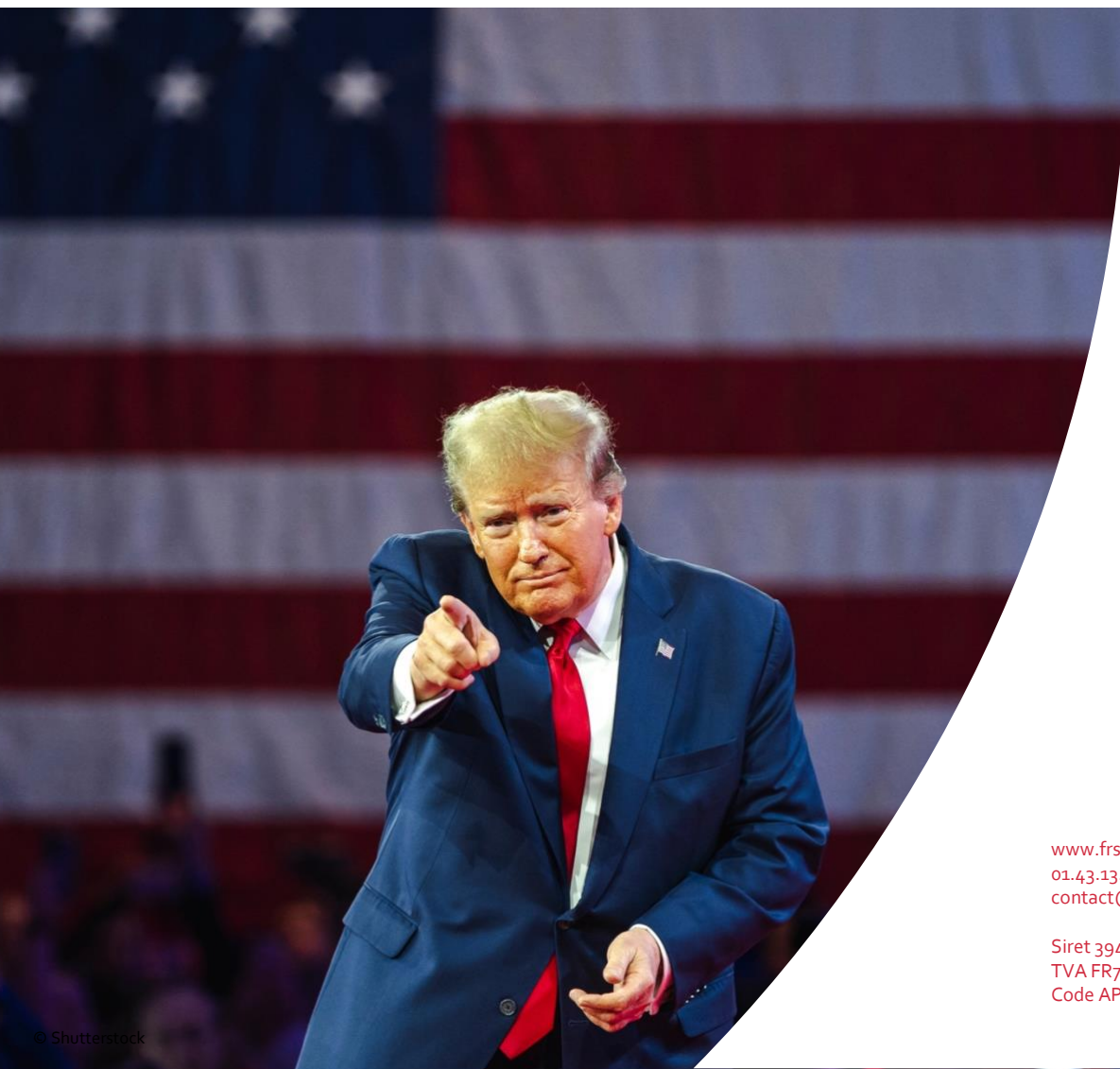


# Taiwan Program on Security and Diplomacy

24 February 2025

## US-Taiwan relations amidst Trump's coercive diplomacy

Simon MENET



[www.frstrategie.org](http://www.frstrategie.org)  
01.43.13.77.77  
[contact@frstrategie.org](mailto:contact@frstrategie.org)

Siret 394 095 533 00060  
TVA FR74 394 095 533  
Code APE 7220Z

- **Simon Menet** ([s.menet@frstrategie.org](mailto:s.menet@frstrategie.org)) is a Research Fellow at FRS, where he focuses on China-related strategic and security issues and heads the Taiwan Program on Security and Diplomacy. He is also a PhD candidate in Political Science at the *Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales* (Inalco).
- The **Taiwan Program on Security and Diplomacy** aims to enhance understanding of key issues related to Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait while fostering cooperation between Taiwan, France, and the broader European Union. Through publications, conferences, and interviews with policymakers and leading Taiwanese experts, the program provides insights into security and diplomatic dynamics.

#### **Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS)**

55 rue Raspail 92300 Levallois-Perret  
Fondation reconnue d'utilité publique par décret du 26 février 1993  
Directeur de la publication : Bruno Racine  
ISSN : 2273 - 4644  
© FRS 2025 — tous droits réservés

Le Code de la propriété intellectuelle n'autorisant, aux termes des alinéas 2 et 3 de l'article L.122-5, d'une part, que les « copies ou reproductions strictement réservées à l'usage privé du copiste et non destinées à une utilisation collective » et, d'autre part, que les analyses et les courtes citations dans un but d'exemple et d'illustration sous réserve de préciser le nom et la qualité de l'auteur et la source de la citation, « toute représentation ou reproduction intégrale, ou partielle, faite sans le consentement de l'auteur ou de ses ayants droit ou ayants cause, est illicite » (alinéa 1<sup>er</sup> de l'article L. 122-4).

Cette représentation ou reproduction, par quelque procédé que ce soit, constituerait donc une contrefaçon sanctionnée par les articles L.335-2 et suivants du Code de la propriété intellectuelle.

Less than a month into his presidency, President Donald Trump has startled policymakers and diplomats with its mafia-style “Peace through strength” and “America First” agendas. His desire to take over Greenland and threats to impose heavy tariffs on the European Union (EU), Canada, and Taiwan, alongside a conciliatory tone toward China and a radical shift on Ukraine that mirrors Russia’s narrative<sup>1</sup>, have prompted serious skepticism among US allies regarding Washington’s commitment to their security and shared values. Unlike their European counterparts<sup>2</sup>, Taiwanese officials and experts have maintained a *façade* of confidence<sup>3</sup>, emphasizing past cooperation under Trump’s first term and deep defense ties with the United States. At the same time, they have signaled a willingness to accommodate Trump’s demands on trade, semiconductors, and defense spendings. Yet, the stakes are high for the island.

The transactional and hardline approach of the Trump administration, increasingly comparable to racket, could weaken deterrence towards China, hinder Taiwan’s efforts to build up its military, and strain European support if left unaddressed. Just because Taiwan navigated Trump 1.0 relatively unscathed does not mean it will do so again.

## 1. Taiwan’s dependence on the US

---

Taiwan’s relations with the United States are vital for the island. Even though Washington does not officially recognize Taiwan since 1979, its diplomatic and military support represents a lifeline for Taipei in face of growing pressure from the People’s Republic of China and calls for “reunification”, including through force. The two countries share deep economic ties, with the US standing as Taiwan’s second largest trading partner (behind China) and first investment destination in 2024, mainly due to projects of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. in Arizona. Although Europeans outnumber American citizens living in the Republic of China (ROC), the United States remains a key destination for Taiwan’s students and serves as a training ground for its political, military, and economic leaders. Reflecting Washington’s significant influence, the American Institute in Taipei (AIT), which serves as the *de facto* US embassy, employs over 500 personnel – a figure comparable to the US embassy staff in Tokyo. This is ten times more than the French Office in Taipei, which has the largest European representation on the island.

In recent years, US-Taiwan relations have significantly deepened, bolstered by considerable bipartisan support within the United States. During his first term (2017-2021), Donald Trump increased arms sales up to 18.76 billion USD<sup>4</sup>, facilitated high-level exchanges, and enhanced cooperation in sectors such as cyber and energy. The Biden administration (2021-2025) not only deepened these policies but also expanded them, reaching unprecedented levels of military and security cooperation. Frequent engagements from Congress – with no less than 13 delegations visiting Taiwan between 2018 and 2024 – together with initiatives such as the Taiwan Assurance Act (2020) and the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (2022) have further strengthened relations across the board.

On defense, Taiwan has become highly dependent on and integrated with the United States. As evidenced by the latest reform of its Marine Corps<sup>5</sup>, key parts of the ROC

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Bake, “Trump’s Pivot Toward Putin’s Russia Upends Generations of U.S. Policy”, *New York Times*, 18 February 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Vadler, “‘Transatlantic relations are over’ as Trump sides with Putin, says top German MP”, *Politico*, 20 February 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Interviews conducted by the author in Taipei in February 2025.

<sup>4</sup> By comparison, the Obama administration notified Congress of more than 14 billion USD in Foreign Military Sales (FMS) between 2009 and 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Chung, “Taiwan’s marine corps to rebuild brigade with modern coastal mission”, *South China Morning Post*, 19 February 2025.

Armed Forces are modeled after their US counterparts. A large number of Taiwanese officers receive training in US defense colleges, while the Department of Defense dispatches military personnel and experts (estimated around 2,000 to 3,000<sup>6</sup>) every year for training and consulting purposes. These exchanges have led to closer integration with INDOPACOM, including in intelligence sharing and command and control (C2) systems. In recent years, the Taiwanese defense industry has certainly made strides in indigenous production of arms<sup>7</sup>, notably missiles (e.g., Tien Chien air-to-air and Hsiung Feng antiship missiles) and drones. However, it remains dependent on key components sourced externally such as gyroscopes, radar modules, surveillance systems. Taiwan also relies heavily on US imports for both conventional warfare systems and important elements of its asymmetrical warfare doctrine, such as mines and MANPADS. This dependence has already created some difficulties with the Biden administration, which declined to sell certain equipment like the Seahawk helicopter<sup>8</sup>, deeming it unsuitable for Taiwan's "porcupine strategy."

## 2. Trump 2.0: a new test for Taiwan

---

Trump's second term might upend the progress made so far and heighten Taiwan's vulnerability. During his campaign, Trump called for Taiwan to pay for its own "protection" and accused it of stealing the American chip industry<sup>9</sup>. Since taking office, he has sought to curb what he views as unfair dominance, threatening tariffs on semiconductors to push Taiwanese companies to move advanced chip production to the United States. Meanwhile, he has imposed a limited 10 percent tariff on China and maintained a noticeably softer tone with Beijing, in stark contrast with his campaign rhetoric and the positions of close aides, including National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Reports have also pointed that Trump may be exploring a deal with China<sup>10</sup>. It is not clear though whether Taiwan could be used as leverage in discussions with Beijing. But Trump's transactional and unilateral approach to foreign policy, evident in his handling of Ukraine and ongoing US-Russia talks, serves as a stark warning.

Recent positive signs in US-Taiwan relations have yet to illuminate the overarching policy. A recent joint statement between Japan and the United States reaffirmed "*the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community*"<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the State Department has removed mentions of the US not supporting Taiwanese independence, prompting probably unwarranted interrogation about a stronger backing for Taipei<sup>12</sup>. These steps only add confusion and highlight divergences within the Trump camp, ranging from China hawks such as Marco Rubio and Elbridge Colby, nominated for the role of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, to the likes of Elon Musk and Darren Beattie at the State Department, who have tended to follow Beijing's line.

Taiwan is currently adjusting to Trump's hardline policy, using tools that yielded result in his first presidency. This time, however, things will be different. While Taipei remains

---

<sup>6</sup> Yuko Mukai, Masatsugu Sonoda, Sonoda Yomiuri, "U.S. Plans to Expand Scale of Training of Taiwan Military; Defense Against Potential Invasion to be Strengthened", *Japan News*, 17 September 2023.

<sup>7</sup> David Ann, Matt Schrader, Ned Collins-Chase, "Taiwan's Indigenous Defense Industry: Centralized Control of Abundant Suppliers", *Global Taiwan Institute*, May 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward, Nahal Toosi, "In letters, U.S. tries to reshape Taiwan's weapons requests", *Politico*, 5 October 2022.

<sup>9</sup> "The Donald Trump Interview Transcript. Full text, fact-checked", *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 16 July 2024. See also: Michael Martina, Ben Blanchard, Yimou Lee, "For Taiwan, Trump's 'protection' money may mean new and early big ticket arms deals", *Reuters*, 7 November 2024.

<sup>10</sup> "A big, beautiful Trump deal with China?", *The Economist*, 28 January 2025.

<sup>11</sup> "United States-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement", *The White House*, 7 February 2025.

<sup>12</sup> "US removes no independence statement", *Taipei Times*, 17 February 2025.

confident in Washington's enduring support – particularly given deep defense ties and its dominance in advanced semiconductors manufacturing –, it is aware that it must address the concerns of the new administration. Taiwanese officials have stepped up engagement with the MAGA (Make America Great Again) camp. They have demonstrated their commitment to strengthening the ROC Armed Forces and increasing defense spending<sup>13</sup>, contingent on the US reducing its 20 billion USD backlog<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, there appears to be little panic in Taipei over potential tariffs. Officials and experts argue that Taiwan will eventually offset trade tensions by purchasing more of American natural gas to reduce the US trade deficit and stands ready to shoulder businesses in mitigating the impact of potential levies on semiconductors. TSMC's control over the production of the most advanced chips further provides Taiwan with a sizeable advantage, as most of the tariff burden will ultimately be borne by US end-users and customers.

### 3. Paths ahead for US-Taiwan relations and Europe's role

---

The future of US-Taiwan relations remains uncertain as several potential paths lie ahead. Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine and disengage from Europe to focus more on China could, in some ways, benefit Taiwan. It would help reduce delays in arms sales and reallocating resources to counter Beijing's revisionist agenda and destabilizing actions in the Taiwan Strait. However, a "dirty deal" that would favor Russia over Ukraine and undermine European security could negatively impact Taiwan by emboldening the PRC<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the prospect of closer ties between Trump and Putin, evident in ongoing negotiations, risks weakening transatlantic relations more than disrupting the China-Russia strategic alignment, which is apparently one goal of the Trump administration. Once unthinkable, such a geopolitical reconfiguration could erode international support towards Taiwan.

Given these uncertainties, Europeans must maintain their low-key yet essential engagement with Taiwan. This includes strategic communication efforts, as demonstrated by EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen's 2025 Davos speech<sup>16</sup>, which linked the Baltic Sea and Taiwan Strait in the context of undersea cables security. Taiwan stands to benefit from reinforcing the interconnection between the European and Indo-Pacific theaters and ensuring that European policymakers and populations recognize that a weakened response to Russian aggression in Europe sets a dangerous precedent for Chinese aggression in Asia.

In addition, Europeans must bolster collective deterrence against any unilateral attempts by China to alter the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait. To this end, member states must resist the lure of China's economy in response to the turmoil stemming from the Trump administration<sup>17</sup>. While fostering dialogue with Beijing should not be overlooked, Europe must not compromise its strategic interests for short-term gains in the Chinese market.

---

<sup>13</sup> "President Lai holds press conference following high-level national security meeting", Office of the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan), 14 February 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Cheung, Will Ripley, "Taiwan's divided politics undermine defense resolve as Trump returns", CNN, 24 January 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Balmforth, Bart H. Meijer, "Trump promises Kyiv involvement in peace talks with Russia", Reuters, 14 February 2025.

<sup>16</sup> "Davos 2025: Special Address by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission", World Economic Forum, 21 January 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, "La tentation de la carte chinoise", Institut Montaigne, 19 February 2025.