For the leadership of Taiwan, the significance for Taiwan’s relationships with the US and China of the end of the Trump administration and the arrival of the Biden administration formed the defining concern as 2021 began. Taiwan welcomed two steps that the Trump administration took in its waning days: announcing a visit to Taiwan by the US ambassador to the UN (even though it was later cancelled) and repudiating the longstanding Taiwan Contact Guidelines, which was widely seen in Taiwan as overly restrictive. Taiwan’s anxieties regarding the Biden administration were quickly allayed, as incoming senior officials repeatedly called US support for Taiwan “rock solid” and issued new far less restrictive Guidelines. Taiwan also benefited from unusually direct expressions of support from Japan and other international partners.
Taiwan’s economy continued to boom despite the pandemic, but its dominance in high-end computer chip production became the subject of worries by US officials and industry groups over supply chain security. China’s military activities near Taiwan included two days of especially intense activity, which were clearly intended to signal its displeasure with the Biden administration’s support for Taiwan. China also banned the import of Taiwanese meat and pineapples and announced preferential treatment for Taiwan investors in mainland agriculture, all clearly targeted at disrupting support for Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party and President Tsai Ing-wen among its rural political base. Both strategies appeared more likely to backfire than not. Increasing tensions between the US and China, especially over Taiwan, have led to concerns on all sides that a diplomatic or military confrontation may be growing more likely.

Low-key Statements Begin the Cross-Strait Year

2021 dawned in China and Taiwan with many recalling the exchange of statements in January 2019 between People’s Republic of China (PRC) President Xi Jinping, calling for movement toward unification, and Tsai Ing-wen, president of the Republic of China, staunchly defending Taiwan’s separate identity. That exchange helped to reverse Tsai’s lagging political fortunes and led to her reelection on Jan. 11, 2020. This year, Xi’s New Year statement did not mention Taiwan.

Zhang Zhijun, president of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS)—China’s supposedly unofficial interlocutor with Taiwan—issued a statement describing the cross-Strait situation as “severe and complex,” saying that “the deadlock between the two sides of the strait is difficult to resolve,” but expressing confidence that these difficulties “cannot change the melody of the era of national rejuvenation.” In her new year’s statement, President Tsai offered a very different view, asserting that the actions of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft and naval vessels had undermined cross-Strait relations, but promising that Taiwan would “uphold our principles and not act rashly” [and] “facilitate meaningful dialogue under the principles of parity and dignity” as long as the Beijing was sincere.

On March 5, Premier Li Keqiang addressed cross-Strait relations in his work report to China’s National People’s Congress, using language familiar from previous work reports. He promised that China would remain committed to the one-China Principle and the 1992 Consensus and “to promoting the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait and China’s reunification.” China, he warned, would resolutely deter any Taiwan activity that promoted independence yet encouraged Taiwan compatriots to benefit from China’s economic growth. There was none of the tension around this work report that had occurred when the 2020 work report, which was presented shortly after Tsai’s second inauguration, reportedly omitted reference to peaceful reunification. These three statements from the mainland and one from Taiwan seemed to signal a relatively moderate tone on both sides and suggested that both would continue their policy approach from 2020.

The events of January through April offered a picture of considerably sharper confrontation. An early point of contention was another in the series of efforts from Taiwan to find a formula to bridge differences with the mainland over the “1992 Consensus” in order to resume cross-Strait dialogue that had been frozen by Beijing since Tsai first took office in 2016. Chiu Tai-san, newly appointed as minister of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, proposed on March 18 that Taiwan and the mainland could renew their dialogue with “constructive ambiguity,” “finding the greatest common denominator” between the two sides. Chiu was clearly proposing that the two sides revisit the “1992 Consensus” without insisting that it reflected China’s “one-China Principle.” Even if Chiu intended this to be an olive branch, no one expected it to succeed, and China’s Taiwan Affairs Office promptly rejected it.

Outgoing, Incoming Administrations Raise Taiwan’s Stature in Washington

On Jan. 6, the State Department announced that US Ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, would visit Taiwan, only to cancel the visit the following week. On Jan. 9, then Secretary of State Michael Pompeo cancelled the State Department’s Guidance for US official contacts with Taiwan, reissued annually since at least the mid-1980s, which had helped ensure that the US did not treat Taiwan as a country with which the United States had diplomatic relations, and that
had been criticized in Taiwan as demeaning. Both of the announcements led to strong denunciations from Beijing, but were welcomed enthusiastically in Taipei. Both were interpreted as Pompeo’s efforts to force the incoming Biden administration to continue a confrontational posture against China and in support of Taiwan. How would the Biden administration respond? Biden’s nominees for secretary of State and Defense both assured senators at their confirmation hearings that US support for Taiwan was “rock solid.” Tsai, Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, and Taiwan’s Representative in Washington, Bi-khim Hsiao, all enthusiastically welcomed these confirmations that Taiwan’s relationship with the US would be secure under the Biden administration. Earlier anxiety seemed to vanish.

The Biden State Department issued new Taiwan Contact Guidelines on April 9 that are less restrictive than those Pompeo cancelled. The Financial Times, citing an unnamed Biden administration official, said the new guidance now allows US officials to regularly meet Taiwan counterparts in US federal government buildings and at Taiwan’s de facto embassies and consulates overseas. US officials are also now permitted to attend gatherings at Taiwan’s Twin Oaks estate in Washington, except at Taiwan’s Double Ten national day. The Biden official said “both sides” should be happy with the new guidance—Beijing because some “guardrails” remained in place and Taipei because several restrictions had been lifted. The official State Department press release said the liberalized guidelines are aimed at encouraging greater US government engagement with Taiwan—an “important economic and security partner”—but it also underscored the unofficial nature of US–Taiwan relations. Evidence of the Biden administration approach to contacts with Taiwan appeared even before the State Department’s April 9 announcement. Most notably, the US ambassador to Palau accompanied the president of Palau during his visit to Taiwan in late March, marking the first visit to Taiwan by a sitting US ambassador since 1979. Earlier in the month, the chargé (acting ambassador) to Japan invited his Taiwan counterpart in Tokyo, Frank Hsieh, to the official residence of the US ambassador.

A few months into office, the Biden administration is actively rallying US allies against the PRC. On a visit to Tokyo in March for the Security Consultative Committee meeting, the so-called “two-plus-two,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin issued a joint press statement with their Japanese counterparts on the US–Japan alliance, in which the four ministers underscored the importance of cross-Strait peace and stability. The following month, President Joe Biden welcomed Japan’s Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide to the White House for his first in-person meeting with a foreign leader. Biden and Suga issued a joint statement on a US–Japan partnership for a “new era,” which, like the “two-plus-two,” underscored the importance of cross-Strait peace and
stability. This addition came as a surprise to some observers who believed Suga might have preferred to omit it for fear of overly antagonizing Beijing. The last public reference to Taiwan during a US–Japan leaders’ summit was in 1969.

**PLA Actions Belie Low-key Statements**

Two days after Biden was inaugurated, China launched its largest ever single-day series of air sorties, sending 15 PLA Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Twelve were combat aircraft, a significant shift from earlier sorties near Taiwan in which turboprop Y–8 anti–submarine and reconnaissance aircraft had dominated. The US State Department responded sharply, affirming Washington’s “rock solid” commitment to Taipei and urging Beijing “to cease its military, diplomatic and economic pressure.” By the end of January, PLA sorties near Taiwan had occurred nine out of every 10 days, according to *Global Times*, a nationalist mouthpiece. China’s Ministry of Defense said that they were intended as a “stern warning” to foreign forces.

Near–daily incursions continued through the first four months of the year, spiking with 20 aircraft on March 26, 15 aircraft on April 7 as Taiwan prepared to conduct missile tests, and 25 aircraft on April 12. The last was the largest on record; all of these group sorties included significant proportions of combat aircraft. Chinese naval forces, including the Liaoning aircraft carrier, also maneuvered near Taiwan. While many of these activities were described by China’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) or *Global Times* as signaling Chinese warnings, they clearly also served operational and training requirements for the PLA, including intelligence collection and accustoming PLAAF units to flying around Taiwan’s defensive perimeter and encountering Taiwan military challenges. They also strained the capacity of the Taiwan Air Force to respond, leading it to request an additional $74 million to counter the incursions. Taiwan’s Air Force also announced its decision to purchase Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC–3) missiles to enhance its defensive capabilities.

When China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee passed a new Coast Guard Law on Jan. 22, it transformed the Coast Guard into a military–like organization under the command of the Central Military Commission, and it authorized commanders to take action when sovereignty is violated in waters claimed by China, which would include the East China Sea, the waters around Taiwan, and the South China Sea. Without acknowledging a cause–and–effect linkage, Taiwan’s Coast Guard and Navy announced plans to equip patrol vessels with anti–air missiles during wartime and integrate the vessels into the Navy’s live–fire drills later this year. On March 25 in Washington, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Relations Office (TECRO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to establish a US–Taiwan Coast Guard Working Group (CGWG) without suggesting any military dimension to their cooperation. China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said the following day that the pact violated US commitments to China and called on the US to “be cautious with its words and actions on Taiwan–related issues,” suggesting that China did at least see the MOU as a step toward more formal US–Taiwan military cooperation.

**Agriculture Becomes a Field of Contention**

On Jan. 27, China’s TAO announced that it was banning the import of meat from Taiwan to prevent the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza and consumption of meat with ractopamine. Because Taiwan exports very little meat to the mainland, Taiwan officials expressed annoyance, but there was no significant economic damage caused.

The next month, on Feb. 26, the TAO announced that it had found unspecified biohazards in pineapples imported from Taiwan just as the pineapple harvest was beginning in Taiwan. Because the mainland is a major market for Taiwan producers, the potential economic damage was considerable. President Tsai took to Facebook to urge Taiwanese to eat more pineapples, calling the mainland decision an “ambush” and “obviously ... not a normal trade decision.”

On March 17, China announced “22 Measures on Agriculture and Forestry” to attract Taiwan investment in mainland agriculture, including provisions on land–use rights, access to financing, agricultural patents, and funding for research and development, essentially providing Taiwanese investors national treatment. While there was little evidence that such measures would attract any significant interest, Taiwanese officials treated the package as one
more in a series of economic United Front strategies, following the pineapple ban and the packages of 31 investment incentives in 2018 and 22 in 2019 that the Mainland offered. During an inspection tour of Fujian Province in March, Xi Jinping called on provincial officials to “be bold in exploring new paths for integrated cross-Strait development.”

Figure 3 Chinese President Xi Jinping visiting Fujian and calling on the province to redouble its efforts to reach out to Taiwan. Photo: Xinhua/Ju Peng

Taiwanese suspicions of Chinese agricultural policies and their negative impact on Taiwan were reinforced on April 4 when a dead pig was discovered in a harbor on Taiwan’s west coast; tests found it had been infected with African Swine Fever (ASF), which has decimated mainland pork production since 2018. Although there was no conclusive proof that the dead pig had come from China, Taiwan’s Coast Guard announced it would launch increased patrols and inspections to prevent ASF being transmitted from the mainland to Taiwan.

A Strong Economy & Chip Dominance

Taiwan emerged from a year of COVID–19 in strong economic shape. By February, Taiwan export orders had grown for the twelfth successive month, up 49% from a year earlier according to Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Taiwan was ranked the 15th largest global exporter, up two spots from 2020. First-quarter 2021 manufacturing grew for the ninth straight month and business confidence, as measured by the Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI), remained over 60, where 50 and above indicates growing confidence. Taiwan’s economy has boomed thanks to huge global demand for computer and IT products in the work–from–home age and the avoidance of any COVID–related shutdowns on the island.

Taiwan investments in mainland China dropped by both the value and number of investments from a year previous, down to 33% of Taiwan’s total outbound investment, a fall from a high of 84% in 2010. However, reflecting the continuing strength of the cross–Strait high–tech trade, China’s General Administration of Customs released foreign trade data showing that, in 2020, Taiwan’s exports to the mainland hit a record high of $200.664 billion, an annual increase of 16%.

Taiwan’s strength in the production of high–end silicon chips and information technology and communication (ITC) equipment paradoxically posed several challenges for Taiwan. On Feb. 24, President Biden ordered a review of US supply chains, seeking to end the country’s reliance on China and other adversaries for crucial goods. On March 1, a US national security commission on artificial intelligence concluded that the dependency of the United States on semiconductor imports, particularly from Taiwan, creates a strategic vulnerability for both the US economy and military. These concerns pose a special concern for Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). TSMC’s central role in the global productions of silicon chips was underscored by a report by a US industry group concluding that Taiwan produces 92% of the most advanced silicon chips (with channels less than 10 nanometers wide) and warning that this supply could suffer a catastrophic interruption due to natural disasters, infrastructure shutdowns, or international conflicts. The report also concluded that the largest bilateral trade flow in semiconductors was between Taiwan and China, accounting for over 60% of Taiwan semiconductor trade, a market that TSMC dominates.

In response to tightening US export controls, Chinese firms have become more aggressive in recruiting top talent from Taiwan semiconductor firms. In early March, prosecutors in New Taipei announced that they were investigating two companies with Chinese funding that were, they alleged, poaching computer chip engineers from Taiwan companies. In late April, Taiwan’s Ministry of Labor banned companies in Taiwan from posting jobs in China, especially jobs in the semiconductor and integrated circuit industries.
The Washington Post reported in early April that the Chinese company Phytium Technology had used chips that were produced by TSMC to build a supercomputer used in designing a cutting-edge hypersonic glide vehicle for the PLA. A day earlier, the Commerce Department added Phytium and six other Chinese supercomputing companies to its Entity List, imposing sanctions for actions contrary to US interests. A US official reportedly expressed concern: “In this particular case, we have a partner that is under a direct military threat from China, and is also one of the few places that produce certain technologies China needs to support its military ambitions.”

Even less advanced chips became an issue as car companies across the globe were forced to pause production because they could not acquire sufficient silicon chips for increasing internet-enabled vehicles, chips that are mostly produced by TSMC. The shortage has grown so severe that the German economics minister recently appealed to his counterpart in Taiwan for help to shake loose a few chips that are urgently needed by German carmakers; the director of Biden's National Economic Council did the same.

**Trade Deals and Pork**

Taiwan’s efforts to expand its international economic linkages took a step forward when Japan’s Prime Minister Suga expressed support for Taiwan’s participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Taiwan’s economic linkages took a step backward when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) multilateral free trade agreement with China, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, from which Taiwan is excluded because of China.

On Jan. 1, Taiwan officially opened its markets to pork from the US, a step Tsai’s administration had announced in August 2020 to persuade the US to move toward a bilateral trade agreement despite Taiwan consumers’ concerns over US pork producers’ use of the additive ractopamine. Since August, her efforts to satisfy Taiwan consumers and US producers have failed to satisfy either. The opposition Nationalist or Kuomintang (KMT) Party announced that it had collected a sufficient amount of signatures to hold an advisory referendum to block US pork imports, even though the Taiwan government announced that none of the 1,500 tons of US pork imported through April 8 of this year contained any trace of ractopamine. Despite Tsai’s efforts, the annual trade report issued by the US Trade Representative said that it continued to have serious concerns about Taiwan’s agricultural policies that are “not based on science” and “barriers to market access for US pork and beef.”

**KMT Approves Subtle Twist to the 1992 Consensus**

During the Ma Ying-jeou era (2008–2016), Taipei leveraged the 1992 Consensus, or “one China, different interpretations,” to cut trade deals with the mainland while protecting Taiwan’s sovereignty, since, in their interpretation, “China” refers to the ROC. However, under Xi, Beijing has made it crystal clear that it does accept any notion of “different interpretations,” and has equated the 1992 Consensus with the PRC’s rigid “one-China principle,” under which China constitutes the PRC. Polling indicates that an ever-wider number of Taiwan voters view the 1992 Consensus with skepticism or think that consensus was never reached. This issue is widely cited as one reason the KMT lost the 2020 presidential election, yet older senior KMT leaders insist that the 1992 Consensus is fundamental to the party’s claim to be able to calm cross-Strait tensions.

In late March, the KMT announced a “1992 Consensus Plus.” It combines the 1992 Consensus with four new affirmations: 1) the sovereignty of the Republic of China; 2) peace and security across the Taiwan Strait; 3) freedom, democracy, and human rights; and, 4) the strengthening of cross-Strait co-prosperity. On paper, these additions appear unremarkable, and are even quite close to President Tsai’s formulations, but KMT chairman Johnny Chiang said it better emphasizes the 1992 Consensus’s grounding in the ROC constitution. In Beijing, the TAO spokesperson immediately rejected the new formulation and denounced efforts to “highlight differences.” Nonetheless, Chiang insisted that the “1992 Consensus Plus” would help the KMT to “keep up with the times,” i.e., appeal to younger Taiwanese voters. Whether the KMT’s subtle twist on the 1992 Consensus will reassure a nervous Taiwan electorate remains to be seen.
Taiwanese endorse Tsai, Her Cross–Strait Policy, and Taiwan Identity, but Not US Pork

As the KMT struggles internally, recent polls indicate that Tsai continues to benefit from Taiwan’s successful management of COVID-19 and its surprising economic resilience. Taiwanese continue to support Tsai and her resistance to Chinese pressure to accept its 1992 Consensus. According to two different polls (link to first and second), Tsai had almost 60% trust and approval ratings, 53% endorsed her handling of cross–Strait relations, and over 60% approved of her handling of COVID-19. Her one negative was imports of US pork, which 60 to 70% opposed. A third survey conducted by the Election Study Center showed that the DPP had significantly greater support than the KMT. Over 80% of those surveyed supported the cross–Strait status quo rather than immediate moves to either independence or reunification, while over 60% identified as “Taiwanese,” 30% identified as Taiwanese and Chinese, and less than 3% identified as solely Chinese. Tsai’s performance was sufficiently popular that even the chair of the opposition KMT party, Johnny Chiang, gave credit to her efforts “to show goodwill to the other side.”

Looking Ahead

As May approached, officials and commentators on all sides engaged in an extended debate over what Taipei and Washington perceived as new and threatening Chinese actions to coerce Taiwan, or what Beijing perceived as Taiwan and US initiatives to move Taiwan toward de jure independence. The Economist called Taiwan “the most dangerous place in the world,” leading Tsai to respond, “Taiwan stands on the front lines of democracy worldwide. As long as the people of Taiwan remain united and uphold our core values while responding prudently to regional developments, we can overcome the challenges posed by authoritarian expansion.”

Response to The Economist May 1 cover story:
Taiwan stands on the front lines of democracy worldwide. As long as the people of Taiwan remain united and uphold our core values while responding prudently to regional developments, we can overcome the challenges posed by authoritarian expansion.

As Taiwan moves into the second year of Tsai Ing-wen’s second term in May, the president is in a very strong position for a second–term presidency. That should enable her to pursue long–term policies, such as increasing Taiwan’s defensive capabilities and pursuing trade agreements, even if those require budget increases or pork imports. The KMT will hold elections for its party chairman in July, but it will face a major challenge over how to adjust its policies, especially on cross–Strait relations, in ways that attract popular support. The scheduled Aug. 28 referendum, which appears likely to include votes on importing US pork and closing the fourth nuclear power plant, will offer the KMT an opportunity to challenge the ruling DPP on the kind of domestic bread–and–butter issues on which the ruling party has stumbled before.

Regardless of how Taiwan’s political balance is altered, China appears determined to increase the range of coercive measures—economic, diplomatic, cyber, and military—that it deploys against Taiwan. It may even be prepared to accept that its military sorties may lead to a greater risk of miscalculation or military accident followed by military action. It has no interest in establishing contacts with the ruling DPP, no matter how the party tries to show flexibility. Even if the KMT were to return to power, it appears unlikely that it would have popular support for returning to the sort of...
policies that enabled President Ma Ying-jeou to secure mutually beneficial economic and other ties with the mainland. China may well perceive that Taiwanese and US debates over its coercive intents and capabilities advance its objectives by disquieting its opponents.

Renewed international attention to Taiwan’s dominance in high-end chip production and the close relationship of that industry to China will make even this economic strength a subject of controversy.

Finally, Taiwan will play a more visible role in US–China tensions. The Biden administration will find support for Taiwan’s democratic free-market system a popular way to signal its differences with Beijing. The US will continue to expand its role in highlighting Taiwan in its interactions with foreign partners. The US Congress will advance legislation advocating greater US support for Taiwan. Whether those will make a real difference in Taiwan’s security or simply make Taiwan more of a pawn in US–China relations is less certain. The one step the US could take to strengthen Taiwan’s economic security seems paradoxically the least likely to happen—progress toward a bilateral trade agreement.

With the Chinese Communist Party celebrating the 100th anniversary of its founding on July 1, 2021, one continuity seems inescapable: Beijing will continue to increase pressure on Taipei by conducting military operations around the island, blocking access to multilateral and bilateral international recognition, and threatening sanctions against any Taiwanese who does not endorse its preferred formula of “one country, two systems.” The annual plenums of the PRC National People’s Congress and Chinese People’s Consultative Congress will offer occasions for any further tightening, or, far less likely, loosening, of Beijing’s cross-Strait policy.
CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

JANUARY – APRIL 2021

Jan. 1, 2021: New Year Message from China’s Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) warns that “the situation across the Taiwan Strait is severe and complex.

Jan. 1, 2021: China’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian reiterates that it was infeasible to launch any cross-Strait dialogues without the 1992 consensus.

Jan. 2, 2021: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen calls for a meaningful dialogue with Beijing on an equal basis Friday in her New Year’s speech.

Jan. 5, 2021: US National Security Council declassifies East Asia Pacific Security Policy. It states that the US seeks to develop an effective asymmetric defense. It also states that the US will implement a strategy capable of defending the first-island-chain, including Taiwan.

Jan. 6, 2021: US and Taiwan hold a virtual political-military dialogue. US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs R. Clarke Cooper participates.

Jan. 6, 2021: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announces that US Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft will visit Taiwan because “Taiwan shows what a free China could achieve” as the US supports the Hong Kong people.

Jan. 6, 2021: Premier Su Tseng-chang calls on China to adhere to its promise to uphold Hong Kong’s autonomy until 2047. KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang called on Beijing and the Hong Kong government to be prudent and tolerant and not to harm or restrict the development of freedom and democracy in the territory.

Jan. 9, 2021: Secretary Pompeo announces that Washington will no longer enforce Taiwan Contact Guidance that had restricted contacts between US officials and Taiwan counterparts since 1979.

Jan. 10, 2021: Transition official states that Biden is committed to the "strong, principled, and bipartisan" support for Taiwan and will support "a peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people of Taiwan.”

Jan. 10, 2021: Two medical groups in Taiwan protest the decision of the International Society of Radiographers and Radiological Technologists (ISRRT) to list "Taiwan" as "Chinese Taipei.”

Jan. 11, 2021: US Ambassador to the Netherlands Pete Hoekstra and his Taiwan counterpart Chen Hsing-hsing meet at the US embassy.

Jan. 14, 2021: President Tsai Ing-wen holds a videoconference with US Ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, whose trip to Taiwan was canceled at the last minute.

Jan. 14, 2021: Edward McMullen, US ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, officially meets Taiwan’s representative to Switzerland David Huang.

Jan. 15, 2021: New Zealand Commerce and Industry Office in Taipei (NZCIO) announces that New Zealand and Taiwan have signed a mutual customs arrangement.

Jan. 16, 2021: Taoyuan voters recall Taoyuan City Councilor Wang Hao-yu of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), making him the first councilor in a special municipality ever to be recalled. A KMT spokesman calls it “the first domino effect resulting from the import of pork containing ractopamine.”

Jan. 19, 2021: Vietnamese government approves Taiwan-based Foxconn’s investment of $270 million to build a new factory.
Jan. 19, 2021: Antony Blinken expresses at his confirmation hearing to be secretary of State "a strong and long bipartisan commitment to Taiwan" based on the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and the US-China joint communiques; he promises to ensure Taiwan’s self-defense capability. US secretary of Defense nominee Lloyd J. Austin echoes the same position.

Jan. 19, 2021: At a World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board meeting, the United States voiced support for Taiwan’s inclusion in the global body as an observer state.

Jan. 23, 2021: US State Department spokesman expresses concern at China’s “attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan.” He urges Beijing to “engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan’s democratically elected representatives.”

Jan. 24, 2021: Fifteen Chinese military planes enter into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) but do not cross the median line that divides the Taiwan Strait.

Jan. 27, 2021: China’s TAO announces that China has banned meat products from Taiwan to prevent the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza and consumption of meat with ractopamine.


Jan. 29, 2021: US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan says that US must “impose costs” for China’s threats to Taiwan as well its actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Feb. 1, 2021: China’s new Coast Guard Law goes into effect after being passed by the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress on Jan. 22.

Feb. 4, 2021: Guyana abruptly terminates an agreement with Taiwan to open an office in the South American country, hours after China urged Georgetown to “correct their mistake.”

Feb. 6, 2021: Secretary of State Blinken tells Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi in a telephone call that the US and its allies will hold Beijing accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, indicating across the Taiwan Strait. Chinese media report Blinken committed to abide by the three Sino-US joint communiques and the US “one-China Policy.”

Feb. 17, 2021: Taiwan’s Cabinet approves over NT$10 billion (US$357.1 million) to assist the domestic pork industry.

Feb. 17, 2021: Taiwan’s Economic Affairs Minister Wang Mei-hua receives a letter from US National Economic Council (NEC) Director Brian Deese asking for help to resolve the shortage of automobile chips faced by American automobile manufacturers.

Feb. 26, 2021: China’s TAO announces that Chinese customs has banned import of Taiwanese pineapples over biosafety concerns.

March 1, 2021: US national security commission on artificial intelligence says that the dependency of the United States on semiconductor imports, particularly from Taiwan, creates a strategic vulnerability for both its economy and military.

March 3, 2021: Taiwan announces it has received its first batch of COVID-19 vaccines, 117,000 doses, from the COVAX allocation program of the World Health Organization.

March 3, 2021: Biden administration issues Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, saying “We will support Taiwan, a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner, in line with longstanding American commitments.”

March 3, 2021: Secretary Blinken says he is committed to beginning talks on free trade agreement negotiations with Taiwan, and to inviting Taiwan to the Summit for Democracy, which the US plans to host later this year.

March 4, 2021: Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga expresses his government's support for Taiwan’s participation at the WHO and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).
March 5, 2021: Premier Li Keqiang in the Government Work Report before the National People’s Congress repeats language from previous work reports emphasizing the one China principle, the 1992 Consensus, and promoting the peaceful growth of relations across the Taiwan Strait and China’s reunification.

March 7, 2021: Washington Post reports that the Chinese company Phytium is using chips from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (TSMC) in a supercomputer developing China’s hypersonic glide vehicle.

March 9, 2021: KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang announces the party has submitted 528,000 signatures to the Central Election Commission to initiate a referendum opposing the government’s decision to lift a ban on pork imports containing ractopamine. This would be well above the 289,667 required.

March 14, 2021: Secretary of State Blinken stresses the importance of Taiwan ties to Paraguay’s president in a phone call.

March 15, 2021: Taiwan’s Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng tells reporters that Taiwan has received approval from the US to acquire critical components for the submarines it is building.

March 17, 2021: China announces "22 Measures on Agriculture and Forestry," which it says would offer more "equitable treatment" to Taiwan enterprises operating there.

March 18, 2021: Taiwan’s newly appointed Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Minister Chiu Tai-san calls on mainland China to take an attitude of “constructive ambiguity” toward the 1992 Consensus as he announces rules to allow business travelers from China to visit amid the COVID–19 pandemic. China immediately rejects the idea.

March 24, 2021: Incoming commander of US Pacific Command Adm. John Aquilino tells Senate Armed Services Committee that China might attack Taiwan much sooner than most think. If China is allowed to take over Taiwan, it would be a severe blow to the credibility of the United States as a strong and trusted partner in the region.

March 25, 2021: Xi Jinping, during an inspection tour of Fujian province, instructs officials there “to be bold in exploring new paths for integrated cross–Strait development.”

March 26, 2021: US and Taiwan sign MOU to establish a Coast Guard Working Group.

March 26, 2021: Twenty Chinese military aircraft enter Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ), in the largest incursion yet reported by the island’s defense ministry.

March 27, 2021: Palau’s President Surangel Whipps Jr visits Taiwan accompanied by US Ambassador to Palau John Hennessey-Niland, who is reported to be the first US ambassador to visit Taiwan in an official capacity since 1978. China’s Foreign Ministry cautions against steps that might “damage Sino-US relations and the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait.”

March 31, 2021: Office of the US Trade Representative issues its Trade Policy Agenda and 2020 Annual Report and expresses serious concerns about Taiwan’s agricultural policies that are not based on science and create barriers to market access for US pork and beef products.

April 1, 2021: US industry group reports that all of the world’s most advanced semiconductor manufacturing capacity—nodes below 10 nanometers—is located in South Korea (8%) and Taiwan (92%).

April 7, 2021: US Navy destroyer transits the Taiwan Strait, the fourth such passage under the Biden administration.

April 9, 2021: US Department of State issues new more permissive Taiwan Contact Guidelines.

April 12, 2021: Twenty-five PLA aircraft, including 18 fighters and 4 bombers, enter Taiwan’s ADIZ, exceeding the previous record of 20 aircraft set on March 26.

April 14, 2021: President Biden dispatches to Taipei former Sen. Chris Dodd and former Deputy Secretaries of State Richard Armitage and James Steinberg to reaffirm US support.

April 14, 2021: Canada’s Parliament endorses Halifax Security Forum’s decision to award Tsai Ing-wen a prestigious leadership award after the Trudeau government threatened to pull funding from the organization.
April 16, 2021: A court in Beijing sentences 46 Taiwan nationals, who were deported from Spain in 2016, to up to 13 years in jail for their alleged involvement in telecom fraud.

April 16, 2021: President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Suga issue a joint statement after their summit, including: “We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.

April 21, 2021: Strategic Competition Act of 2021 is approved by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The bill that seeks to boost the United States' capability to counter China's aggression, including its belligerence against Taiwan.