

The Arms Trade Treaty: U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan and U.S.-China Relations

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic of U.S.-China relations cannot be secluded from Taiwan-related issue. Falling into a treacherous category is the ceaseless U.S. arms sales to Taiwan under the scheme of Taiwan Resolution Act (TRA) that obligated the former to provide the latter with arms of defensive character, resulting in uneasiness among the leaders in Beijing. Congenial to its endeavor to cut out the knit-tight relations between the U.S. and Taiwan, China intends to exert the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) as a means to condemn U.S. arms sales to a non-state actor carrying lethal weapon able to mar the existing status quo in the region. This paper aims to elucidate the positions of the U.S. and China on the ATT to which both states currently are not the parties. With emphasis on Taiwan, it is argued that both the U.S. and China will be persistent to uphold pragmatism, covering also the ATT, without seriously harming the strategic relations between the two.

Keywords: *ATT, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, U.S.-China relations*

Dinamika hubungan AS dan Cina tidak bisa dilepaskan dari isu-isu yang berkorelasi dengan Taiwan. Salah satu isu yang dimaksudkan adalah penjualan senjat di bawah skema Taiwan Resolution Act (TRA) yang mengharuskan AS menyediakan sarana pertahanan, yang menghasilkan kekhawatiran di Beijing. Sejalan dengan usaha Cina untuk memutus hubungan erat AS dan Taiwan, Cina berniat mengangkat Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) sebagai cara untuk mengangkat isu penjualan senjata AS ke Taiwan, yang memberi arti bahwa AS telah membantu Taiwan untuk melepaskan diri dari Cina. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan posisi AS dan Cina terhadap ATT mengingat keduanya bukan merupakan bagian dari ATT. Berbasis pada Taiwan, tulisan ini berargumen bahwa AS dan Cina akan masih tetap berpedoman pada pragmatisme tanpa mencederai hubungan keduanya.

Kata-Kata Kunci: *ATT, penjualan senjata dari AS ke Taiwan ,hubungan AS-Cina*

Background

Taiwan has always been a top-level issue for both the U.S. and China. The relationship between Washington and Beijing to some points revolves around the foreign policy of each side regarding Taiwan. For China, Taiwan is a “core interest”. It is merely an internal affair of China. Any infringement on this particular matter is considered national threat. The question of whether Taiwan is part of China (the PRC) is nothing more but rhetoric. The answer is crystal clear: Taiwan is within China’s sovereignty.

The U.S. has been maintaining its position, emphasizing that it regards China's sovereignty and never acknowledges Taiwan as an independent state. U.S. stance in the enigma of China-Taiwan relationship is firm that the problem has to be settled peacefully between the two parties, in which the U.S. does not side with either China or Taiwan. This neutral yet pragmatic policy enables this superpower to enhance beneficial relationship both with China and Taiwan. Both parties entice central attention from Washington. In order to keep the healthy relations, the U.S. cautiously selects certain issues that will not antagonize the other side. But the U.S. slips in commitment created by the previous leaders to balance its relations with China and Taiwan.

U.S.-China relations started to flourish in 1972 with the startling decision of Nixon to visit Mao in Beijing. This official visit was predated by many analysts as bedrock of future U.S.-China closer relationship. The fruit of this meeting was Shanghai Communiqué. Chief to the Communiqué were an opposition to "hegemony" (Soviet Union), U.S. military withdrawal from Taiwan, and U.S. encouragement of a "peaceful settlement" of Taiwan issue (Sutter 2010, 75). In 1978, the Second Communiqué was tailored with prime agenda of further normalization between the two states with special treatment on Taiwan issue which the U.S. acknowledged Taiwan as part of China and agreed to terminate the U.S.-Taiwan defense treaty (Sutter 2010, 79). The Third Communiqué was established as a response of the formation of Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in 1979 that hurt Beijing. The U.S. pledged to gradually diminish arms sales to Taiwan and China would seek peaceful reunification with Taiwan. Of all these Communiqués, Taiwan is the subject. It demonstrates how important the Taiwan card in the dynamics of U.S.-China relationship.

U.S.-Taiwan relationship is generally based on the TRA. Under this treaty, the U.S. is obligated to "provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character". The U.S. has been adamant to support Taiwan to be able to uphold its own defense through continued arms sales. The arms sales not only veer U.S.-China relationship to a hard trajectory, but also tarnish U.S. image on the eyes of Beijing and international community. The latter refers to the attempt of different actors, mainly the NGOs, to enact a treaty to manage the transfer of arms. The pivotal concerns of the proposed treaty are forestalling access for arms sales to the wrong hands, such as dictators and terrorists and denying the dissemination of illicit weapons. This very treaty, namely the Arms Trade Treaty (hereafter refers to as ATT), with some revisions, engulfs the transfer of conventional weapons between sovereign states. The ATT, by no mention, will attune to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, as a non-state actor—the treatment of Taiwan as a non-state actor is rooted in the fact that most UN member states do not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state.

The ATT officially was convened on June 3, 2013 through a roller-coaster process of negotiation and bargaining among Member States. Of 193 states participated in the long-haul process of the Treaty convention, the U.S. and China are, needless to say, two actors worthy of special attention for a reason related to Taiwan. China's loathing over U.S. arms sales to Taiwan mark debate within China so as to attempt to stymie the partnership between the U.S. and Taiwan utilizing the ATT. The U.S., too, scrupulously keeps an eye on the Treaty's capability to put Washington in unfavorable place concerning arms trade within and beyond its respective territory. This paper aims to analyze both the U.S. and China position with respect to the ATT and its connection to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The positions of the two states derive from official speeches addressed by each representative to the UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty held on July 12, 2012 and the UN GA Meeting on the Arms Trade Treaty held on March 18-

28, 2013—China's position will solely based on the July 2012 Conference as it does not publish any other official statements regarding the ATT afterwards.

The Arms Trade Treaty

The ATT was first introduced in the UN General Assembly in 2006. It was a resolution adopted by the GA for further realization of a legally-binding treaty overarching all 193 UN member states. The U.S., under Bush administration vetoed the resolution, rendering it moot. The resolution was brought back in 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2012. On July 2012, the draft of the ATT was submitted by the President of the Conference, Roberto García Moritán of Argentina. The Draft covers the list of weapons that are regulated by the Treaty; the activities including export, import, brokering, transit and trans-shipment, reporting and recordkeeping; enforcement; secretariat; international cooperation and assistance; etc. The core points of the Draft is fabricating a regulation for the distribution of conventional arms among states and most importantly the tracking of illicit transfers of small and light weapons (SLW).

The ATT was finally approved by the UN GA on April 2, 2013. The voting carried out to conclude the adoption of the Treaty resulted in 153 states—including the U.S.—voted for, 3 states voted against, and 23 states were abstain—for which China opt. With no significant changes from the preceding Draft, the ATT highlights the tightening of small arms and conventional weapons transfers to avoid such weapons to go to wrong hands of human rights abusers and criminals alike. On June 3 the ATT was officially opened for signature. Seventy seven states have signed the Treaty hitherto with only one state has ratified it. Ratification by fifty states sets the limit for the Treaty to come into force. The U.S., named as the world's largest arms exporter, is yet to sign, let alone to ratify the ATT. The incessant political struggle pitting Obama administration against the National Rifle Association or the NRA—a heavy-duty lobbying group consisting of hundreds of pro-gun organization—dims the likelihood for Washington to take the lead in controlling arms transfers mistreatment and misuse by irresponsible actors and/or states. Nonetheless, one can simply argue that the U.S. position in international stage might also be dwarfed.

On the similar vein, China is not a signatory to the ATT. Beijing, now the third largest arms supplier after the U.S. and Russia respectively and the fifth biggest arms exporter ousting England, was abstain on the voting to adopt the Treaty. While the U.S. is vying for domestic consensus to embark on signing the Treaty, China hard-heartedly flinches from it for a reason alluding to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Albeit cognizant of the pivotal role the ATT bears, China's whereabouts is nowhere close to signing the very Treaty. Washington's and Beijing's exclusion en masse renders the Treaty to some degree hovered around uncertainty.

U.S. Position on the ATT

In the official statement for the UN GA 2012, the U.S. highlights several points for the ATT to be effective, including strengthening the legal basis for legitimate arms trade and establishing a universal responsible national standard for the arms trade, to name few. Interestingly, in this statement the U.S. weighs as well, implicitly, its concern over Taiwan.

The U.S. proposes that “the ATT should not in any way handicap the legitimate right to self-defense,” (Mahley 2012). This statement indicates U.S. consistency to support Taiwan with arms of a defensive character in compliance with the TRA. The U.S. relationship with Taiwan is complicated. Taiwan is U.S. number one export destination of arms trade with total amount of \$ 0.8 billion in 2011. The U.S. feels responsible to give access for Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. According to the Defense Secretary’s annual report to the Congress, the balance of forces across the Taiwan Strait has continued to shift to the PRC’s favor (Kan 2012, 4). Massive China’s military build-up and modernization send a signal of caution for both Taiwan and the U.S. China keeps on placing ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan.

Even though China-Taiwan relationship is relatively harmonious since the election of Ma Ying-jeou as Taiwanese President for two consecutive years of 2008 and 2012, for Beijing there is always a possible detour of this relationship into war. In Kenneth Waltz words, state’s image equals to its capabilities. The more capabilities state acquires, the more others might feel threatened by it (Waltz 1979). Using this gauge, the U.S. justifies its unrelenting arms sales to Taiwan for the sake of maintaining stability or status quo in the Taiwan Strait. It is in the U.S. interest to “help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific,” (Taiwan Resolution Act 1979, 2).

In the official statement for the UN GA 2012, the U.S. contends also that “the ATT should require state parties to regulate their international arms trade according to high standards, in accordance with their own constitutional and legal structures,” (Mahley 2012). This statement applies to Taiwan case in a way that the U.S. has already had and been complied with the TRA for more than 30 years. Washington implies that the so-called ‘national regulation’ comes first, second to none. The U.S. highly respects non-discriminatory principle of arms trade. For international arms trade, the U.S. upholds the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 34 issued by President Clinton in 1995. This PDD was exercised by Bush administration and now is still valid under the presidency of Obama. The PDD 34 states that the U.S. will apply range of criteria to each arms transfer decision and will make each decision on a case-by-case basis (Bromund 2012).

The U.S. in measuring the need to authorize arms trade calculates adroitly the implication of such trade for regional stability. According to the PDD 34, “the U.S. will consider the consistency of any transfer with U.S. regional stability interests, especially ... for transfers involving power projection capability or introduction of a system which may foster increased tension or contribute to an arms race,” (Bromund 2012). This concept inflicts twofold meanings. On one hand, the U.S. will take any measure to maintain stability in the region attune to its interest. On the other hand, the U.S. will also consider how this trade might aggravate the spat and lead to arms race. In Taiwan case, the U.S. ever-ending arms sales somehow inspire China to obtain much better military capabilities vis-à-vis U.S.-backed Taiwan and contribute to the protracted tension between China and Taiwan. Added to this conundrum, the PDD 34 points out that instability is also a source of U.S. interest. Bromund (2012) asserts that this term implies a belief that stability will be leveled up by ensuring the defensive power of its allies. The instability of the Taiwan Strait compels the U.S. to keep on selling arms to help Taiwan build up its defensive capability.

Upon the opening for signatory to the ATT, Washington, truncated by domestic political skirmishes, appears to be indecisive so as to determine whether it is supposed to line up with the Treaty or to hoist objection. A sense of abomination toward the Treaty radiated by the powerful lobbying group, the NRA, bars Obama administration to take further steps in accord with international community’s longing for U.S. active

engagement in the endeavor to trample illicit arms trade worldwide. An official press statement carried by Secretary of State John Kerry held on June 3 divulged that the U.S. will resort to signing the Treaty stressing "... we [the U.S.] look forward to signing it as soon as the process of conforming the official translations is completed satisfactorily," without a clear detail on when it will be done (Kerry 2013). On his statement Kerry underlined that "the ATT will not undermine the legitimate international trade in conventional weapons [within which arms sales to Taiwan might fall], interfere with national sovereignty, or infringe on the rights of American citizen, including our Second Amendment rights," (Kerry 2013). The painstakingly long and arduous negotiation and bargaining process within the Congress basically cling heavily toward the objection that "the terms of the agreement will be used as justification to tamper with gun rights within the U.S.," (Grudnicki 2013) rather than the scruple about possible hindrance on international arms trade. Notwithstanding, the opposition seems to have the upper hand with majority of Senate members come out against the Treaty—for the ATT to be passed on to ratification it needs a two-third majority in the Senate. Barring Obama's rectitude to support the ATT, the chance is rather slim without winning the vote in the Congress.

While the fad in the Congress is ensuing, apprehension over the disruption of the persistence arms sales to Taiwan appears to be abated. Sheila Paskman, spokesperson to the American Institute in Taiwan, asserts that U.S. defense commitment to Taiwan "will not change unless there is a change to the legislation relating to the TRA or a change to the 'one China' policy," (Shih, 2013). Article 26 of the ATT states that "the implementation of this Treaty shall not prejudice obligations undertaken by State Parties with regard to existing or future international agreements, to which they are parties, where those obligations are consistent with this Treaty," (UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty 2013). This article validates U.S. not to retreat from its 3-decades old commitment to Taiwan.

China's Position on the ATT

Chinese delegation to the UN Conference on the ATT (2012) emphasizes that "the primary objective of the ATT is to prevent and combat illicit arms trade and maintain global and regional stability by regulating arms trade." Here, China alludes to the regulation of arms trade with regard to cross-Taiwan-Strait relationship, touching on the perceived U.S. involvement in China's internal matter of sovereignty. China considers thoroughly the principle that arms exports should not undermine the peace, security, and stability of the region concerned when assessing arms exports (Parker 2007). That is being said, China scorns U.S. firm stance to retain the arms sales to Taiwan under the principle of stability maintenance. For Chinese leaders, U.S. engagement in the cross-strait rapprochement confounds the stability and otherwise triggers instability.

It is obvious that China has been using international organization, particularly the UN to alienate Taiwan. Taiwan is not *de jure* sovereign state based on the number of recognition of other states. The ATT is another tool in which China can ascertain its position as the only legitimate 'one China'. Chinese delegation (2012) states that "the ATT should urge states to establish their effective national regulating and control mechanism respecting the sovereign rights of all states to make their own arms trade decisions." This statement entails two points. One, China implicitly bashes the U.S. critiques over its military build-up by way of importing some weapons from advanced states like Russia side-by-side with ample local production of such weaponry. It can

also be translated into China's rights to export arms to states that China favors. The U.S. has long condemned China's arms transfer to Iran and Syria which for Washington exacerbating the already grotesque situations transpire in the volatile region of Middle East. Second, China underlines the words of 'sovereign rights of all states' which refers to all sovereign states, excluding Taiwan. It can be argued that China aims to make the ATT a legal way to discard U.S. arms sales to Taiwan by professing that only sovereign state can have and wield the rights of arms trade. The implication is rather stark: the U.S. bent on continued arms sales to Taiwan is practically baseless.

During the July UN Conference on the ATT, Chinese delegation (2102) avers that "the ATT mechanism should ensure the comprehensive and effective fulfillment of the Treaty, avoiding interference with states' sovereign decision." By this statement, China intends to outstrip the U.S. in Taiwan issue charging that Washington deliberately intrudes into China's sovereign decision to deal with Taiwan. Beijing has long been suspicious on the real motive of U.S. knit-tight involvement in the cross-strait relationship. Chinese leaders are leery of U.S. intention to check China's growing power and if possible debilitate it using the old containment policy with Taiwan as a key. In simple words, China wants to kick the U.S. out of its business in coping with Taiwan.

Chinese delegation (2012) mentions "the ATT should not be misused for political purposes to interfere with the normal arms trade and internal affairs of any state." China bluffs the U.S. continued support to upgrade Taiwan's self-defense capability and charges it as an intervention. The arms trade, from China's perspective, is also a matter of national security. It is, in fact, closely linked to national security. This statement again pinpoints U.S. strategic relationship with Taiwan. While the U.S. presumes that its worth of billions of dollars arms sales to Taiwan as an effective way to preserve the stability and status quo in the region, China hardly believes that this type of relationship poses no harms for China's national security. For the same reason, the U.S. is regarded as a major threat to China's national prestige and sovereignty, and hence made it the *de facto* focus of the PLA's strategic and military modernization.

China is among the clique of UN GA to quash the Treaty indicting its lack of consensus. China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, Wang Min, states that "China has all along supported the negotiations on the ATT... expecting all parties to reach consensus on an effective treaty to regulate the conventional arms trade and to combat illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons," (Yang and Yao 2013). Furthermore, Wang points out the reason China opts for abstention is because "... the ATT does not address the concern of China," in which Beijing "... could support a treaty reached through consensus... to ensure the universal support and effective implementation of the treaty," (Yang and Yao 2013). Wang's statements are deemed to be the pretext for China's position with respect to the ATT in the years ahead.

Renowned Chinese scholar, Shen Dingli, underlines three interests Beijing implants within the ATT: the effort to stop arms trade involving non-state actors, the uneasiness shared among Chinese leaders to inform the world about China's arms trade with foreign government perceived as national secret, and the U.S.- Taiwan arms trade that is subject to strong opposition due to the nature of Taiwan's status of non-state actor. It is worth taking into account that arms sales to Taiwan instigates China's relentless to submit to the ATT which does not address illegal arms trade involving non-state actor.

Beijing is firmly anxious when it comes to any occurrence able to tip the balance of the status quo over the Taiwan Strait. Labeling U.S. impeccable relations with Taiwan as the ultimate source of an inversion of the existing stability, Beijing is adamant to

dwindle, and if possible to annihilate, the arms trade between the two. Chinese leaders has been alarmed frequently that U.S. TRA scheme is of no limit of validity and that Washington exhibits no indication whatsoever to rescind the arms sales to Taiwan. China's stance with regard to the ATT, thus, is ambivalent. On one hand, China lauds protest over the shortcomings adhered to the ATT that it lacks consensus and criticizes it for the exclusion of Taiwan case. On the other hand, China is bereft of sway to make significant change to the Treaty to conform its own vested interests as it is now an outsider to the ATT.

The ATT and U.S.-China Relations: Toward a More Pragmatic Relationship?

Taiwan will always be a point where the U.S. and China might get involved in a serious contestation. The preceding negotiation of the ATT heated up last year unveils how each party condemns each other regarding the arms sales to Taiwan. The U.S. vies that its support to Taiwan based on the needs to ensure Taiwan's self-defense capability in the face of China's rapid military growing. This will eventually throw in the stability of the region. President Ma Ying-jeou of Taiwan says that it is essential for the U.S. to keep the TRA intact and alive and help Taiwan building its own military defense capability. He aims to "reassure the U.S. that Taiwan will not free-ride on the U.S. for its own security," (Ma 2009). With the two parties see the same necessity, the arms sales will likely to continue with no set-up termination date. In fact, the TRA, sets in motion since 1972, is of a permanent nature and shall remain in force indefinitely.

The U.S. implicitly accuses China's military build-up as the factor that precipitates the region's slippage to instability. China's modernized military posture makes the U.S. worry about the possibility should China resorts to war to get Taiwan back. U.S. decision concerning arms sales to Taiwan now appear to be shaped primarily by fear of Beijing's anticipated response rather than by Taiwan's needs (U.S-Taiwan Business Council 2012). Kang (2007, 5) says that for Western states, including the U.S., China's intention to grab Taiwan is an expansionist policy, part of China's effort to tip the balance of power in the region that affects U.S. presence. But Taiwan is not an issue because of power politics. It is an issue because of competing conceptions of whether Taiwan is an independent, sovereign nation-state, or whether it is a part of China. For China, the question is nation building, not expansion.

U.S. executes a dual-face policy toward Taiwan. On one side, the U.S. stiffly maintains its position that it does not support independence for Taiwan or unilateral moves that would change the status quo as defined by Washington and opposes statements or actions from either side that would unilaterally alter Taiwan's status (Kan 2012: 54). Oppositely, Washington covets to keep supporting Taiwan's self-defense build-up in order to shield this island from China's attack. The U.S. wants stability in Taiwan Strait, while at the same time lit the fire of instability in the very place.

China's position on the ATT can be summed up as rejecting all means by any states to interfere in other's internal affairs and infringe on other's sovereignty. It is quite easy to interpret the target of China's criticism on its statement. China feels being betrayed by the U.S. when the latter refuses to recall the 1982 Communiqué which obligate it to diminish its support on Taiwan. Instead, the U.S. opts for strengthening the relations with Taiwan under the TRA. China was a weak state with scant capability that it could not challenge the U.S. But since the 1990s onwards, thanks to rapid economic growth, China possesses sufficient power to build up its leverage in the international arena and modernize its military. The third Taiwan Strait crisis of 1955-56 conjures a wake-up call

for the U.S. that China today is much stronger than it was in the 1980s. China no longer wants to be the player who only takes for granted the rules of law. It wants to be the maker also. The ATT is just another proof of China's ambition to actively promote its own believed norms and rules to be applied in international level.

In the case of Taiwan, generally, Robert Sutter divulges three stature elements of China's approach toward the Taiwan issue: positive incentives, mainly involving economic exchanges; coercion, seen in the impressive PLA's military build-up; and unremitting efforts to isolate Taiwan internationally (Sutter 2008, 182). The ATT obviously equips China with all leeway available to alienate Taiwan, as seen on the proposed thought addressed at the UN Conference on the ATT on July 2012. China also sends a clear message to the U.S. that Beijing will never approve U.S. arms sales to Taiwan on any conditions. The ATT will be another battlefield between the U.S. and China in a struggle for bargaining power in the pursuit of each national interest that hinges on Taiwan issue. The U.S. will not succumb to China's intimidating figure, at the same reason that China will not allow any state, especially the U.S., to encroach on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The future of U.S.-China relationship has been drawn by the fluctuating policies and discordant views of both parties in dealing with Taiwan. It is nascent to judge how the future of U.S.-China relationship is likely to be by way of seeing it only from their positions on the ATT as the Treaty only serves a fragment of the grand picture painted by both leaders. The picture now, nonetheless, is scanty clearer with the two states resolutely recede from engagement with the Treaty. China's solemn denouncement condemns the Treaty's lacking of consensus while implicitly citing its cliché weakness to satisfy the leaders in Beijing who long for the severance of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Ceaseless defense partnership between the U.S. and Taiwan will nothing but set off a more stringent and obstinate China posing a threat able to tip the balance of the existing status quo in the region. China's abstention, on the other side of the coin, will likely reverberate to an even faster military build-up lauded by Beijing to keep pace with the modernized military equipments the U.S. provides Taiwan with. An arms race is nearby.

The Congress' disapproval of the ATT is resounded as vilifying the already exists national regulation on arms entitled the PDD 34. With an utmost concern on losing civil rights to possess gun fire, the NRA has been restlessness in voicing the egregious objection to the Treaty. That the NRA also represents million-dollar-worth U.S.-based defense industries, it is not inconceivable to channel the zealous lobby to maximizing-profit-discourse attainable through arms export. There is no flagrant proof to link these 'honorable' industries with possible deterioration of profit coming from arms export invoking them to oppose the ATT. Neither is dossier of the list of partners with whom these industries set up business connection. It is improper to pass on a premise without sufficiently strong foothold but history might come in handy. Chomsky (2004) boldly lists up the crimes [against humanity] the U.S. has been involved since the end of World War II—peaking in 1970s and 1980s and reaching its zenith amid the excessive 'War on Terror' lead by Bush Jr. administration. During the unenviable years of U.S.-backed state terrorism in Latin America, the U.S. amicably helped providing wherewithal essential to force the governments and the people to comply with the godliness instruction brought by Washington. Middle East is another silent hill of strategic importance in which Washington has been holding sway through terrorism-style of chain of command. If the ATT came to alive amid the height of U.S.-sponsored felonies, the reason used by Washington would be in accord with its own list of supporting scoundrels and human rights abusers alike by providing assistance,

especially arms, necessary to ensure its global dominance—a major assault on the ATT commitment to bog down any access for criminals to procure arms. What the history tells does not resonate in an instant that the same reason is employed by Washington but it merits deep consideration that the same pattern might reoccur.

U.S.-China relations in the last decades have been marked by merest pragmatism guiding both leaders to contemplate foreign policies fruitful for each home country while at the same time restraining even a dim detail that might destroy the romanticism of the two. U.S. two-pronged policy in reference to its relations with China and Taiwan—placing a stiff ‘one China’ policy toward the former and the TRA toward the latter on the same boat—is a sign of pragmatism. No matter how furious China can be in dealing with the obdurate ‘partner’ across the Pacific, Beijing leaders never cease to remember to play safe. It is unlikely that China resort to force to discipline Taiwan acknowledging strong U.S. back-up bequeathed by the TRA—force will only be the last resort for China. The ATT, like any other pragmatic means exerted by both states, can be a safe haven to avoid China to be at odds with the U.S.-Taiwan duo jeopardizing the relatively stable cross-strait relations.

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