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### **QI Panel:**

#### **Interpreting the Taiwan Elections: Democracy in the Shadow of Geopolitics**

January 17, 2023  
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#### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 0:07**

Good afternoon. My name is Kelley Vlahos and I am a senior advisor at the Quincy Institute and editorial director of our magazine, responsible statecraft. I am excited to be moderating this very timely panel today entitled interpreting the Taiwan Elections: Democracy in the Shadow of Geopolitics, the Democratic Progressive Party or DPP has now won three consecutive presidential elections. And while it won a plurality and not a full majority and does not have what one would call a blanket mandate, it is clear there was an appetite for some of the same policies of the incumbent Tsai government. Lai Ching-te has been a reliable supporter of Taiwan sovereignty, though he has not signaled a real desire to go off the well established script. When it comes to China, this is likely not to assuage Beijing's fears as it would have rather seen a win from the KMT opposition party, which was unable to catch up to the DPP's popularity in the polls.

Here to talk about what all of this means for domestic politics on the island, but more importantly, what it means for the tenuous current US China and China, Taiwan relations are three of the most prominent scholars in the field. We are lucky to have their insights today as election news reports and analysis often gloss over the complexities and nuance of these relationships, and the impact of broad political shifts upon them. So without further ado, let me introduce our esteemed panelists, Shelley Rigger, she is the Vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, and brown professor of Asian politics at Davidson College. She has written several books on Taiwan, including her most recent, the tiger leading the dragon how Taiwan propelled China's economic rise. That was in 2021. And she just returned from Taiwan after monitoring the elections on the ground. And I think we are still waiting for Stephen, but he will be joining us so I'm going to I'm going to introduce him right now anyway, so we can get him right into the conversation when he arrives. But Stephen Goldstein is an associate of the Fairbanks center, and the director of the Taiwan studies workshop at Harvard University. He was previously the SOFIA Smith, Professor of Government Smith College, from 1968 to 2016. His current research focuses on the relations between the mainland and Taiwan, as well as the evolution of US Taiwan relations. And last but not least, Michael Swain, who is my colleague, a senior research fellow at the Kinsey Institute's East Asia program. Previously, he served for 20 years at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he specialized in Chinese defense and foreign policy, US China relations and East Asian international relations. Swaine served as a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation as well. So, Michael, let's start with you. You mentioned in an interview that this election did not represent a tidal wave for the DPP. And as a result, Lai Ching-te may be looking at a difficult rule and think he will move a bit cautiously. Do you think China should recognize this and respond with restraint? Can you talk a

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little bit about the dynamics here, what it means for domestic politics? And DPP's relationship with the other political parties vis a vis, China?

### **Michael Swaine 3:55**

Thank you very much, Kelley. And it's a pleasure to be with, with Shelley, and I hope with Steven, on this webinar. Yes, the the election, really, I think Beijing's response to the election thus far, has, I would say been fairly restrained. In fact, more than fairly, it's been quite restrained. It has, of course, issued some sharp language about how the election of Lijiang has moved Taiwan more towards provocation, more towards the possibility of crisis, trying to sort of whip up concern over over what he might be doing as president, etc. But it hasn't actually done a lot in terms of showing its its peak showing its dislike of the situation as it had done, for example, after Nancy Pelosi, former Speaker of the House, visited Taiwan back in 2022, where China launched a series of military exercises and other displays and made some very harsh language. And there was all kinds of extreme rhetoric going on, particularly on the Chinese internet. We haven't really seen that kind of response at this point. And I think that, you know, it reflects the fact that a couple of things. Beijing doesn't want to disrupt the tenuous stability that has been established, I call it tenuous in the sino us relationship, ever since the meeting between Biden and Xi Jinping in San Francisco on the sidelines of the APEC meeting. It wants to have stability, in part because of domestic issues within China, the economy is not doing terribly well, although the growth rate remains reasonably good. Nonetheless, it's facing considerable domestic issues that I think are taking a lot of the time and attention of the Chinese leadership. So they don't need to have a worsening crisis at this point in time. Plus, I think the Chinese probably do recognize, as you suggested, that the lodging to victory, although he's won the presidency, and that is significant. And you're right, this is the third consecutive DPP victory for a presidential position. It didn't by any means reflect a massive mandate by the public of Taiwan to support the DPP over anybody else. They lost 10 seats in the legislative un election, they lost their their thin majority that they had in the L Y. And as the election showed, 60% of the people did not vote for Lai Ching-te be president of Taiwan, if the opposition in Taiwan had gotten its act together. And and and presented a single opposition to Lai Ching-te, he almost certainly would not have been elected president of Taiwan. So Beijing is obviously aware of these factors. So I think that has also cooled its response to the situation. But I don't think we necessarily can assume that this kind of relatively stable situation right now. And low response, restraint will continue indefinitely. But we can talk more about that later, if you'd like.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 7:11**

Sure. I want to go to Shelly I, I was amazed to see that you were actually on the ground monitoring these elections. Is there any way that you could share a little bit about what that entailed? And your impressions of the election, but also of the the political mood in Taiwan right now?

### **Shelley Rigger 7:33**

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Sure, I want to be clear that, you know, I was there observing, talking to lots and lots and lots of people. But Taiwan doesn't require any kind of official monitoring, right? You know, Taiwan is not a place where electoral fraud or abuses of the electoral system are happening on any kind of a scale that would require external monitoring in the formal sense nowadays, but I was there to try to get a sense of the mood and the kind of vibe around the election in the week before and a couple days after, and I would say it felt like a very normal election, pretty routine, very calm the rallies. In the waning days of the campaign. Everybody has a has big rallies, usually multiple going on at the same on the same nights. And they had a great feel to them. There were lots of people who came out to support their candidates and very enthusiastic crowds, but it didn't feel like a do or die kind of election for anyone. And in particular, the most interesting aspect of this election certainly was the fact that it's it was a three way election. And the third candidate, Ko Anja from the Taiwan People's Party or the TPP, which is easily confused with the DPP, the Democratic Progressive Party, but CoinJoin introduced a kind of wildcard factor into this election and his supporters in particular were very enthusiastic. On Sunday, I was chatting with a fellow who was really he was ruining the fact that he had not voted on Sunday. He was too undone by a romantic betrayal. And he just couldn't, couldn't quite get out of the house and go vote. But he was kicking himself because he had been planning to vote for Cohen Joe And, you know, he felt like it, it really was, it somehow made a difference that he hadn't done so. So, you know, it was a very normal feeling high energy, high turnout not as high as last time, but over 70%. And that's of eligible voters. So that's very, very high. But with this interesting twist, which was everybody was trying to figure out, you know, how best to use their vote in a three way race with no runoff, which, you know, just a first pass the post election.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 10:38**

Shelley, can you talk a little bit about what Michael had referred to, and that the DPP hadn't performed as well, in the local elections? How, you know, for for viewers who are not familiar with the process there and the makeup of the Taiwanese political system? What does that mean, essentially? And why Why was there a disparity between this national presidential election and then the performance at the local level?

### **Shelley Rigger 11:11**

So Taiwan's legislature is district based, there are 113 seats in the legislature 34 of those are party list proportional representation seats. So they also give us a sense of support for different political parties. But most of the seats are district seats. And they're based on the administrative units. So if we think about, you know, the US analog, it would be the states. They are less, there's less gender gerrymandering and disproportionality in the Taiwanese system than there is in the US system. electoral district being is still relatively technical, rather than highly politicized and gamed by, you know, the incumbent party. Nonetheless, the distribution of preferences kind of creates a little bit of a gerrymandering effect. So one thing that's noteworthy is that while the cam t got 52 seats in the legislature, and the DPP got 51 seats, the DPP actually did substantially better overall in the percentage of the district vote that it received. So DPP

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legislative candidates overall actually got a higher proportion of the legislative vote than lighting, though their presidential candidate did. But because of the way the districts, you know, that the the spread of references within the different districts that actually produced a slight lead for the KMT. So there are aspects of Taiwan politics that are familiar, even though they're not perfectly aligned with how we understand things from the US perspective.

### **Kelley Beucar Vlahos 13:17**

I mean, it just sounds very complicated, and not black and white, in terms of, in particular, what the mood is there. And I say, as an American consumer of the news, it's hard to get a sense when our thought leaders and experts here are always talking about independence for Taiwan and protecting democracy and the democracy, aspirations of Taiwan, how much of that that is actually reflected in the polity there, and can you give us a sense of how Taiwanese voters are feeling about the independence issue? It sounds pretty mixed or heavily nuanced from that vantage.

### **Shelley Rigger 14:08**

Yeah. So on the independence issue, I mean, I think it's, it's first of all really useful to differentiate democracy from independence, right. Taiwanese are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their democracy. If you take a poll, you'll find lots of criticism of democracy, you know, it doesn't perform as well as people think it should. But compared to the other realistic alternatives, which would be I guess, to go back to the old single party authoritarianism of the pre democratic era, or to merge into the PRC system, which is as pretty much as far away from Democratic as you can get. You know, there's no enthusiasm for those options. And I think protecting what ironies are committed to is protecting that democratic political system, and especially the personal freedoms that come with living in a liberal democracy. So while most Taiwanese in fact a very large majority are not in support of kind of running a new flag up the pole and cutting off any connection to the Chinese civilization or their their origins and heritage, in the Chinese mainland, there is also virtually no appetite for merging into the PRC precisely because the two things people would certainly lose, if they did that are their ability to select their leaders through a democratic process, and the freedom to live the way they choose. So independence isn't really something that many people are pushing, and a lot of even the DPP candidates. So that's the party that's typically associated in the Western media with the independence cause. Even the DPP candidates are at pains to say, you know, we are not trying to change the status quo in an independence direction. But we are absolutely committed to preserving Taiwan's self governing role in the world. And the reason we need to be self governing is that it is only through being separate from the PRC and separately governed, that we can have this democracy and specifically a liberal democracy.

### **Kelley Vlahos 16:51**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Michael, can you talk a little bit about why I feel as though we're only getting like a sort of, I don't know, to to not even a two dimensional view of who this

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guy is, other than he was the vice president of the current regime, do you get Can you tell us a little bit about what we might expect from his, his, his presidency, and what his relationship might be with the with Washington?

### **Michael Swaine 17:27**

Sure, I mean, I'm sure Shelley can add to this as well. Lighting has been seen, historically, as being somebody within the DPP who is what's called a deep green person. In other words, he's been pretty vocal in the past about talking about the need for Taiwan to be fully independent, and about his role in trying to foster Taiwanese independence. And the assumption being that this is independence as a sovereign independent nation, and not just one that's separate from Beijing, but recognized as a sovereign independent nation, by the international community, etc, etc. So he's, he's had that reputation now in the run up to the election, and since he became a candidate for president, and since after his election, he has, however, exercised a lot of restraint in his rhetoric. He has said, I'm not going to push for independence, if I'm elected president. And he said, I want to maintain the status quo, continue the policies of the Tsai Ing-wen government. I'm not I'm not trying to push things in a radical direction, etc, etc. So he's provided a lot of reassuring statements. And the US government has had several conversations with Lijiang, both before the election. And now since the election, the US sent an unofficial delegation over to Taiwan, to speak with Tsai and others. And that message I'm told has been very, very consistent, which has been, we don't want any surprises. We don't want you to start doing anything that we are not expecting, that would be destabilizing. They don't want anything like a repeat of what happened with Chen Shui-bian, a DPP President became president in the early 2000s and began to push for Taiwanese recognition through referenda of Taiwan as an independent state, which created a crisis at the time and prompted the United States to very publicly and very directly, berate and oppose Chen Shui-bian's actions. The US doesn't want a reputation of that. And it looks like lashing doesn't want a reputation of that either. So the thing the thing looks relatively stable for now.

However, I wouldn't assume that over time, this this current dynamic cannot change. It is possible that Beijing could become increasingly frustrated over time by the lack of any kind of positive momentum or movement towards something that it would regard as interaction with Taiwan towards movement towards some kind of political dialogue, or some kind of progress with Xi Jinping apparently would like to see that it puts more pressure on Lijiang to tries to alienate or tries to demonize him, tries to ice tries very much to isolate him, and really put pressure on on his government in in different ways, new ways. And that the opposition, the Guangdong and the TPP, a kind of go along with that, in a sense, in that they work very hard to block Lai Ching-te's efforts at carrying out any policies, and they could do that, and they'll fly given the closest of the vote in the LY. The DPP actually is really a kind of Kingmaker if you will. It, although it only holds I think, what is it Shelley isn't, I don't know how many seats it holds in the fly, but nine seats, eight see, but those eight seats could be decisive in policy passing different legislation in the LY. So they could play that kind of a role. And so you could get Lai Ching-te being very frustrated by what Beijing is doing, and seeking greater support within the United States for closer relations with Taiwan, more support for Taiwan, hold Taiwan, closer to

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the United States, and that that could then ratchet that aggression up actions by Beijing, that become even more extreme. So you can get into this kind of negative dynamic, because of frustration by lie because of Beijing's pressure. And because of U.S. support for Lai Ching-te. There's quite a lot of support within the Congress, in particular for the DPP, and for Lai Ching-te, and so you could get this kind of negative dynamic occurring over time, that could put us into something much more serious than what we see right now, I'm not predicting this. But I do think that it is certainly possible that Lai Ching-te himself has said, ultimately, he thinks that the president of Taiwan, he has said sort of indirectly requires more respect from the United States in the sense that he would like to see the president of Taiwan be able to visit the White House at some point. Now, that's sort of an action trying to push for that trying to get the Congress to push for that, in this kind of context that I just described. I think that we create a real crisis between the United States and China because the Chinese would not just sit back and allow that kind of thing to happen. Again, I'm not predicting this. But there are dynamics in all three actors here, that could produce a very negative situation over time.

### **Kelley Vlahos 22:53**

I want to get to Steven in two seconds because I'm so glad that you joined us. But I just want to do a tiny follow up with you, Michael, you had mentioned the unofficial delegation. Was this the trip that was announced last week of former top US officials that were traveling there, I think at first blush, everybody says, Oh, is this going to be another Nancy Pelosi type trip that's going to anger the Chinese, but it sounds like it had a different agenda.

### **Michael Swaine 23:23**

This was very much unlike the Nancy Pelosi trip. This was a trip by for two former officials. And I don't know who else was there, Steve Hadley and Jim Steinberg, both have been senior officials in past administrations, but they were no longer serving in government at all. And it was not an unprecedented type of action. The United States has sent these types of delegations to Taiwan before. So both before and after elections, and they're always going there to take the temperature to RIA reaffirm a US position and message to hear what the, in this case, what the what their Victor, Victor is saying about the relationship, and to just make sure that everything is on the up and up, no surprises, etcetera, etcetera. And I think Beijing, although it doesn't like the delegation and criticize the delegation, because it sees it as not really unofficial, it does have official activities behind it. Obviously, it has been sent over there at the behest of the US government. So you can't really call it entirely unofficial. But nonetheless, I think Beijing understands that that kind of messaging by the United States at this point, is not something that they should be coming out and just completely condemning, completely condemning this kind of action. So very different from the Nancy Pelosi visit, which brought up all kinds of other very different into China much more threatening types of of implications.

### **Kelley Vlahos 24:50**

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Absolutely. We're joined by Stephen Goldstein. thank you Steven for coming on. We did introduce you with your with your bio. at the at the, at the beginning of the program, but just a reminder that you're the director of the Taiwan studies workshop at Harvard University. Steven, I would love to hear your impressions of the election. And what kind of impact do you think, if any, there will be on US relations with China, and Taiwan relations with China? Maybe just your just general thoughts? Before we get into more specifics?

### **Stephen Goldstein 25:42**

That's okay. That's okay. It isn't a problem. What I'd like to do is talk a little bit about the impact of the elections on Taiwan's policy, and how changes may or may not affect the dynamic in the whole triangle of the United States, China and Taiwan. I think the first thing to say very strongly, is that it's way too early to be predicting what policies what responses may result from the election, that is, responses from the United States, responses from China, and ultimately, responses from Taiwan. They'll be the swearing in of the new legislature on February 1. And of course, on May 20, the inauguration of the new president. That's when we might be starting to get clues. What we have now really, is what seems to be just more of the same, as Michel suggested, a slightly restrained response from from the mainland, but continuing sharp attacks on Lai Ching-te and on the DPP. And, of course, Beijing did its kleptomania again, and stole one of Taiwan's allies in the South Pacific. So, so far, I find that hard to really predict what the what the policies will be, that will be coming out of Taiwan, or, for that matter, the United States or China.

What, what, what we have to pay attention to, I think, and where there has been real change is in the policy process in Taiwan, the Taiwan political system, from today on, is going to look much different than the Taiwan political system has looked previously. The most striking thing is that the system has gone from a two party system to a three party system. Now, it's not the first time there have been third party in Taiwan. It's not the first time that there have been other parties, but they've been smaller parties. They've been transient parties. And most of all, they're they were not parties that held potentially held the balance of power in the Leafa un in the parliament. And that changes the next characteristic of the Taiwan political system. And that is is a characteristic as a semi presidential system. A system where ultimate and extreme power rests with the presidency, who is charged by the Constitution with deferred defense and cross strait relations. The there have been times again, it same as the case with third parties. There have been times under the presidency of John treyvion when the president of Taiwan did not control the legislature. But there has never been a time when it has not controlled Hold a legislature, where there are three parties that carry the majority of the votes. Now, it has to be said that the presidency is very powerful in, in Taiwan, it has all sorts of ways to influence the cabinet. It is clear, clearly dominance over the Prime Minister and the cabinet.

But it still has to work with the Leafa yen, despite the fact of that dominance, and despite the fact that it has prime responsibility for mainland policy, so what what is changed in Taiwan is, or what is evident in the changes in Taiwan is not what policy is being made or might be made. What we do have real evidence for is how that policy will be made. And that's very significant.

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Because one of the things that the challenge will be and administration taught us was the prostrate policy very much gets involved in the parliament. And it very much gets involved on an item which is very important to Taiwan American relations, and that is arm sales in budgets. Next point that I would make is the impact that the defeat of the Golden Dawn has had, has had from this election, the warming dog has been for a long time under the grip of elders, who have shaped Guangdong policy have often frustrated attempts by younger members of the Guan Yu Dong to come to the fore and kept the walking dog on his old friendly to China course. And the role of the seniors could not be more evident that in that in my in Joe's role in this campaign. So we're going to have a new new Golden Dawn, we're going to have a different kind of Taiwan government. And how that will shake up and how that will change things, I think is the really important question. Because it is really, I think, too early to speculate on the basis of past statements on the basis of past incidents, exactly how both sides can the United States are going to react to this change in the nature of the policy process. And finally, I think we shouldn't forget that there's another cog in this wheel. And maybe I shouldn't have said Cognis, another cog in this wheel, and that is American policy, because we're going to have an election and in the fall, and the results of that election will surely shape the nature of the American policy towards the Taiwan issue, and perhaps shake it a shape it in ways that we don't want to think about but should think about.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 33:59**

Shelley, I wanted to ask you, what do you think about what Stephen just said, regarding the interplay between the President and the legislature, the three parties, their influence over policymaking? Do you agree and where do you think that that will be most evident in terms of, of policies moving forward?

### **Shelley Rigger 34:29**

Yeah, you know, as I said, I think the most interesting aspect of this election was that it was a three way election, for sure for the presidency, and the TPP. Although it lost all of the district seats, it contested even ones where the KMT was supporting the TPP did manage to get eight seats through the proportional representation part of the legislature. And because the KMT and the DPP were virtually tied, those eight seats make a big difference, there are a couple of things that I would put on the table as maybe alternatives to the possibilities that that Steve has laid out. First of all, if I were the leader, the legislative leader of the TPP, I would be very eager to negotiate with the DPP, actually, to, if not form a formal coalition, then at least to have informal cooperation, because in coalition with the can tea, the TPP is role is as an obstructionist, that's not actually able to move forward many of its initiatives. Whereas if the EPP joins up with the DPP, then it actually does have the potential to leverage those eight seats into a lot of influence, because the DPP will really want to be able to govern to, you know, to give up a president lie more of his agenda. And I think the DPP is also willing to do that. We'll see whether they can really pull it off or not. But the first conversations that I had immediately after the election with DPP legislate people close to DPP leadership, was that they would look for opportunities to invite the TPP into the government, possibly in the cabinet. Or, and I think this is a really

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interesting possibility in the leadership of the legislature. One reason that this the ladder is really interesting is that the TPPs, lead candidates are the person at the top of their party list. So the first TPP person to make it into the legislature is Wang Shan Shan, who is a politician close to go under the TPP presidential candidate, but actually a very capable person in her own right. A lot of Taiwanese say that she was running Taipei City when he was the mayor. And, you know, she could conceivably, if she were offered a really good position in the legislature, such as Speaker of the legislature, that would be very tempting, I think, for her, and that leads to the other very strong possibility that I see for the future, that TPP, which is that it will fall apart under the internal pressure of the legislators and other politicians who see a future if they play ball in the system, versus Cohen, Jia, who has up to now treated the TPP as a sort of vanity project for himself. And that has been the stumbling block that has brought down all of the serious, you know, all of the third parties that we thought might gain some traction in Taiwan, they've all fallen apart due to the internal inability to decide like how they want to move forward, whether they want to collaborate with other political parties or forge their own road. I think the same thing could happen to the TPP very easily, especially now that Koh has lost his race. And Lai Ching-te has won and is sitting atop very small, potentially quite tight legislative delegation that will determine what happens in the legislature for the next four years.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 39:00**

Thank you. And I would be remiss not to mention my colleague, Michael Swaine. Brief, and I'm gonna tie this in with a question, Michael. But Michael has just published a brief with his colleague James Park called paths to crisis and conflict over Taiwan. You can see that by going to the Quincy Institute website, but I mentioned that because we're getting a ton of questions in the q&a about the military situation. And I was hoping that you might enlighten us a little bit, Michael, I know that leading up to the election. And honestly, for months, there's been allegations of Chinese provocation with ships and planes and going right up to the border. And there had been reports by the New York Times and others saying that China was trying to interfere in the election. Can you talk a little bit more about the prospects of the military situation. There are plenty of people in Washington that want to keep funding Taiwan. They want to fund them even more they want to continue a closer security cooperation relationship. This is all amping up the tensions. Do you see that changing at all with this election? Do you see it getting any better or worse?

### **Michael Swaine 40:31**

Well, actually, I think that the election raises a very important point with regard to the issues you're talking about. And that is, Taiwan for some time, has been criticized by the United States and by others for not investing enough in his own defense. Now, this is a long, complicated problem. I originally examined this problem back in the 1990s, when I was at the RAND Corporation, and I did a very detailed examination through interviews on Taiwan about Taiwan's arms sales process, and desiring arms sales from Washington, the whole process. And it really showed me how many obstacles there were within Taiwan to actually getting down to a pragmatic, objective assessment of what Taiwan needs militarily, to try to defend itself for at

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least a decent period of time before the United States might come to its assistance in a conflict, which is what Taiwan needs to do. Taiwan cannot independently defend itself against China, it needs the United States, but it needs to show that it has the capability and the will to provide for its defense in a very meaningful way for an appreciable period of time. And, to the greatest extent possible. That has not been the case, in the view of most people for a lot of different reasons to do with domestic politics on Taiwan, rivalries among the military services in Taiwan, all kinds of issues, the election of Lijiang who has said he wants Taiwan to increase its defense capabilities. And the woman Don candidate, also very strongly ran on the idea that Taiwan needs to up its defense capabilities. This kind of rhetoric, this kind of discussion, I think, indicates that, hopefully, you'll be able to get some basis between the KMT and the DPP to actually work on improving Taiwan's defense stature, and being able to increase its deterrence. I think that is an important thing that needs to be done. But then the big 'but' here is alongside that, there has to be credible policies that are put in place by Washington, by Taiwan, that provide some level of reassurance to Beijing, that with all the strengthening of the defense posture of Taiwan and the US doing the same, this does not serve as a basis for moving Taiwan permanently separate from the mainland, and in other words, that it undermines degrades. Washington's one China policy, there has to be credible assurances from Washington, with support from Taiwan, that that is not the objective of the United States to erode the One China policy because that is the only viable basis for stability, as long as Beijing also continues to provide a credible commitment to a search for peaceful unification. Both of those policies, which are the understanding that was formed by the US and China way back at the time of normalization, peaceful unification, one China, both of them have been eroded because of political and military actions being taken by both sides, with Taiwan playing a role in different ways over time, that dynamic I think, is what needs to be controlled. So the military developments that you're talking about, that are underway, the United States has been involved in China's building, its military relevant to Taiwan, of course, in major ways. And then the whole issue of Taiwan's defense, all of this needs to be placed in this larger context of the overriding political dynamic about the status of Taiwan and the confidence of Beijing and Washington that the status quo such as it is, can be maintained over time. So the military deterrence has to be really put in that larger context. And I fear that it's not as often not being put in that larger context. People just focus on doubling down on military deterrence. on the US side, for example, as if that's going to solve the problem regarding the Taiwan issue. It will not do that. If you don't have the level of commensurate reassurances provided in a credible manner to Beijing and Beijing. Asians doing the same way, the same thing visa vie Washington, and Taiwan should be encouraging that, because it's in Taiwan's interest to maintain the stability of this situation through that original understanding as much as it possibly can. I fear that Lai Ching-te's government does not really understand that, and that it will push more for closer ever closer political relationship between the US and Taiwan than I think it should have given this overall dynamic.

### **Shelley Rigger 45:31**

Can I follow up on that with just a couple thoughts? One is, you know, I really agree with most of what Michael just said there, especially the need for the US to have a some reassurance toward

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the PRC that we are not seeking to permanently divide Taiwan from the PRC, irrespective of the preferences of the Taiwanese people or people in mainland China, because they definitely believe that we are, and we need to do everything we can to disabuse them of that notion, which I think is actually mistaken. But I think one thing that one piece, one data point is support. What Michael and I are both saying is something he mentioned earlier that the PRC's response to the Pelosi visit was stronger than its response so far to the election of Lai, though, which seems kind of weird, right. But I think what it captures is that the US is the target for a lot of The PRC's activity in this regard is they know that Taiwan is boxed in, they know that a combination of military threats, domestic political constraints, and international factors will prevent latching the from making moves toward formal independence. What they do not believe is that the US is constrained in the same way. And they really worry about what the US might pret not only allow, but actually, in some ways, encouraged or even pressure Taiwan to do. So I'm not where I guess I would part company for Michael a little bit is, I'm not too worried about what Lai Ching-te might do, because I think he is very constrained. But I think if he is encouraged or invited or instructed by figures in the US to take certain actions that he may recognize they're not fully in Taiwan's interest, but he may not be in a position to say no, in the same way that the Tsai administration was not in a position to say no to the Pelosi visit.

And there's another thing happening in Taiwan that's running parallel to all of this, which is a very significant and real discourse and growing conviction on the the KMT side of the aisle, that the US is not reliable, that the US is writing checks that are not that are funds inadequate to cover, and that it's encouraging Taiwan to do things that are actually really dangerous, and that there are US politicians who are willing to sacrifice Taiwan, in their own eagerness to contain or rollback the rise of China. So it's not like the US is getting away with this stuff. It's that and it's not noticed in Taiwan, or that everybody appreciates that the the ways in which the sort of China hawk community has been weaponizing Taiwan, on the contrary, there's a very real backlash in Taiwan against that, that kind of moves.

### **Stephen Goldstein 49:00**

Say two things that I would share you, Shelley just added. Obviously, when I talked about the other cog in the strategic triangle, I was talking about the United States. And that is a factor that we really won't know, until the election in the fall. The second thing is I she, the point that I didn't make is that there was another impact of this campaign. And that was what's in Chinese called , And that is skepticism about the United States. And whether the United States is using Taiwan for its own purposes. The DPP kept telling visitors that that was a mainland theme, and that it was propaganda. But there were some very wise and very but important, non mainland politicians who were expressing that concern. So it'll be interesting to see that was clearly a notable addition to the campaign itself, and a notable result of the election. And that is email one injecting into the political dialogue, distrust of the United States, which I think we should watch.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 50:35**

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Absolutely. What I seem to be getting the same question a number of times and in articulated in different ways, but I'm just gonna broaden this out a little bit, or in a big way. This idea that Xi Jinping has been reiterating his calls for unit reunification. One of the questioners, Charlie Kimball asks, What do you think will happen in 2027, which she has called a deadline for unification? I know that before the holidays, there was a big hullabaloo in the media about Xi's remarks about unification. Do you think this is this? Is this an I see everybody shaking their heads? Is this an actual real concern? And I guess I'd love to hear from Shelley whether or not she's hearing this, hearing this on the ground at all, among voters and the people there, that there might be some move, and then it's imminent, and it might even lead to some sort of military action with the US involved. And this is what I'm hearing the questions. So I'd love to hear your thoughts.

### **Shelley Rigger 51:53**

The answer from Taiwan is going to be really short because I know Michael can give us chapter and verse for what's coming out of aging. But no, people in Taiwan do not think a conflict with the PRC is imminent. They don't they, they think it would be a disaster for everyone's obviously a disaster for them. But also it is a huge disaster for China. They can't imagine why the PRC would would take such a self defeating foolish action. So they are not concerned about you know, some of the obviously military planners, think about it, worry about it. But or everyday people, it's a background concern, something that they worry may ripen up in the future, but not tomorrow. But I want to hear Michael talk about where Xi Jinping stands?

### **Michael Swaine 52:46**

Well, the statement what you said Kelly, that one of the viewers had indicated was just simply incorrect. Xi Jinping has not stated that Taiwan must be unified with China by 2027. That has not occurred. What has happened, and this is often misinterpreted, misunderstood, is that the United States, in particular, the CIA, and William Burns, the director of CIA, and my former boss at the Carnegie Endowment, has stated that US intelligence has indicated that Xi Jinping has told the PLA that they need to acquire enough capabilities to deal with a Taiwan situation by the year 2027. Now, what does that mean? We don't know what that means. Exactly. What it means is, he's sending a message to the PLA that it needs to it needs to improve its capabilities in order to deal with a possible crisis or conflict regarding Taiwan. And he wants to see that done by the year 2027. That is not a prediction that by 2027, the United China is going to attack Taiwan. It's a statement if indeed, it is true. It's a statement about readiness in the PLA to have the sufficient level of readiness to be able to deal with a situation by that date.

Now, Xi Jinping statements about reunification. He has repeatedly stated that he's committed in China remains committed to the search for peaceful unification of the Taiwan issue. He stated this authoritatively on several occasions publicly. Now, what that means is that he's rhetorically trying to abide by the original assurance that was come out of the normalization period. But at the same time, the question emerges, you know, how optimistic is he that despite that search for peaceful unification, you're actually going to get peaceful unification? Is he indeed, instead,

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perhaps preparing for the likelihood the greater likelihood that you're going to have some kind of a resolution of this issue through coercion, if not outright force, and that is what people worry about is that Xi Jinping has actually altered in reality, his preference not or his his expectation of what is necessary in a more pessimistic direction. In truth, we simply don't know. The degree to which Xi Jinping feels optimistic or pessimistic about the prospects for peaceful unification. He has said that he wants to have China reunified with Taiwan by 2049, during the process of the completion of what he calls the rejuvenation of China. Now, this is a pretty long term goal that he's laid out there, which is likely at a time, which he is no longer going to be in power. And I think he has made that statement, primarily for domestic reasons, because the Taiwan issue is always hanging there. It's always hanging there as a okay, we've got this unresolved question, what are we going to resolve this issue, and successive Chinese leaders have said, we need to resolve this issue at some point in time, we can't be delayed indefinitely, we have to have some kind of resolution. Much of that is for domestic political consumption, in my view, and the statement about 2049. And the rejuvenation, I think, was similarly, in large part part of that general messaging that Chinese leaders make. It wasn't what I would regard as a clear and hard deadline statement. Nonetheless, nonetheless, I think it is important, and Xi Jinping should make himself lower officials have said this, he has not to my knowledge, he needs to come out and say publicly, he has no deadline, no firm deadline for unification with over Taiwan. He is willing to exercise patience, as long as the United States does not abrogate the One China policy, as long as the situation isn't destabilize. He wants eventual unification. He wants to see movement towards it. He has no deadline. He hasn't said that lower officials have. He's never said that I think he needs to.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 57:02**

Okay, we have three minutes. So, I was wondering if, Steven, oh please, go ahead.

### **Stephen Goldstein 57:07**

The first thing that I'd add is that I still believe that Xi Jinping view of the military option is for deterrence, and not for compellence. Secondly, I think that should it seem as if Taiwan is going to be lost? No matter what the preparation of China, no matter how confident or not confident, the Chinese may feel, Xi Jinping has to take action, whether prepared or not. No Chinese leader can lose Taiwan. We can't expect rational calculation in that situation.

### **Michael Swaine 58:08**

And if I if I could just add Kelly, what what's so important about Steve's observation and how it relates to the debate in Washington, is that there tends to be this assumption, Washington, that if we just have enough military deterrence, we will stabilize the situation. And we will prevent conflict and interest will work in our favor. But if the United States just focuses on military deterrence, and it doesn't focus on maintaining that credibility of the One China Policy and the eventual possibility, through a peaceful process that you might see unification someday far in the future, if the US is seen as throwing that out the window, it doesn't matter how much military

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deterrence The United States has in place, the Chinese government will respond with force to that.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 59:02**

Shelley, I'd love to give you a final word here in terms of if you want to follow up on that, but also, maybe some parting thoughts on what viewers can expect on the political front out of Taiwan post election? What are we looking for, for signals and more broadly, in its relationship with us, China, each other?

### **Shelley Rigger 59:29**

Yeah, sure. I mean, I, first of all, I really want to underscore what Michael and Steven are saying about the the PRC's reluctance and, you know, lack of a desire to take on this military challenge at the at this time, or in the foreseeable at least the near future, probably the foreseeable future. And also it's resolved to do it if it has to, right. And I think If that I totally agree that much of their military posturing is deterrence, aimed at persuading the us not to push Taiwan or enable Taiwan to take an action that would then force Beijing's hand. And, you know, Beijing made the decision to make this a litmus test for the leadership of the Communist Party. But now that they have, you know, we all we all know where they stand. So what we're looking for, I think next is we're looking to see what Lai Ching-te in particular is going to say and do with respect to cross strait relations, and how he will indicate his willingness to stay within the framework that has worked well, for the last few years. So I think the next big moment is going to be his inaugural address on May 20. So stay tuned, we'll be back.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:00:59**

Michael, any parting thoughts?

### **Michael Swaine 1:01:07**

No, I think we've covered a great deal of waterfront here. I really appreciate Shelley and Steven for coming on and having this discussion. I think it's, it's covered some really important points that you don't often hear, discussed that much in Washington now. And it was really great to get two really deep experts on Taiwan, who are not within the DC policy community, per se, to give their views on these issues. I think it's really important to hear these kinds of views.

### **Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 57:48**

Yeah, thank you. We're very lucky at Quincy, to have access to you, Shelley and Steven, and thank you so much for coming on. Before I let everyone go first, I want to point to Michael's excellent brief with James Park pads of crisis and conflict over Taiwan, which you can find at Quincy institute.org. Please give it a look because he absolutely fleshes out a lot of these issues. And they're very important. And we have an upcoming book talk that I think will grab a

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lot of interest from from our audience. Anatol Lieven, who is a director of our Eurasia program, will be sitting down with Professor John Mearsheimer to talk about his new book, which was written with author Sebastian Rosato called "How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy" that is going to take place on January 29, at 12 o'clock Eastern time. So take a look at that on the Quincy Institute.org website as well. And thank you to our panelists and to Michael as always, great talk and we will absolutely see you next time.