



# Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations

*Richard C. Bush*

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The future of the Taiwan Strait is more wide open than at any other time in recent decades. Tensions between China and Taiwan have eased since 2008. But the movement toward full rapprochement remains fragile. Whether the two sides of the Strait can sustain and expand a cooperative relationship after years of mutual distrust and fear is still uncertain.

The waters of the Strait are uncharted, and each side worries about shoals beneath the surface. The current engagement between Beijing and Taipei may make possible a solution to their six-decade-long dispute. Whether, when, and how that might happen is, however, shrouded in doubt. China fears the island's permanent separation, by way of either an overt move to de jure independence or continued refusal to unify with the mainland. Taiwan fears subordination to an authoritarian regime that does not have Taipei's interests at heart. And the United States worries about the stability of the East Asian region.

Richard Bush, who studied issues surrounding Taiwan during almost twenty years in the U.S. government, explains the current state of relations between China and Taiwan, providing the details of what led to the current situation. And he extrapolates on the likely future of cross-Strait relations. Bush also discusses America's stake, analyzing possible ramifications for U.S. interests in the critically important East Asia region and recommends steps to protect those interests.

"At the heart of the [Taiwan conundrum] is a question of definition. Does the dispute stem from the protracted division of the Chinese state after World War II, or does the Republic of China on Taiwan in some sense constitute a successor state of the old Republic of China (ROC), one on a par with the People's Republic of China on the Chinese mainland? Whether and how the unification of the two entities might occur hinges on the answer. Indeed, I have argued that the core of the dispute between the two sides has been their disagreement over whether the Republic of China—or Taiwan—is a sovereign entity for purposes of cross-Strait relations. It follows that if unification is a real option, the two sides must form a political union that bridges the disagreement over the island's legal status. Is that possible?"—from the Introduction

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