

Taiwan should prepare for the “possibility of a very difficult period ahead for US policy in the cross-strait area,” a Washington symposium heard on Tuesday.

Steven Goldstein, director of the Taiwan Studies Workshop at Harvard University, said he was “quite pessimistic” about the future.

Taiwan’s external policies, he said, were all about domestic politics, which were highly polarized over policies toward China.

“Over the next year or so that polarization is going to center around the ECFA [economic cooperation framework agreement] issue,” Goldstein added.

There would be plenty of opportunity for political fractures to emerge in a bitter public debate, he said, adding that while China would have limited leverage in the internal Taiwan debate, its policies toward Taiwan would not change.

“It would like to see peaceful reunification at some point in the future, it would like not to use force, but it is prepared to use force, it has the capability to use force and that capability is increasingly growing,” Goldstein said.

“Let us assume that in the next year Taiwan goes through a bitter, sharply divided, vocal, controversial, process addressing the issue of ECFA,” he said. “Let us say that a lot of positions are taken and a lot of things are said that are going to be outrageous to the mainland.”

## **REACTION**

Goldstein asked if at that point it looked like the ECFA was going to be amended or reversed, how would the US react?

The US, he said, would argue that this was how democracy functions and that it was up to the Taiwanese to work it out.

“But the mainland reaction would be very different,” he said.

The Chinese reaction, he said, would be “outrage.”

“But more than outrage, it will perhaps begin to generate a sense that Taiwan is playing for time, Taiwan is stalling, that the process is not going forward, Taiwan is pocketing the benefits and that what is beginning to emerge is a scenario for separation,” he said. “So here you will have the United States saying that the Taiwan people are working it out and the mainland saying that the Taiwan people are looking for indefinite separation.”

