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# Global Island

**Sustaining Taiwan's International Participation  
Amid Mounting Pressure from China**

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*with Zachary Durkee*

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**The roots of Beijing's pressure campaign, including Xi's personal interactions with Taiwan policy, go back decades. But recent events have deepened and intensified China's efforts.**

## **Executive Summary**

**C**hina under Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping has ramped up political, economic, and military pressure on Taiwan. The roots of Beijing's pressure campaign, including Xi's personal interactions with Taiwan policy, go back decades. But recent events have deepened and intensified China's efforts, which include seeking to block Taiwan from engaging the rest of the world as part of a comprehensive strategy to force Taipei to move toward unification with the mainland on Beijing's terms.

China's comprehensive isolation campaign against Taiwan has three main lines of effort. First, since the election of the Tsai Ing-wen government in 2016, Beijing has revived a campaign to break the few official diplomatic relationships Taiwan enjoys by inducing or coercing the states that recognize Taiwan to shift their recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Second, China seeks to cajole and bully states that have unofficial relations with Taiwan—including advanced liberal democracies—into curtailing those ties. Third, China uses its growing heft in international institutions to prevent Taiwan from playing any role whatsoever in global governance of transnational issues. Taken together, these prongs make up a multi-layered strategy to sever Taiwan's links with global society.

Washington, Taipei, and like-minded partners will have to develop sophisticated strategies to counter China's moves in order to effectively maintain and advance Taiwan's international participation while also aligning with the larger objective of sustaining cross-Straits peace and stability. Resources and political will are limited, so choices to focus on particular initiatives should be based on the substantive value they provide more than the symbolism they might hold. In general, Washington and Taipei should roughly prioritize deepening unofficial relations with major and like-minded countries first, expanding multilateral participation second, and protecting Taiwan's group of official diplomatic relations last.

Finally, the authors make three general recommendations for policymakers from the United States, Taiwan, and like-minded partners for sustaining Taiwan's international participation and detail specific steps to advance them: First, keep U.S. and Taiwan policies aligned on common strategies that maximize substance over symbolism and foster deep, politically sustainable ties across their governments, legislatures, and societies. Second, facilitate the expansion of unofficial links between Taiwan and like-minded allies and partners that can help sustain the political status quo and blunt China's isolation campaign. Third, defend and advance Taiwan's ability to contribute to multilateral international organizations in ways that are consistent with long-standing U.S. policy.

## Introduction

**R**ecent years have witnessed growing tensions over Taiwan's (officially the Republic of China or ROC) role in East Asian and global affairs, a trend which threatens to destabilize the world's most dynamic region or even lead to conflict. The government of China (officially the People's Republic of China or PRC) in Beijing has sought to pressure Taiwan—a prosperous, self-governing island home to more than 23 million people—into closer economic and political integration and, eventually, unification.<sup>1</sup> That campaign has intensified as relations have been rapidly deteriorating between China and the United States, Taiwan's closest partner, as nearly a half-century of U.S. policy toward China generally known as “engagement” completely gives way to an era of strategic competition between the two superpowers.<sup>2</sup>

**What happens with Taiwan and its ties to the outside world will have important governance implications, too, namely whether democratic countries will allow a fellow democracy to become more isolated as it faces down an emboldened authoritarian major power.**

The outcome of China's pressure campaign against Taiwan will affect several major political and security questions in East Asia and beyond. Most directly, it will be one factor in determining whether China can gain a decisive advantage in cross-Straits disputes or be able to compel Taiwan's unification with the mainland. Another issue is whether China, the United States, and Taiwan can ever find a new equilibrium in relations that can be a foundation for long-term stability. What happens with Taiwan and its ties to the outside world will have important governance implications, too, namely whether democratic countries will allow a fellow democracy to become more isolated as it faces down an emboldened authoritarian major power. And finally, there is the question of whether and how Taiwan will be able to share its experiences and capabilities—ranging from health security to high technologies to robust democratic governance—with the rest of the world, thereby contributing to global public goods provision.

This report explores trends related to Taiwan's international participation<sup>3</sup> and offers a framework for how Washington, Taipei, and interested allies and partners can respond to growing pressure from Beijing. It proceeds in four parts. First, it examines the origins of China's recent pressure campaign. Second, it details the methods Beijing uses to constrain Taiwan's international participation. Third, it considers responses from Taipei and Washington and identifies principles to guide future strategies for ensuring Taiwan's meaningful participation in the international arena, given limited resources. And fourth, the paper offers specific recommendations for U.S. policymakers in the executive and legislative branches, as well as like-minded allied and partner governments.

## Origins of Beijing's Pressure Campaign

**C**hina's pressure campaign against Taiwan has roots that go back decades, but recent events have deepened and intensified Beijing's efforts to isolate Taiwan from the rest of the world. This section details the origins of that campaign and places it within the broader context of relations across the Taiwan Strait.

During his career, China's leader, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping, has devoted special attention to cross-Straits issues. He has a long history with Taiwan policy. He worked in the mainland's Fujian Province, which sits directly across from Taiwan, in various military and civilian positions from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> Later, after becoming China's top leader, Xi orchestrated a meeting with current Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (KMT) party, in November 2015. It was the first meeting between the leaders of People's Republic of China and the Republic of China since 1945.<sup>5</sup>

Indications of a cross-Straits thaw under a KMT government notwithstanding, Tsai won the January 2016 presidential election, reversing the result from her previous unsuccessful presidential bid against Ma in 2012. Beijing saw this outcome as a major blow to its interests and its preferred trajectory for cross-Straits relations for several reasons. First, some members of Tsai's party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), support declaring Taiwan's independence, even though Tsai herself does not espouse that position. In fact, she played an instrumental role in steering the DPP toward a more moderate stance following the presidency of Chen Shui-bian, who from 2000 to 2008 led Taiwan's first DPP administration. Second, the DPP under Tsai eventually became the preferred political party for activists from the Sunflower



Movement, Taiwan's youth democracy movement.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Tsai has not reaffirmed a political formulation known as the 1992 Consensus, which is interpreted differently by Beijing and both the DPP and KMT parties but is generally understood as a recognition that there is only "one China" without specifying whether that is the PRC ruling from Beijing or the ROC ruling from Taipei.

These developments appeared to lead Beijing, and especially Xi, to conclude that earlier steps toward more cross-Straits economic and political integration that started in the 1990s were being thrown into reverse. Those trends augured for China that Taiwan was on a trajectory away from, not closer to, the mainland—a threat to China's political and territorial ambitions but also to Xi's personal record. PRC leaders, therefore, perceived a need to deter Taiwan from declaring independence and to impose costs on Taiwan for its political choices, despite continuing to push domestic narratives that say time and momentum are on the mainland's side.

In this context, it would be possible to interpret China's moves, seen strictly from Beijing's perspective, as being simply a reaction to developments in Taiwan.

And certainly, deterring Taiwan from declaring any form of independence is a top priority. But that interpretation belies the broader context. China's goal of gaining control over Taiwan goes back to the Chinese Civil War

and the founding of the PRC in 1949. Further, China's ambitions to become the preeminent power in East Asia—and, potentially, beyond—have deep roots that go back decades.<sup>7</sup> Xi's China has pursued both goals more aggressively, even brazenly. China has taken aggressive steps in pursuit of securing its territorial claims, of which Taiwan is by far the most prominent among the areas Beijing does not already control.

Xi has also made a number of hardline statements regarding Taiwan policy. Some analysts say those statements should be discounted, at least partially, as nationalistic bluster primarily designed to placate domestic audiences.<sup>8</sup> Those analysts are correct that some contextualizing is likely warranted, and, when read in context, Xi's statements leave significant room for interpretation and later revisions. At the same time, however, Xi's statements have further bolstered the political incentives for a hardline stance from which any Chinese leader will be loath to back down. Xi said in 2013 and repeated in 2019 that the Taiwan dispute

"cannot be passed on from generation to generation."<sup>9</sup>

He has also continued PRC policy since former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping by refusing to renounce the use of force and calling on Taiwan to accept the "one country, two systems" formula that was applied to Hong Kong. In addition, Xi has said that resolving the Taiwan question is "a must for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era," an overall national goal frequently tied with the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 2049.<sup>10</sup>

Recent events in Hong Kong have also deepened rifts between China and Taiwan. Massive protests that started in the formerly semi-autonomous city in June 2019, to which Beijing responded with police crackdowns and then imposing a draconian new national security law in June 2020, have further sharpened the divide.<sup>11</sup> Hong Kong's experience crystallized views in Taiwan that oppose accepting a "one country, two systems" model for integration while retaining political autonomy. The obvious reason was that Beijing's behavior toward Hong Kong has shown the "one country, two systems" model to be an utter farce in

practice and demonstrated that, at least in this area, China cannot be trusted to adhere to international agreements once those accords restrain Beijing from pursuing its ultimate objectives.<sup>12</sup> According to political analysts in Taiwan, the situa-

tion in Hong Kong was one factor—along with Beijing's pressure campaign and Taiwan's improved relations with Washington—that helped Tsai recover from sharply declining public support for her government and win a second four-year term in January 2020.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, Chinese leaders are watching with mounting consternation as political support in Taiwan for closer ties with the mainland wanes.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Beijing appears emboldened by its growing economic and military strength to respond with pressure rather than inducements. In addition, Chinese leaders likely also worry, albeit less openly, that a thriving democracy in Taiwan serves as an alternative model for how the mainland could be governed if not controlled by the CCP.<sup>15</sup> The government in Taiwan has been hesitant to accept large numbers of political refugees from Hong Kong or the mainland for a host of diplomatic, security, political, and social reasons, but Taiwan remains the destination of choice for many of them, including some who have fled Hong Kong by boat.<sup>16</sup>

## **China seeks to isolate Taiwan on the international stage as one part of a comprehensive strategy to pressure Taipei into engagement on Beijing's terms.**

For all these reasons, China seeks to isolate Taiwan on the international stage as one part of a comprehensive strategy to pressure Taipei into engagement on Beijing's terms. Three additional elements of the strategy are worth noting. One is China's more aggressive military maneuvers near and around Taiwan. Another is economic pressure, such as boycotting Taiwanese pineapples and restricting the flow of mainland tourists to Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> The third is active measures to influence Taiwanese politics by working through local proxy groups and manipulating information online.<sup>18</sup> All of these components are designed to advance Beijing's long-term goal of annexing Taiwan, ideally without fighting, but through coercion or force if necessary. Constraining Taiwan's international participation serves a medium-term goal as well, which is to make the mainland the only conduit for Taiwan's international trade and diplomatic engagement.

## China's Lines of Effort for Isolating Taiwan

**C**hina's attempts to cut Taiwan off from the outside world target every level of the international system. Beijing enjoys several points of leverage that it uses to persuade or coerce other countries to shun Taiwan. These include China's position as a top goods importer and exporter, as well as its ample reserves for foreign direct investment, loans, and, to a lesser extent, aid. Beijing also draws influence from a perception that it is a rising major power. Using these and other tools, the PRC seeks to at least have a veto over the international community's interactions with Taiwan, if not to use third parties and international organizations to actively exert pressure on Taipei.

China's isolation campaign against Taiwan has three main lines of effort. First, since the election of the Tsai government in 2016, Beijing has revived a campaign to break the few official diplomatic relationships Taiwan enjoys by inducing or coercing the states that recognize Taiwan to shift their recognition to the PRC. Second, China seeks to cajole and bully states that have unofficial relations with Taiwan—including advanced liberal democracies—into curtailing those ties. Finally, China uses its growing influence in international organizations to prevent Taiwan from playing any role whatsoever in global governance of transnational issues. Taken together, these prongs make up a multi-layered strategy to cut off Taiwan's links with other countries and global society writ large. Below, we summarize each of these pillars and detail recent activities within them.

### STATUS OF TAIWAN'S DIPLOMATIC ALLIES SINCE XI JINPING'S RISE TO POWER IN CHINA

#### Countries that still recognize Taiwan as of March 2022<sup>19</sup>

Marshall Islands
Nauru
Palau
Tuvalu
Eswatini
Holy See (The Vatican)
Belize
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Paraguay
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

#### Countries that have switched their recognition from Taiwan to China since Xi became General Secretary of the CCP in November 2012

Nicaragua: Switched in December 2021. <sup>20</sup>
Kiribati: Switched in September 2019. <sup>21</sup>
Solomon Islands: Switched in September 2019. <sup>22</sup>
El Salvador: Switched in August 2018. <sup>23</sup>
Burkina Faso: Switched in May 2018. <sup>24</sup>
Dominican Republic: Switched in May 2018. <sup>25</sup>
Panama: Switched in June 2017. <sup>26</sup>
São Tomé and Príncipe: Switched in December 2016. <sup>27</sup>
The Gambia: Ended diplomatic relations with Taiwan in November 2013. <sup>28</sup> Reestablished diplomatic relations with China in March 2016. <sup>29</sup>

### Breaking Taiwan's Official Diplomatic Ties

The most direct pillar of China's isolation campaign is its push to sunder the few official diplomatic relationships Taiwan has. Because the present Taiwan government came into being as the result of the unfinished Chinese Civil War, for many years both Beijing and Taipei claimed to be the legitimate government of China, and countries were forced to recognize one or the other. For decades, Taiwan dominated this competition, but as China opened to the world in the 1970s, most countries switched recognition to China—including the United States in 1979.

China's efforts to poach Taiwan's allies have waxed and waned with broader cross-Straits relations, increasing during contentious periods and easing during more cooperative ones. In 2008, the KMT's return to power in the form of the Ma administration kicked off a thaw with the mainland. As part of this general warming, the two sides tacitly agreed to stop trying to poach each other's diplomatic partners. This "diplomatic truce" paused a decades-old dynamic in which Beijing and Taipei competed in offering patronage to mostly small countries, who would often play both sides off against each other. Beijing appeared to actively honor this truce, for example by rebuffing the entreaties of The Gambia, which severed ties with Taiwan in 2013 and sought to negotiate mutual recognition with the PRC. However, with Tsai's election in 2016, Beijing resumed courting Taiwan's diplomatic partners with a vengeance, beginning with The Gambia. At the time of Xi's accession to China's top leadership position in November 2012, 23 countries formally recognized Taiwan over China. That number has since decreased to 14.<sup>30</sup>

Beijing's primary tool for wooing countries away from Taiwan is the promise of economic gain. Many of the countries that recognize Taipei receive significant aid and investment from the island. However, Taiwan's total financial resources and market access incentives now struggle to compete with what the mainland can offer. From Panama to Kiribati, recognizing China has come with promises—sometimes never fulfilled—of millions of dollars in infrastructure investment, including through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Xi's signature connectivity project. In addition, China's large market and position in global supply chains sometimes make countries more likely to choose Beijing over Taipei: When the Dominican Republic switched recognition in 2018, its government noted that China was already its second-largest source of imported goods.<sup>31</sup> There are also signs, for example in the case of Burkina Faso, of China offering security assistance such as counterterrorism cooperation to newly recruited partners.<sup>32</sup>

China has spent the six years since Tsai came into office mobilizing its considerable resources to convince Taiwan's dwindling official diplomatic partners to switch their diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, and it shows no signs of stopping. In international relations, sovereignty is bestowed on an entity by other countries' recognition, and Beijing's poaching is an important part of China's overall program of strangling Taiwan's autonomous existence.

### WASHINGTON'S "ONE CHINA POLICY" DIFFERS FROM BEIJING'S "ONE CHINA PRINCIPLE"

Although Beijing continually attempts to conflate them, the United States and China maintain different official positions on Taiwan's status. Beijing's One China *principle* is uncompromising: "there is but one China in the world, the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory."<sup>33</sup> The United States, however, follows a separate One China *policy*, which does not take a position on Taiwan's sovereign status, instead viewing it as undetermined.<sup>34</sup> In the process of rapprochement with Beijing that started in the early 1970s, two U.S. administrations "acknowledged," but notably did not accept or agree to, China's stance as articulated in Beijing's One China principle.<sup>35</sup> Simultaneously, the United States is committed by law, namely the Taiwan Relations Act, to maintaining unofficial relations with Taiwan, among other obligations such as providing defensive arms. In addition, Washington has made affirmative statements on the process of resolving Taiwan's status, namely that it will "work with partners inside and outside of the region to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, including by supporting Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, to ensure an environment in which Taiwan's future is determined peacefully in accordance with the wishes and best interests of Taiwan's people."<sup>36</sup>

### Seeking a Veto on Other Countries' Unofficial Ties with Taiwan

China expends extraordinary effort trying to control the terms of countries' interactions with Taiwan, even states that do not officially recognize Taipei as sovereign. Despite its ambiguous international legal status, as a self-governing entity, Taiwan has built unofficial relations with a number of countries that do not formally recognize it—including, most prominently, the United States. This makes sense because Taiwan's physical, financial, and human capital give it a position in regional and global value chains, especially for semiconductors, that still outstrips China's in important ways.<sup>37</sup> In addition, over the past 30 years Taiwan has transformed into a vibrant liberal democracy.<sup>38</sup> While



Beijing has always voiced opposition to states cultivating ties with Taiwan even unofficially, in recent years China has been more strident in bullying countries that do so using its full array of coercive tools.

Nevertheless, Taiwan's outreach to unofficial diplomatic partners, particularly fellow democracies, has increased in recent years. Tsai's New Southbound Policy has focused on strengthening relations with countries such as India, Japan, Australia, ASEAN countries, and Pacific Island nations.<sup>39</sup> The fruits of this framework include a first-ever Japan-U.S.-Taiwan trilateral strategy forum, a bilateral investment agreement with India, and an official visit from legislators of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).<sup>40</sup> Beyond its own region, Taiwan has also achieved breakthroughs in relations with countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Lithuania—notably, all small countries that have undergone democratic transitions in recent decades and that deal with interference from a larger autocracy in their neighborhood (in their case, Russia). Taiwan's Foreign Minister Jaushieh Joseph Wu visited Prague and Bratislava, as well as Brussels, on a European tour in October 2021. Importantly, progress in unofficial relations often proceeds through parliamentary exchange—which both highlights Taiwan's democratic bona fides and slightly sidesteps the special strictures that executives face as official liaisons with foreign governments.

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Beijing has resorted to threats and coercion in response to any sign that unofficial relations are taking on the characteristics of official ties. In 2021, when Lithuania agreed to change the name of Taiwan's unofficial embassy from the "Taipei Office" to the "Taiwanese Representative Office in

Lithuania," Beijing took the severe diplomatic step of recalling its ambassador from Vilnius and demanded that Lithuania do likewise.<sup>41</sup> It attempted to add bite to this diplomatic censure by delisting Lithuania as a country of origin for trade purposes, effectively barring all Lithuanian exports from entering the PRC.<sup>42</sup> The ban also hit goods from other EU countries that use Lithuanian components, increasing the pressure on Vilnius.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, when the president of the Czech Senate made an official visit to Taiwan in 2020, Beijing threatened that the parliamentarian and his supporters would "pay a heavy price."<sup>44</sup>

Beijing's harsh responses to burgeoning ties between Taiwan and its unofficial partners build on years of seeking to control other countries' Taiwan policies. For years, Chinese officials put pressure on third countries not to negotiate independent economic accords with Taiwan. Even during the Ma administration, Beijing prevented Taiwan and partners like Singapore and New Zealand from negotiating trade or investment pacts until after all the relevant parties had signed agreements with the PRC.<sup>45</sup>

China has also instrumentalized its own relations with third parties to put political pressure on Taiwan. From 2016 to 2019, China has insisted that countries such as Kenya, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Spain extradite Taiwanese citizens accused of crimes to the mainland.<sup>46</sup> As tensions over Taiwan's status increase, Beijing could easily decide to use other agreements with third countries on functional areas such as law enforcement to pressure Taiwan or restrict those countries' relations with the island.

In addition, as China becomes ever more enmeshed in and significant to the global economy, it has begun exerting pressure on private foreign firms to comply with its One China principle. In April 2018, China suddenly ordered all international airlines and hotel chains to show destinations and properties in Taiwan as being located within the PRC.<sup>47</sup> While not affecting diplomatic relations directly, it showed Beijing's willingness to embroil important private stakeholders in political questions, casting a coercive shadow over countries and firms considering deepening their ties with Taipei. No entity is too small, powerless, or obscure: in 2021, China blocked a Jesuit high school in Colorado from attending United Nations events because the school's website included language that suggested Taiwan was an independent state.<sup>48</sup>

### Locking Taiwan Out of Multilateral Organizations

China also expends significant effort to ensure that Taiwan cannot participate in multilateral forums or international organizations (IOs) where countries come together to address transnational issues. China cares in part because full participation in these institutions is often restricted to sovereign states, and thus for Taiwan to participate would imply international recognition of the reality of Taiwan's self-government. But Beijing also seeks to circumscribe Taipei's participation in bodies that Taiwan can join because they allow participation from subnational entities, such as the Olympic movement. Taipei's absence from functional bodies bolsters China's ability to coerce or control Taiwan within those domains. For example, in 2017, when Beijing abrogated an informal understanding with the Ma administration by creating new commercial flight paths on Taiwan's side of the Strait, Taipei had no recourse within the relevant multilateral forum, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).<sup>49</sup>

Since the passage of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 in October 1971, which transferred to Beijing the seat representing China in the United Nations, Taiwan has had no official representation in the U.N.'s main bodies or its 15 functional bodies, known as specialized agencies.<sup>50</sup> Over time, Taiwan did develop informal vehicles for participation, such as sending its civil servants as part of nongovernmental organization (NGO) delegations to gatherings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or ICAO. During the era of improved relations between China and Taiwan under Ma, China even used quasi-official participation as a carrot to incentivize closer political and economic integration on its terms: Taiwan was granted observer status at the ICAO assembly in 2013 and the World Health Assembly (WHA), the governing body of the World Health Organization (WHO), from 2009 to 2016.

Today, China works relentlessly to become a more powerful and sophisticated presence in international organizations, giving Beijing more tools to prevent Taiwan's meaningful participation. Xi has spoken authoritatively of the need to "lead the reform of the global governance system" to better accommodate China's interests, such as excluding Taiwan, undermining the status of fundamental civil and political rights, and seeding global governance discourse with PRC ideological terms.<sup>51</sup> It is undertaking a strategy of "embedded revisionism" in which it uses existing institutional authorities (such as its permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council) and external coalition-building

(through BRI and other foreign policy initiatives) in a mutually reinforcing fashion to shape and shove international institutions in its preferred directions.<sup>52</sup> Beijing is getting its citizens elected to head U.N. specialized agencies and increasing the number and quality of Chinese bureaucrats in IO civil service positions.<sup>53</sup> It is slowly mastering the arcane arts of U.N. protocol and bureaucratic wrangling.<sup>54</sup> These intertwined efforts are yielding policy leverage and institutional knowledge that can reinforce barriers to Taiwan's meaningful participation.<sup>55</sup>

### China works relentlessly to become a more powerful and sophisticated presence in international organizations, giving Beijing more tools to prevent Taiwan's meaningful participation.

Following Tsai's election and Xi's coercive policy turn, not only has China once again blocked Taiwan's observer status at the aforementioned institutions, but it has also taken steps to block the NGO avenues for Taiwan's participation in U.N. specialized agencies. From 1995 to 2016, Taiwanese civil servants participated at the UNFCCC's governing assembly, the Conference of Parties, as part of the delegation of a government-linked research and development organization. In 2017, however, Chinese officials physically impeded the head of Taiwan's Environmental Protection Agency from entering the meeting as part of an NGO delegation.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Chinese staff at U.N. headquarters were able to change otherwise mundane building access badge policies to prevent Taiwanese officials from even entering the facilities by making passports issued by the Republic of China, Taiwan's official name, unacceptable forms of identification for gaining access.<sup>57</sup>

Taiwan still takes part in some international organizations that allow membership by subnational political units. It participates in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping as "Chinese Taipei" and at the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the "separate customs territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu." Nevertheless, this subnational modality does not preclude Beijing from pushing for exclusion: the Olympic Committee of Asia stripped Taichung City, located in central Taiwan, of the right to host the 2019 East Asian Youth Games after an impromptu meeting orchestrated by China.<sup>58</sup>

The COVID-19 global pandemic threw the stakes of Taiwan's exclusion from international organizations into sharp relief. In the early days of the pandemic, WHO officials took China's denials that the virus could spread through human-to-human transmission at face value despite being stonewalled on access to Wuhan, the city in China where the first cases were reported. WHO officials simultaneously refused communications from Taiwanese public health officials offering credible data showing human-to-human transmission.<sup>59</sup> The WHO official responsible for liaising with Beijing on the pandemic, when confronted on Taiwan's exclusion by journalists at a press videoconference, faked a malfunctioning internet connection to the videoconference to avoid answering the question.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, while China's tools for excluding Taiwan are growing, Beijing is encountering more pushback from the international community, suggesting more diplomatic clashes over these issues in the coming years. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, important voices are calling for Taiwan to have greater presence in global governance. For example, Group of 7 (G7) foreign ministers released a statement in August 2021 calling for Taipei's participation in the WHA.<sup>61</sup> However, just because the case for Taiwan's presence in multilateral settings is becoming stronger does not mean it will come about. Although China's influence still has limitations, any campaign to bring Taiwan into these spaces will have to account for ever more powerful opposition from Beijing.

## Priorities and Strategies for Washington and Taipei

**C**hina's campaign to shrink Taiwan's international participation has been comprehensive and unrelenting. Washington, Taipei, and like-minded partners will have to develop sophisticated strategies to effectively maintain and advance Taiwan's international participation while also aligning with the larger objectives of sustaining cross-strait peace and stability and enabling Taiwan to choose its own path. To that end, this section explores current official U.S. and Taiwan policies toward the issue. It then articulates forward-looking principles for how to design efforts to sustain Taiwan's international participation, including with whom to engage and on what issues to engage.

### Biden Maintains Consistent Policy on Taiwan

The Biden administration has continued to uphold long-standing American policies toward Taiwan. The administration has noted that U.S. policy is still governed by the Three Communiqués—the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972, the Normalization Communiqué of 1979, and the Joint Communiqué of 1982—along with the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances.<sup>62</sup> It has also reaffirmed the U.S. “One China” policy (which, again, is distinct from Beijing’s “One China” principle). While adhering to that framework, the Biden administration has taken steps to support Taiwan in the face of Chinese actions that undermine the status quo. These include inviting Taiwan’s representative to the United States, Bi-khim Hsiao, to the inauguration in January 2021; issuing new, less restrictive guidelines governing U.S. officials’ interactions with their Taiwan counterparts; and approving two arms sales and support packages worth \$750 million and \$100 million, respectively.<sup>63</sup>

**Washington, Taipei, and like-minded partners will have to develop sophisticated strategies to effectively maintain and advance Taiwan’s international participation while also aligning with the larger objectives of sustaining cross-strait peace and stability and enabling Taiwan to choose its own path.**

Specifically, U.S. policy toward Taiwan’s international participation is one of steadfast support for Taipei, within clear boundaries. To wit, a U.S. State Department fact sheet states:

The United States supports Taiwan’s membership in international organizations that do not require statehood as a condition of membership and encourages Taiwan’s meaningful participation in international organizations where its membership is not possible.<sup>64</sup>

That policy originated from a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Taiwan conducted in 1994 and was reiterated as recently as January 2021 by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who also noted that he would “like to see Taiwan playing a greater role around the world

including in international organizations.”<sup>65</sup> Pursuant to that policy, Secretary Blinken released a press statement in May 2021 calling on the WHO director-general to invite Taiwan to participate as an observer in the WHA and another in October 2021 to “encourage all UN Member States to join us in supporting Taiwan’s robust, meaningful participation throughout the UN system and in the international community, consistent with our ‘one China’ policy.”<sup>66</sup>

Washington has also occasionally been able to recruit coalitions of like-minded states to express support for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in key organizations. For example, the May 2021 communiqué from a meeting of G7 foreign and development ministers stated that “it is vital to ensure inclusive processes in international organisations” and expressed support for “Taiwan’s meaningful participation in World Health Organization forums and the World Health Assembly.”<sup>67</sup>

The U.S. Congress also plays a critical role in Taiwan policy, including in supporting Taipei’s international links. One recent example is a bipartisan, bicameral effort during the spring of 2021 to support Taiwan’s participation in the WHA.<sup>68</sup> These build on the Taiwan Assurance Act, the text of which passed in December 2020 as part of a large spending package, which included a statement of policy that the United States will “advocate for Taiwan’s meaningful participation” in international organizations “for which statehood is not a requirement for membership.”<sup>69</sup>

#### **DETERRENCE REMAINS FUNDAMENTAL TO CROSS-STRAIT PEACE AND STABILITY**

Ensuring Taiwan’s participation in the international arena is both possible and important. Still, policymakers should keep this agenda nested within a larger strategy for upholding cross-strait peace and stability. In this respect, the U.S. approach must mirror and counter China’s comprehensive pressure strategy. Deterring Chinese aggression should be the cornerstone of U.S. strategy toward Taiwan. To be sure, expanding Taiwan’s international participation can help bolster the political elements of deterrence by demonstrating widespread support for resolution of cross-strait issues without coercion or force. Enhancing Taiwan’s ties with the world would thereby align with U.S. efforts to construct an “integrated deterrence” framework that coordinates across domains, across tools of national power, and with allies and partners.<sup>70</sup> But ultimately Taiwan military capabilities—paired with the prospect of U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Japanese support—provide the main foundation for deterrence.

#### **Official Policies of Taiwan**

Taiwan’s policies toward its international participation reflect the island’s overall strategic position. Tsai has argued that Taipei has sought to turn what would appear to be a liability into a strength, noting that being excluded from the United Nations and other multilateral institutions and being forced to conduct diplomacy without official recognition from most countries “has encouraged resilience and spurred novel approaches to dealing with challenges and crises of all kinds” and “compelled us to think asymmetrically, combating efforts to negate Taiwan’s existence by deepening our engagement with the world through nontraditional channels.”<sup>71</sup> Tsai’s New Southbound Policy is one major component of this approach.

In her second inaugural speech in May 2020, Tsai summarized her foreign policy goals by saying Taiwan would “fight for our participation in international organizations, strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation with our allies, and bolster ties with the United States, Japan, Europe, and other like-minded countries.”<sup>72</sup> At the same time, she has frequently asserted that Taiwan is not interested in playing “dollar diplomacy” to retain allies, showing sensitivity to the cost-benefit ratio of various forms of international cooperation as well as a desire to build relations on more sustainable foundations.<sup>73</sup> Taiwan’s Foreign Minister Wu has echoed similar sentiments, stating, “There is no lack of compelling reasons for Taiwan to play a constructive role in the U.N. system.”<sup>74</sup>

#### **Principles for Prioritizing Efforts to Advance Taiwan’s International Participation**

Given China’s growing power, reach, and demonstrated will to use them in squeezing Taiwan, Washington and Taipei must be judicious in choosing how to respond. Not all pathways to influence in international politics are equally smooth, nor are their destinations equally attractive. Generating more support for Taiwan requires drawing on a finite—although not necessarily fixed—reservoir of political will. Symbolism can be important, but the main criteria for action should be substantive impact. The good news is that promising avenues for augmenting Taiwan’s international space exist. With prioritization and focus, the United States and Taiwan can create room for the island to continue to thrive despite China’s pressure campaign.

A simple framework for deciding what to prioritize is to consider the intersection of value and feasibility. Some outcomes might be easy to bring about but provide only nominal benefits to Taiwan’s foreign policy or



its people. Other options might give Taiwan substantial new autonomy but face long odds of coming to fruition given prevailing conditions. Also important is to consider the indirect as well as direct impacts of a given action. Improving ties with major and middle countries, for example, can have indirect benefits in improving Taiwan's access to international organizations, because those states can lobby within those bodies themselves. The reverse may be less true: Few capitals will change their foreign policy on an issue as sensitive as Taiwan because a multilateral body recommended it. The key is for Washington and Taipei to concentrate on initiatives that promise both high value and high(er) likelihood of success.

While there may be specific considerations on different issues, Washington and Taipei should generally think of an initiative as having positive impact if it would increase access to a significant policy good—or impede a likely means of Chinese pressure—without directly engaging questions of Taiwan's juridical sovereignty. Indeed, both the Biden and Tsai administrations have indicated that while they wish to boost Taiwan's international participation, they also intend to behave responsibly, that is, not openly consider formal independence.<sup>75</sup> Significant policy goods might include expanded consultations with security officials of key partner countries; new markets for Taiwan's exports or sources of investment; or opportunities to contribute at multilateral forums where decisions are made on issue areas that engage Taiwan's interests, such as responding to climate change.

A given action's likelihood of success depends on both the formal rules of decision-making that apply in that context and the weight of China's influence in a given area. For example, both the formal rules and the China factor militate against Taiwan returning to the United Nations as a member state. Since 1971, U.N. leadership has interpreted organizational rules to preclude Taiwan from having an official presence in U.N. decision-making bodies, and China is formally empowered to block alteration of those rules by its status as one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, or P5. By contrast, individual states have significant latitude to determine their own relations with other autonomous actors. At the same time, the practical reality is that states must consider what actions China might take in reaction to any expansion of ties with Taiwan. All else equal, the more economically and politically enmeshed a state is with China, the less successful any effort to cultivate Taiwan's ties with that state will be, especially if they lack direct regional security interests, such as those held by the United States or Japan.

Taking these considerations together, Washington and Taipei should roughly prioritize deepening unofficial relations with major and like-minded countries first, expanding multilateral participation second, and protecting its group of official diplomatic relations last.

Major powers have the latitude to increase unofficial relations with Taiwan, if they perceive the risk and cost of blowback from China as acceptable. These ties can create multiplier effects in achieving Taiwan's other international objectives. For example, growing closeness between Taiwan and Japan—encouraged by the United States—may prove key to Taiwan being included in the process for expanding the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a key forum for negotiating the rules of inter-Asian trade on which Taiwan's economy depends.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, states that share democratic values and face similar strategic problems, such as Lithuania, have special incentives to weather China's reactions to upgraded ties with Taiwan. The more that third countries build up their relations with Taiwan, the greater stake they have in its security, and the more likely they are to join with the United States in standing up to PRC coercion.

### **Taking these considerations together, Washington and Taipei should roughly prioritize unofficial relations with major and like-minded countries first, expanding multilateral participation second, and protecting its group of official diplomatic relations last.**

Multilateral institutions are also an important ingredient in an effective international strategy for Taiwan. The island and its supporters in Washington—and increasingly in Europe—have long campaigned for Taiwan to join IOs that do not require statehood for membership and meaningfully participate in those that do (through observer status or quasi-official civil society engagement). For Taiwan, participation increases its interaction with the global society and other states, allows it to build prestige by contributing to public goods, and gives it a voice in important debates over inter- and transnational issues. In return, Taipei's multilateral participation benefits the United States and like-minded partners by bringing into those forums another liberal democracy with broadly aligned viewpoints and high levels of technical capacity.



Finally, Taiwan's portfolio of formal diplomatic partners is important and worth maintaining but should be accorded comparatively low priority in U.S.-Taiwan joint efforts to sustain its international participation. Having formal partners does help to legitimize Taiwan's autonomy from the mainland, and it is important that Taiwan stand by existing commitments to its friends. Sovereign recognition is a matter of network effects: the more states that say yours is sovereign, the more sovereign it is; the more states that recognize your sovereignty, the greater the incentive for holdouts to join the consensus. But some states' recognition is worth less than others. At present, Taiwan's partners are too peripheral in the system to themselves affect the calculations of bigger powers. Far better for Washington and Taipei to focus on building substantive ties with larger and/or democratic states, even if unofficial, than to look for a reflected glow from formal relations with smaller ones, especially non-democracies.

### What Issues to Engage On

Similar to the framework for deciding what types of entities to work with, the United States and Taiwan should be judicious in choosing what issues to prioritize, in both bilateral consultations and broader campaigns to expand international participation. Selection should be driven as much as possible by how a given option might advance Taiwan's vital interests and ability to function autonomously. The sections that follow articulate some general priorities that can help guide Washington's and Taipei's allocations of effort.

### HARD SECURITY

Taiwan's security situation is defined by two major factors: the threat from the PRC and Taiwan's geography. On the first factor, Taiwan can benefit from continuing to cultivate ties with other neighboring states that are nervous about China's growing might and revisionist ambitions. Deeper relations with Japan are a perfect example: in both the U.S.-Japan "2+2" foreign and defense ministry talks and President Biden's meetings with former Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and current Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, cross-Strait peace and security figured as a major concern.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Japan's 2021 defense white paper offered the clearest statement yet that Japan would likely involve itself on the American and Taiwanese side in the event of a cross-Strait conflict.<sup>78</sup> Washington and Taiwan can build on this by seeking

substantive political-security consultations with other powers who have interests in Taiwan's situation, including the other Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) countries, India and Australia; other regional players such as Singapore and South Korea; and European powers such as the United Kingdom and France.<sup>79</sup>

Even in peacetime, as an island with an economy built on foreign trade, Taiwan is dependent on the freedom and security of the global commons. The unrestricted movement of people and goods by air and sea is therefore critical to its survival and economic well-being. During the 2018 fracas over international airlines and hotels being forced to list destinations in Taiwan as part of the PRC, rumors spread that airlines were no longer accepting Taiwan passports for international travel. Though those rumors were ultimately disproven, China could employ similar coercive tools that threaten to cut off Taiwan's physical access to the global commons in a future crisis.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, in addition to making maritime and airspace security a focus of its bilateral exchanges, Taiwan should prioritize campaigns to participate in IOs with jurisdiction over such topics, such as ICAO and the International Maritime Organization.

### ECONOMICS AND ENERGY

As a trading nation and a high-tech powerhouse, Taiwan is reliant on access to global markets. Tsai discussed at length in her second inaugural address that this is especially true as new technologies emerge and supply chains shift in the wake of the U.S.-China trade war and the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Taiwan has a special importance in the economy of tomorrow, given its dominance in semiconductor manufacturing. Based on these considerations, Taiwan should seek to enhance ties with other countries whose firms occupy important links in high-tech global value chains, such as Japan and South Korea. In the multilateral realm, it should prioritize making its voice heard in forums that deal with technical standards (such as the International Telecommunications Union), bodies that deal with legal frameworks for issues such as trade in digital services, and multilateral trade blocs generally. Due to both the risk of financial contagion from China and occasional criticism of its own currency manipulations, Taipei should also seek to participate in bodies that deal with financial and macroeconomic policy coordination, such as the Group of 20 (G20), or trade agreements, such as the CPTPP, that may include side agreements on monetary or other macroeconomic policy areas.

## CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The United States and Taiwan also need to recognize the urgency of planetary-scale threats to the island's security, whether from sea level rise, extreme weather due to climate change, or novel pathogens or other health security threats.<sup>82</sup> Taiwan's island geography makes it exceptionally vulnerable to the disruptive effects of climate change. According to some analyses, sea levels may be rising faster around Taiwan than in other areas of the world, and in the longer term, many of its most densely populated areas could be inundated.<sup>83</sup> In the more immediate future, extreme weather poses a threat to human lives, food security, and global value chains.<sup>84</sup> Taiwan needs to consult with bilateral partners and seek to have a voice at international organizations focused on mitigating and adapting to climate change, principally the UNFCCC. Taiwan also has the potential to lead in production and deployment of green energy technologies.

Next, as COVID-19 has made clear, emerging infectious diseases can wreak havoc on every facet of society. Although Taiwan has been an example to the world of how to manage the pandemic—suffering only 21,081 confirmed cases and 853 deaths as of March 2022<sup>85</sup>—it remains vulnerable to the effects of future novel pathogens, especially since mainland China continues to have many of the conditions from which future health security challenges could emerge.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, Taiwan's success in fighting the disease as a democracy gives it a golden opportunity to use that experience to form ties with other countries and international organizations.

Finally, Taiwan should, as President Tsai has called for, foreground its democratic values in foreign policy.<sup>87</sup> This means prioritizing relations with liberal democracies both large and small. Taipei should keep deepening its relationships with like-minded states such as Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia in addition to the countries mentioned earlier. It should also step up engagement with European Union institutions. In this vein, parliamentary exchanges may be particularly helpful, such as the recent visit of members of the European Parliament to Taiwan.<sup>88</sup>

## Recommendations for Policymakers from the United States, Taiwan, and Like-Minded Partners

**T**o sustain Taiwan's international participation amid China's onslaught of pressure, policymakers should consider the following three general recommendations and the individual initiatives that fall under them.

### **Keep U.S. and Taiwan policies aligned on common strategies that prioritize substance over symbolism and foster deep, politically sustainable ties across their governments, legislatures, and societies.**

- Keep U.S. policy toward supporting Taiwan's international participation closely tethered to larger goals in America's policy toward Taiwan and cross-Strait relations, especially the aim of upholding the status quo and opposing coercion or the use of force. Continue support for Taiwan's meaningful international participation at the sub-state level.
- Strike a purposeful balance between symbolism and substance in supporting Taiwan's international participation. Symbolism often matters, but the focus should be on delivering meaningful benefits for Taiwan, enabling Taiwan to make contributions to international society, and ensuring that Taiwan does not become—or seem to be—simply a “card” or pawn in the U.S.-China rivalry.
- Ensure close coordination between Washington and Taipei based on a recognition that previous eras that lacked effective coordination were particularly volatile and dangerous.<sup>89</sup> Relatedly, craft policies to be resilient if future U.S. and Taiwan administrations have more divergence than is currently the case.
- Further bolster ties between the U.S. Congress and Taiwan's parliament, the Legislative Yuan. Where possible, build on those ties to help expand links with legislators in other partner countries. Exchanges between ruling-party legislators from Japan and Taiwan provide a good model to emulate.<sup>90</sup>
- Cultivate and sustain a stable bipartisan consensus on Taiwan policy in the United States. Both parties should carefully avoid the temptation to use the issue as a partisan cudgel.

- Maintain U.S. support for Taiwan sustaining relationships with countries that formally recognize Taipei. At the same time, policymakers in Washington and Taipei should focus forward-looking efforts on building unofficial ties with major- and middle-power states—especially democracies—whose heft on the world stage might ultimately provide more meaningful support and legitimacy to Taiwan in the coming decades.

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**Facilitate the expansion of unofficial links between Taiwan and like-minded allies and partners that can help sustain the political status quo and blunt China's isolation campaign.**

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- Connect the challenges Taiwan faces to larger trends in China's foreign and security policy where Beijing is relying more on coercion and threats of force to achieve its aims. In this way, show that Taiwan's fate relates directly to larger questions of regional and global order.
- Put or keep the issue of supporting Taiwan's international participation on the agenda for bilateral engagements as well as G7 and Quad meetings.
- Coordinate standard practices with other major- and middle-power democracies for engaging with Taiwanese officials with the goal of making exchanges commonplace and fostering solidarity.
- Expand the U.S.-Taiwan Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) to include more categories of cooperation with more partners. Build on the roles played by Japan, which joined in 2019, and Australia, which joined in 2021, as full partners in the GCTF.<sup>91</sup> Explore similar opportunities to expand the U.S.-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue.<sup>92</sup>
- Ensure Taiwan representatives are included in follow-on initiatives from the Summit for Democracy that was held in December 2021. Specifically, consider a leadership role for Taiwan in working groups tasked with developing and sharing best practices for fighting disinformation online.
- Enhance people-to-people exchanges among citizens from the United States, Taiwan, and the international community representing nongovernmental, civil society, media, business, academic, and arts sectors in order to further thicken ties among their societies.
- Encourage countries to act in support of partners facing economic and political pressure from China because of their ties with Taiwan. The U.K. and Australia joining the European Union's case against China in the WTO, undertaken in response to China's actions targeting Lithuania, provides a textbook example.<sup>93</sup>

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**Defend and advance Taiwan's ability to contribute to multilateral international organizations in ways that are consistent with long-standing U.S. policy.**

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- Continue to strongly advocate for Taiwan's participation in multilateral forums, such as the World Health Assembly, where Taiwan can join as a non-state entity or provide meaningful contributions if membership requires statehood. U.S. policy should, however, stop short of advocating for full U.N. membership for Taiwan at this time, as such a move would constitute a meaningful change to the status quo Washington and Taipei are seeking to uphold.<sup>94</sup>
- Seek out creative ways to inject useful information from Taiwan into the proceedings of organizations in which Taiwan has been prevented from participating while clearly noting the source.
- Protect against China's attempts to push Taiwan out of any more international organizations. Recruit an informal contact group of like-minded countries to closely monitor Beijing's moves in this area, alert others about impending actions, and take coordinated steps to counter them.
- Help facilitate Taiwan's participation in high-standards trade agreements. Specifically, work with Japan, Australia, and like-minded states to support Taiwan's accession to CPTPP (after meeting all the technical requirements), even as the United States remains unlikely to join the pact.
- Welcome Taiwan's participation in any future U.S.-led agreement(s), including the proposed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and any potential digital trade deal.

## Conclusion

**S**ustaining Taiwan's international participation amid mounting pressure from China will be a difficult endeavor. Beijing's campaign to isolate Taipei will likely continue to be vigorous and comprehensive across all three of its pillars: breaking Taiwan's official diplomatic ties, seeking a veto on other countries' unofficial ties with Taiwan, and locking Taiwan out of multilateral organizations. The United States, Taiwan, and like-minded allies and partners can effectively counter China's campaign but should do so in ways that focus on ensuring Taiwan garners material benefits and Taipei can simultaneously contribute to global public goods. Symbolism matters, but substance should be the main driver. Taiwan's international participation can be bolstered with the right approach, which can also help to advance the larger goal of upholding peace and security and supporting the rules-based international order across the Taiwan Strait and in the Indo-Pacific more broadly.

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