

Building International Support for Taiwan

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THE ISSUE

Deterring Beijing's growing threats to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait will require a strong international coalition of partners to support Taiwan and send credible warning signals to China. To deepen international cooperation on capacity building and deterrence, Washington will need a compelling narrative for why Taiwan matters that instills urgency across a wide range of capitals—and avoids limiting engagement through overly militaristic framings of the challenge. This will require developing a finer grained understanding of how Taiwan and cross-Strait issues fit within other countries' national interests and what types of strategic narratives on Taiwan resonate in various capitals. Toward this end, the CSIS Freeman Chair convened a geographically diverse international task force of experts for four sessions across May to November 2023. This paper is not a consensus document but distills key insights co-conveners drew from this set of discussions. Further reflections from individual members of the task force, and a list of participants, are included in the Appendix.

INTRODUCTION

If the United States is to meet Beijing's growing threats to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, it must build a strong coalition capable of meaningfully supporting Taiwan and willing to send credible deterrent signals to China. Toward this end, Washington needs a granular understanding of why Taiwan matters to key international stakeholders, what tolerance for risk these partners are willing to bear, and what strategic narratives on Taiwan resonate with their leaders and politics. Importantly, U.S. leaders must also appreciate that their actions and statements can either strengthen or undercut efforts to forge international unity behind preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Building such a coalition is key to deterring conflict and preserving Taiwan's space to grow as a prosperous

and resilient democracy. The broader and deeper the coalition of stakeholders, the more unmistakable the signal to Beijing that it would pay a significant price for escalating pressure on Taiwan. U.S. efforts to build greater cohesion among partners also reflect the reality that Taiwan has become an issue of global consequence. The economic, financial, and supply chain impacts of any instability in the Taiwan Strait would be felt in every country and community that is connected to the global economy. Given the centrality of Taiwan's exports of semiconductors and intermediate goods, any type of crisis in the waters surrounding Taiwan would bring global value chains to a grinding halt and cause a seizing up of international trade.¹ One recent estimate from *Bloomberg* finds that a conflict in the Taiwan Strait might cost the global economy nearly \$10 trillion.²

In addition, any conflict in the Taiwan Strait would also quickly spread across the globe and into cyberspace and space. There would also be real risk of a nuclear exchange. If China uses force to assert control over Taiwan and its 24 million residents, it would mark the definitive end of the post-World War II international system and usher in a “might-makes-right” world in its place.

Despite these sobering risks, progress in building unity of effort to prevent such outcomes has been uneven. There has been notable progress in raising awareness of the global stakes in peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, with a growing number of world leaders, including from the G7, speaking out about the importance of Taiwan.³ A small but growing number of countries have also conducted military presence operations near Taiwan, and more have sent parliamentary delegations and made public statements in support of preserving the status quo. These moves are to be welcomed, but they are insufficient, given the stakes. As it stands, leaders in democratic countries have largely remained cautious in elaborating how events in the Taiwan Strait impact their own vital interests.

To help spur efforts toward greater international cohesion in support of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, the CSIS Freeman Chair convened a group of leading strategic thinkers representing Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States to participate in an iterative set of dialogues over the past eight months. The list of participants follows this paper. These discussions yielded insight into how Taiwan and cross-Strait issues more broadly are viewed in different regions, and how strategic narratives can be constructed in order to spur collective action to limit risks and, if necessary, respond to a crisis.

The key findings of this task force include:

- Specific interests, rather than democratic solidarity, are more likely to drive engagement with Taiwan in most parts of the world and will likely need to serve as the foundation for expanding stakeholder buy-in.
- Washington should expand its efforts to highlight how threats to Taiwan’s peace and prosperity directly impact wide swaths of the global community. The more Taiwan comes to be viewed

as critical to regional stability and, by extension, global prosperity, the more invested other stakeholders will be in its security.

- Relatedly, arguments about stability, rather than debates over Taiwan’s sovereignty per se, are likelier to galvanize global attention to its security and well-being. Washington should make the case that Beijing’s efforts to isolate Taiwan will directly lead to instability in the region and the broader global economy.
- Greater clarity on the ultimate and proximate causes of rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait is needed to combat Beijing’s narrative that the United States is solely responsible for “stirring the pot.” Task force participants recommended coordinated efforts to track and publicize the main elements of China’s pressure campaign against Taiwan in the military, economic, and cyber domains, ideally spearheaded by an organization outside of the United States in order to maximize credibility.
- The United States and key coalition partners must address the lack of basic understanding about Taiwan’s history, the key legal and geopolitical elements of cross-Strait relations, and the debate over sovereignty among publics and political elites in many countries. As long as there is a deficit of knowledge regarding Taiwan in global discourse, Beijing will have ample space to actively shape and manipulate public narratives.
- Uncertainty over the direction of U.S. foreign policy amid an upcoming presidential election increases hesitancy among current and prospective partners to support Taiwan. In the long term, U.S. consistency and steadiness regarding Taiwan will be an important foundation for generating greater global buy-in. Conversely, prevarication, inconsistency, and the abandonment of the long-standing “One China” policy will cast a chill on allied coordination on Taiwan.
- Relatedly, overly militaristic framings about cross-Strait issues and Taiwan’s future have the unanticipated consequence of constraining the space for actual and potential coalition partners to engage on the issue.

Finally, it is important to note that this paper reflects key takeaways that the authors have drawn from the task force discussions. This is not a consensus document of the international task force. To read further reflections from individual task force members, please see the Appendix section.

Takeaway 1: Much of the world does not see U.S. involvement on Taiwan the same way Washington does.

A common theme among task force members was the view that within their countries and respective regions, the United States is seen as a key contributor to escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait. This is partly driven by organic impressions based on interpretations of U.S. actions, but it is also stoked by an aggressive Chinese information campaign that seeks to frame the United States as the primary belligerent. Beijing has taken advantage of events such as then-U.S. speaker of the house Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 visit to Taiwan to paint the United States as undermining the status quo and as seeking to "use Taiwan" as a cudgel to harm China and preserve U.S. hegemony.⁴

Beijing also has sought to warn countries about U.S. efforts to construct an "Asian NATO" and to link such efforts to U.S. support for Taiwan. Beijing suggests that Washington pushed for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) eastward expansion after the collapse of the Soviet Union and that such efforts precipitated war in Ukraine.⁵ Following this logic, Asian countries, therefore, must be alert to the risk of the United States repeating such a cycle of alliance expansion in Asia and triggering conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Chinese propaganda and diplomatic channels have used the launch of the AUKUS security agreement (between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the institutionalization of the Quad (between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States), and the deepening of a Japan-South Korea-United States trilateral grouping as evidence of the United States' ambition to forge an "Asian NATO" that would be arrayed against China and fuel rising regional tensions, thereby raising risk of military conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

However tenuous such arguments may seem, Washington and its partners must recognize that such

narratives hold more sway in many parts of the world than is appreciated. The more accepted Beijing's narrative becomes, particularly in Southeast Asia, the less political space there will be for countries to contribute to coalitional efforts to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

To counter this narrative, the United States should become bolder in explaining the logic of its actions to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. U.S. officials should publicly rebut suggestions that the United States views Taiwan as a tool for use in competition with China, or that the United States has designs on Taiwan's ultimate status in relation to the People's Republic of China (PRC). It should frame its goals around preserving peace and keeping open space for leaders in Beijing and Taipei to ultimately arrive at a peaceful resolution of their differences. This should reflect the will of the people of Taiwan, who have democratic agency to express their preferences. Such an eventual goal may seem remote or even impossible, given the political trajectory in China under Xi Jinping, but in keeping open the prospect for some form of peaceful reconciliation, U.S. officials can puncture Chinese efforts to paint the United States as the destabilizing actor in the Taiwan Strait. Washington needs to present itself as not seeking a fight with China over Taiwan, but rather as being credible, principled, and firm in its defense of Taiwan's security, prosperity, and democratic way of life.

At the same time, there is need to expose China's pressure campaigns on the people of Taiwan. International awareness of these campaigns is limited or fragmented, which helps Beijing obscure its own role in destabilizing the status quo. The task force emphasized that greater efforts to capture data streams and raise public awareness about China's ongoing efforts against Taiwan across a range of polities would help clarify China as the key aggressor across the Taiwan Strait.

One suggestion was fusing various streams of data about Chinese efforts to wear down the psychological will of the people of Taiwan, creating an easily usable and publicly available dashboard of activities. This initiative could track Chinese disinformation and misinformation efforts, cyber campaigns, military activities around Taiwan, and targeted economic coercion efforts against specific Taiwan stakeholders. To maximize credibility, it would

be important for this dashboard to be operated by a nongovernment entity outside of the United States. More systematic efforts to promote transparency in exposing influence operations by the PRC directed against Taiwan would have the secondary benefit of raising awareness of such risks in other democratic societies as well.

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Takeaway 2: There is a sense of crisis fatigue.

Several task force members acknowledged that warnings by U.S. military leaders about timelines for a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan had galvanized policy and public debates in their countries that would not have otherwise occurred. At the same time, the majority of task force members warned that further public warnings and excessively militaristic framings are generating the opposite of their intended effect. They are shrinking domestic political space for leaders to push for more active engagement on and with Taiwan—and are helping Beijing's narrative of the United States as a provocateur. Several task force members noted that such warnings had already led investment communities in their countries to direct fund flows away from Taiwan to avoid facing sunk capital in the event of a cross-Strait conflict.⁶

Multiple task force members warned of crisis fatigue from the cascade of overlapping global events, ranging from the ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict between Hamas and Israel to mounting debt in the developing world, climate-induced calamities, food insecurity, and the effects of rising interest rates on the global economy. To create and sustain political space for engaging on Taiwan, task force members encouraged framing issues in affirmative terms around upholding peace and stability and ensuring functionality in the global economy, rather

than in negative terms around preparing for conflict or pushing back against Chinese pressure, which, as of yet, does not deeply resonate with many countries.

Particularly in Europe, where corporations presently are navigating a process of economically decoupling from Russia, there is scant interest in stimulating discussion around doing the same with China. Instead of encouraging companies to exit China, several task force members suggested that it would be more impactful to frame Taiwan as part of the solution for de-risking from the Chinese market, but such a strategy will only work if companies and investors see Taiwan as a safe destination for talent, capital, and investment.

It is also important to note that the varying and inconsistent timelines offered by senior U.S. military leaders have the effect of decreasing the credibility of U.S. intelligence warnings. If and when Beijing begins to move to a more active war footing with an intention of targeting Taiwan, it will be imperative that the global community sees U.S. information and early warnings as highly credible.⁷ The worst possible outcome would be a collective eye roll to yet another U.S. warning of an invasion as Beijing mobilizes for an attack.

Takeaway 3: While values are important, interests are the primary driver of international support for Taiwan in many parts of the world.

Taiwan is a healthy, stable, and resilient democracy. While this should be celebrated and communicated, most task force members indicated narratives around Taiwan grounded in interests, and not around shared democratic values, were likelier to drive engagement in many parts of the world. This view was based on a judgment that in many regions, shared democratic values would be an insufficient motivating factor to compel countries or their respective private sectors to accept greater friction with China or risk involvement in conflict. This may be an uncomfortable truth, but it is a truth, nonetheless. Instead, pragmatic arguments based on the tangible benefits to be derived from positive relations with Taiwan are likely to gain broader traction, particularly in developing economies. It is vital to emphasize the ways in which Taiwan can help countries advance their resilience and prosperity, as well as the important role peace and stability in and

around the Taiwan Strait play from a developmental and economic perspective.

Taiwan's provision of personal protective equipment to vulnerable populations during the Covid-19 pandemic similarly made tangible the importance of Taiwan's stability and autonomy for key constituencies, including in Central and Eastern Europe. For developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere, Taiwan has served as an important partner in infrastructure financing, trade, and vocational training. Major investments by Taiwan firms in Germany, India, Japan, and the United States serve as sources of job creation. And semiconductors from Taiwan will be vital to the green and digital transitions now being pursued by many political leaderships.

Every leader in the world values job creation and the productive capacity of their country's citizenry. Taiwan's exports, particularly semiconductors but also other products, are critical to the healthy functioning of the global economy. Likewise, cross-Strait stability is critical to the global flow of goods. With nearly half of the global container fleet and close to 90 percent of the largest container ships (by tonnage) transiting through the Taiwan Strait in 2022, it is one of the world's most vital waterways.⁸ Any interruption to the free flow of commerce through the Taiwan Strait would have cascading effects on factory floors and, eventually, household incomes across the world. Boosting awareness of the economic and developmental costs of a conflagration in and around Taiwan, including for economies and businesses that depend heavily on trade with China, can help make the case for more involvement in preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

It is vital to emphasize the ways in which Taiwan can help countries advance their resilience and prosperity, as well as the important role peace and stability in and around the Taiwan Strait play from a developmental and economic perspective.

One possible caveat to this argument is that the economic importance of the Taiwan Strait cuts both ways, with some countries potentially seeing the economic costs of a crisis as a reason to support Beijing in its efforts to coerce "reunification." But here it will be critical to clarify that there is no clean path to Beijing's near-term annexation of Taiwan, given the strong sense of Taiwanese identity and the maturation of the island's democracy. Any effort by Beijing to compel Taiwan's submission will result in a costly and widespread disruption to global trade and semiconductor supply chains.

Takeaway 4: It is important to de-hyphenate Taiwan from China and instead embed Taiwan as critical to regional stability in its own right.

It is widely accepted that much of the world's economic growth and dynamism over the coming decades will emanate from Asia. The region was projected to contribute roughly 70 percent of global growth in 2023 and is home to nearly two-thirds (60 percent) of the world's population.⁹ In the coming years, Asia's importance to global security and prosperity will only grow.

The region's upward trajectory is predicated on stability and the continued free flow of goods and services. And these factors are dependent upon the maintenance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

The more Taiwan comes to be viewed as critical to regional stability on its own terms and, by extension, global prosperity, the more invested other stakeholders will be in its security. Preservation of peace and stability is the common interest that unites G7 advanced democracies with developing economies and transcends every continent. If there is a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, every leader on every continent would have to manage an external shock that would be greater than the effects of the war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic combined.¹⁰ Therefore, it is important for leaders and leading thinkers to begin framing Taiwan in this context, as opposed to adopting Beijing's preferred narrative that Taiwan is a subordinate issue to their relationships with third countries. Such efforts at de-hyphenating China and Taiwan appear more advanced in Europe than elsewhere.

As part of such efforts, it also is critical for leaders and leading thinkers to begin normalizing the view that there is no viable military solution to the Taiwan challenge,

in either direction. A Chinese military occupation of Taiwan would be fraught and would risk leading to a bloody quagmire. Beijing would encounter tremendous difficulty eradicating an entrenched democratic system and a thriving civil society and would struggle to impose a system that subordinated Taiwan to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s governance preferences.

Similarly, there is no realistic increment of military power that Taiwan or the United States could field that would compel China under the CCP to renounce its goal of gaining control of Taiwan. The United States has maintained a favorable balance of military power for most of the past 74 years since the founding of the PRC, and this has not stopped Beijing from threatening the use of force to compel "reunification." This goal is fundamental to the CCP's rationale for maintaining a monopoly of power inside of China. So long as the CCP remains in control of China, cross-Straits differences will require resolution by means short of war. This does not mean that the United States and its allies cannot deter China from an invasion, but rather this speaks to the uncomfortable truth that tensions in the Taiwan Strait are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Takeaway 5: Leaders and publics in many parts of the world need a better understanding of Taiwan and the history of cross-Straits issues.

Beijing has been effective at framing Taiwan for global audiences as a Chinese internal matter by building a historical edifice around its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan. For example, Beijing has falsely claimed that UN Resolution 2758—through which member states allowed the PRC to occupy the seat once held by Taipei in the UN Security Council and General Assembly—represents universal acceptance of its position and has used it as part of an effort to limit Taiwan's participation in international fora, where Taiwan expertise and experiences could make valuable contributions.¹¹

Task force members emphasized that leaders and publics in many parts of the world need a firmer understanding of Taiwan's history and legal status, its distinct sense of national identity and democratic culture, the origins of cross-Straits contention, and their own countries' policies on Taiwan. The absence of this understanding creates

vulnerabilities as Beijing endeavors to frame efforts to deepen relations with Taiwan or promote its engagement at multilateral forums as a violation of Chinese sovereignty. To combat China's pressure tactics, it will be important for Washington and partner capitals to invest in education and competence building on Taiwan.

A key feature of these efforts will be increasing visible support for Taiwan that is grounded in international law. Such efforts will have both affirmative and defensive components. On the affirmative side, it will be beneficial to cross-Straits stability for Taiwan to be more meaningfully integrated into international groupings and institutions that do not require statehood as a condition of membership. The more integrated Taiwan is in efforts to address regional and global challenges, the more it will be able to earn dignity and respect on the world stage through its contributions.

Furthermore, there is also a pressing need to develop principles grounded in international law for opposing Chinese measures short of war to impose control of Taiwan. Types of Chinese activities of potential concern include but are not limited to: enforcing a limited blockade of Taiwan or offshore islands; imposing control over territorial waters and airspace that is being administered by Taiwan; forcibly disarming Taiwan's offshore islands; or other similar measures that could echo Russia's efforts to assert control over Crimea in 2014 short of a full-scale invasion.

To combat China's pressure tactics, it will be important for Washington and partner capitals to invest in education and competence building on Taiwan.

Takeaway 6: A steady U.S. approach to Taiwan will be important for enabling greater and more durable global buy-in.

Washington represents the most capable international counterweight to Beijing's goal of imposing control over Taiwan. If Washington's determination to preserve Taiwan's peace and stability wavers, or is perceived to

be wavering, it is likely that other countries' postures related to Taiwan will adjust as well.

For decades, the United States has maintained bipartisan support for Taiwan. That support has been reflected in public opinion polls, congressional legislation, and consistency in executive branch policy toward Taiwan. With the United States entering its 2024 presidential election cycle, it will be important for the country's leaders to continue to publicly articulate the United States' enduring interests in Taiwan's peace and stability.

There is a vocal and influential minority in the United States that advocates for a return to greater isolationism. There also are voices calling for the United States to use its relationship with Taiwan as a source of negotiating leverage with China. Still others are calling for the United States to jettison its long-standing policy on Taiwan in favor of a more forward-leaning military commitment to Taiwan's defense, including stationing U.S. soldiers in Taiwan or resurrecting a U.S.-Taiwan mutual defense treaty.

Resolving these domestic political debates is outside the purview of this paper. That said, task force members observed that the existence of these debates will generate an impulse toward caution in foreign capitals on matters related to Taiwan until there is greater clarity on the direction of U.S. policy following the 2024 election. As a practical matter, U.S. officials will need to exercise patience and appreciate the constraints their foreign counterparts are operating under in 2024, even as they encourage efforts to build a stronger international narrative in support of upholding peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. ■

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APPENDIX: TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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APPENDIX: TASK FORCE PERSPECTIVES

Scott Simon, Professor, and Research Chair of Taiwan Studies, University of Ottawa

Canada has actively supported U.S. military actions in the Western Pacific. As part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy launched in 2022, the Royal Canadian Navy has joined U.S. forces regularly on Taiwan Strait transits and participated in multilateral military exercises.¹² Canada has a small navy and limited capacity to play a role in the event of an actual conflict, but its presence demonstrates a commitment to peace and security in the region, in alignment with U.S. priorities. This includes defense and security collaboration with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines.

Regarding Taiwan, Canada's position has differed historically from the United States. In 1969, as Canada began negotiations with Beijing on diplomatic recognition, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau explained to parliament that "the position of the government is that the fate of the people of Formosa should be determined by those people themselves."¹³ This commitment to the self-determination of peoples was the basis for Canada's protocol with China, which only said that Canada "takes note" of China's claim to Taiwan. Canada's "One China" policy has henceforward recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole government of China, but neither has endorsed nor challenged China's position on Taiwan. The hope was that Taiwan would eventually enjoy the conditions necessary for self-determination. Arguably, the regular holding of elections since the 1990s is already an enactment of self-determination.

In a 2023 study entitled "Canada and Taiwan: A Strong Relationship in Turbulent Times," a parliamentary committee made 18 recommendations for Canada-Taiwan relations.¹⁴ The second recommendation was "that the Government of Canada offer and declare its clear and unwavering commitment that the future of Taiwan must only be the decision of the people of Taiwan." The official reply was that "the Government takes note of this recommendation." Aligning itself more closely with the U.S. position, the Canadian government stated that "Canada opposes unilateral actions by either side that

seek to alter the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and does not support Taiwan independence."¹⁵

Canada's military presence in the Indo-Pacific, amid other government pronouncements, demonstrates a desire to uphold stability and the rule of law, albeit with a nuanced position in regard to Taiwan's legal status. This takes into consideration concern about potential PRC retaliatory measures, but also the lack of consensus in Taiwan itself about Taiwan's future status. Canadian members of parliament of all parties frequently frame Canada-Taiwan relations in terms of supporting a fellow democracy and beacon of human rights. Nonetheless, there is still progress to be made in both military and diplomatic efforts. Disconcertingly, Canada's 2023 budget made cuts, rather than deeper investments, in these areas.

Recent debates in Canadian think tanks range from suggestions to strengthen the country's resolve to confront China's bellicosity and support Taiwan to advocacy for a foreign policy of restraint that would focus Canadian resources on the Arctic and North Atlantic.¹⁶ In this context, the United States needs to continually reassure Canada that it appreciates its current efforts in the Indo-Pacific and remind Canadians that stability in the Taiwan Strait is crucial for Canada's security and prosperity.

Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, Assistant Professor, National Dong-Hwa University

The CSIS Freeman Chair task force could not have been convened at a more important time in the broader geopolitical context. As Beijing keeps doubling down on its false sovereignty claims over Taiwan, like-minded democracies are still struggling to articulate clearly why Taiwan matters. Although like-minded, democracies also see Taiwan through different lenses and relate to it in different ways, shaped to varying degrees by the China factor. Over the years this has resulted in different democratic narratives on Taiwan. It is worthwhile to amplify some aspects of the EU narrative, or the EU way of framing Taiwan in a new reality. This approach is burdened by its own contradictions but is also more advanced and sustainable in some important ways.

In recent years, EU institutions have elevated Taiwan on their agendas as a like-minded partner. As they

are drawing and embracing the contours of a Taiwan-friendly, more positive narrative, the European Union is learning to engage Taiwan on its own merit, not as a subordinate issue to its relationship with China. This has helped advance the debate on Taiwan's geostrategic importance, with EU member states slowly converging in their awareness that it is in the European Union's own interest to adjust to a new reality—and to a new China. As its official narrative shows, Europe has integrated Taiwan in its efforts to adjust, most notably by including Taiwan as a partner in its 2021 Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Yet, the European Union is fragmented, and discussions on Taiwan lack structure and await implementation. Most importantly, they lack a solid foundation due to the lack of understanding of Taiwan's complex relationship with China, but also due to the failure to appreciate the many layers of Taiwanese identity and how it shapes cross-strait relations. A deficit of knowledge allows Beijing to shape and manipulate public narratives on Taiwan—a critical aspect detailed in this paper. This is a challenge for Europe, the United States, and like-minded democracies. Things are, however, moving forward in terms of countering disinformation: the European Union is taking concrete measures and investing in understanding foreign information manipulation, in partnership with Taiwan. This is crucial and has encouraged Taiwan to exercise agency and shape how the European Union frames Taiwan.

Appreciating Taiwan's expertise in countering disinformation is one of the factors that has enabled EU institutions to start seeing Taiwan on its own merit. The European Parliament's first-ever official visit to Taiwan was by its special committee dealing with disinformation in 2021, which put concrete proposals forward, including urging the standing up of an EU strategic communications hub in Taipei, vital for effectively countering disinformation. The hub is still to be established, but experts from both sides are working closely, learning from each other, and normalizing bilateral exchanges. Finally, in reflecting on how to frame Taiwan in their discourse, the community of international experts must continue to have this conversation with Taiwan, so as to frame Taiwan in a positive way and also to empower Taiwan to shape the process.

Rumi Aoyama, Professor and Director of Waseda Institute of Contemporary Chinese Studies, Waseda University

This task force paper touches on the issue of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, one of the most important issues in U.S.-China relations. It is a concise reflection of rich discussions on the responses to the Taiwan question around the world. Most importantly, this paper gets to the heart of the challenge facing many countries' current policies.

In order to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, it is essential to promote efforts to achieve international unity. To this end, there are two important additional points to be made.

The first point is that for the West to rally the support of countries around the world, it needs to make reassurances to China visible. The paper rightly points out that the United States is sometimes even seen as a major contributor to escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait because of China's aggressive disinformation efforts. Nevertheless, this is only a partial picture.

The reason why many countries have not been openly supportive of U.S. policy on Taiwan is not because China is winning the narrative war, but because the priority for these countries is to ensure peace and stability in the Pacific region. In fact, most countries are on the side of the United States and its allies. The leaders of most countries, especially those in Southeast Asia, have openly declared that peace should be maintained in the Taiwan Strait. According to the Yusok Ishak Institute's *State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey Report*, in the event of a war in the Taiwan Strait, 11.9 percent of surveyed policymakers and thinkers from the region replied that they would be in favor of sanctions against the aggressor, and 45.6 percent replied that they would be against the use of force.¹⁷

Some countries may have concerns that U.S. policy on Taiwan could undermine stability across the Taiwan Strait. Declaring a policy of reassurance toward China could allay these concerns and win their support.

The second point is that in order to make U.S. policy more credible, China's Taiwan policy must be comprehensively assessed.

Alongside increasing military and economic pressure, economic engagement with Taiwan is another important

pillar of China's Taiwan policy, and China is still betting on successful reunification without war.

Economic engagement is usually seen as an indicator of China's preference for a peaceful reunification. If China were to abandon its hopes of economic integration, the likelihood of a show of force in the Taiwan Strait would increase dramatically.

Strong military power does not necessarily lead to victory in modern warfare, as the war in Ukraine has shown. One of China's lessons from the war in Ukraine is that it must reduce its dependence on the U.S.-led SWIFT system and develop a low-orbit satellite system, among other changes.

What is the status of China internationalizing the yuan and its satellite development? How does China assess its economic policy in relation to Taiwan? Predicting war has never been easy, and if it is to be done, it should be based on a comprehensive study of China's policies.

Emeka Umejei, *Former Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, National Endowment for Democracy and currently at the Centre for Analysis for Authoritarian Influence in Africa (CAAIA)*

Positioning Taiwan as a democracy that shares democratic values with many African countries will not win the friendship of African countries. Instead, interest and tangible benefits that will accrue to African countries will be the overriding factors in swaying African countries to embrace Taiwan. One of the ways to engender Taiwan's engagement with the African continent is to position it as an alternative source of funding for infrastructure projects and economic development on the African continent. Most African countries do not want to be in the bad books of the People's Republic of China (PRC) because that will lead to limited funding for the much-needed infrastructure projects in their countries.

Additionally, since its loss of diplomatic capital on the African continent, Taiwan has, tacitly, closed its windows to the African continent. While diplomatic channels might have tanked, Taiwan has not been able to harness its cultural offerings as a channel for engaging with African countries. If Taiwan were open to engaging in cultural exchanges with African countries, it would help

many Africans to come to appreciate its uniqueness, democracy, freedom of information, technology, and scientific advancement. Perhaps revitalizing cultural engagements with the African continent could help Taiwan win influence on the African continent.

Manoj Kewalramani, *Chairperson of the Indo-Pacific Research Programme and China Studies Fellow, Takshashila Institution*

This paper provides a succinct and clear articulation of the deliberations during the meetings of the CSIS Freeman Chair international task force. It takes into account the different perspectives of the task force members to offer a coherent set of recommendations for policymakers across geographies whose interests are impacted by tensions in the Taiwan Strait. The recommendations represent an acknowledgment of the importance of adopting a broad interest-based approach to the Taiwan issue rather than an ideological one. They also underline the significance of concerted and sustained diplomacy to build a broad coalition of like-minded partners invested in ensuring peace and stability in the region.

This process is likely to be challenging, owing to the nature of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) economic and political clout across the developing world and the erosion of the West's moral standing. Such an effort, therefore, requires focusing on specific interests and stability rather than issues of morality and sovereignty. Consequently, steps taken to engender greater awareness about the threats emanating from PRC policies that erode the cross-Strait status quo, enhanced information sharing on the PRC's destabilizing actions, and deepening economic exchanges with Taiwan are likely to yield positive results.

From an Indian perspective, Taiwan has not been a key part of the foreign and security policy discourse historically. However, over the past few years, there has been a gradual but evident shift in the thinking within the strategic affairs community in New Delhi. This has largely been the product of growing concern around the adverse strategic, economic, and developmental implications for Indian interests of a conflagration in the Taiwan Strait. The prospect of economic benefits of engagement with Taiwan (particularly in the context of India's desire to boost

technological self-reliance), the threat of conflict resulting in high economic costs, and the strategic implications of a change in status quo for the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific are shaping the thinking of Indian policymakers. Despite this, Indian politicians and policymakers have been unwilling to publicly weigh in on the issue of sovereignty, nor has the values-based narrative found any significant purchase in domestic discourse. Exploring the reasons behind this dynamic is beyond the scope of this statement. What is evident, however, is that the language of stability and interests is likely to lead to far greater buy-in from Delhi—and perhaps from other countries from the developing world as well.

Wonho Yeon, Research Fellow and Head of the Economic Security Team, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy

South Korea is more concerned about the instability of the Taiwan Strait rather than Taiwan's sovereignty per se. "Cross-Strait relations" may be a domestic issue for China, but the "instability in cross-Strait relations" will have a huge impact on neighboring countries, including South Korea. South Korea prefers to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, as any instability in the Taiwan Strait will have major implications for the military and economic security of the Korean Peninsula. While the Taiwan issue has been mostly discussed in South Korea in the context of a military conflict, South Korea opposes an overly militaristic approach to the cross-Strait issue and Taiwan's future. As stated in its Indo-Pacific Strategy released in December 2022, South Korea supports a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, including the Taiwan Strait. Amid the U.S.-China strategic competition, there is disagreement among countries and domestically about who is escalating the crisis in the Taiwan Strait: the United States or China. However, there is a growing concern in South Korea about the recent shift in the Chinese government's rhetoric from "opposing Taiwan's independence" to "reunification of China." Narratives of "opposing Taiwan's independence" include not only 'reunification of China' but also maintaining the status quo. As long as Taiwan does not claim independence, the status quo is likely to continue. However, the moment China only mentions the "reunification of China," it is removing the "status quo" as an option. It can be understood that the change in rhetoric from "oppose

Taiwan independence" to "reunification of China" is an explicit indication that there is an intention to change the status quo.

Just like many other countries, South Korea supports the "One China" policy, not the "One China" principle. The difference between policy and principle is whether they are mutable or immutable. South Korea will not change its "One China" policy if all countries, including China, the United States, and even Taiwan itself, do not undermine the stability and peace of the region. However, if a country unilaterally tries to change the status quo in the region, South Korea may consider changing its policy.

Again, as noted in its Indo-Pacific Strategy, South Korea reaffirms the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait for the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.

Richard McGregor, Senior Fellow for East Asia, Lowy Institute

In late 2012, and again in early 2022, Australia's then-defense minister Peter Dutton caused huge controversy at home by saying that the country should prepare for war in the region and join the United States in defending Taiwan.

In part, his comments were driven by domestic politics, representing an effort to paint the then Labor opposition as weak on national security ahead of the May 2022 national election. Dutton was part of the then-ruling conservative coalition.

But the comments were consistent with Dutton's long-time, outspoken hawkish positioning on China and on internal domestic security issues.

As it turned out, Dutton's comments backfired in the short term. Labor won the election, installing Anthony Albanese as prime minister, and probably had the best of the China debate as well.

In Australia, elections are invariably close. A brace of seats in Sydney and Melbourne, the country's two largest cities, with large numbers of Chinese-Australian voters, were lost by the conservative Liberal Party to Labor.

Dutton has not changed his views on China. But chastened by the election result, the now opposition leader and his colleagues have periodically pledged to moderate their language on China in light of the electoral backlash.

The episode, though, and the ongoing debate in Australia on China have raised the dilemma that many policymakers in like-minded countries are grappling with: how to grab the attention of an already overloaded or disengaged public on an issue as far removed from their everyday lives as Taiwan, without dramatizing the worst-case scenario of war.

War over Taiwan may not be likely. It goes without saying that China wants to achieve control over the self-governed island without fighting.

But equally, a Chinese invasion, which is to say a war, is also possible. And if that is the case, then why not be honest with the public about the choices that such a conflict would involve?

That is fair enough as far as it goes. But it is an open question as to whether such rhetoric engages the public in such a way that builds a foundation of support and shared interests with Taiwan.

The Lowy Institute's annual poll of Australian attitudes on foreign policy starkly captures the limits of public support for Taiwan. On questions about accepting Taiwanese refugees and imposing sanctions on Beijing should China invade the island, public support is strong, at 80 and 76 percent in favor, respectively.¹⁸

Asked in 2023 if they would back sending Australian military personnel, support is much lower, at 42 percent, although it could be argued that this is relatively high compared with other democratic and regional nations.¹⁹

In some ways, smaller democracies take their political cues from the United States. After all, it is only the United States that can offer credible military deterrence to a Chinese takeover of Taiwan.

Therein lies both the problem and the solution.

Countries such as Australia not only have to deal with their own public, but they also have to work with like-minded countries to influence debate in the United States as well. And that is a steep mountain to climb.

Mathieu Duchâtel, Resident Senior Fellow for Asia and Director of International Studies, Institut Montaigne

The conveners of the CSIS Freeman Chair task force have done a remarkable job in presenting the key

takeaways of four discussion sessions in a succinct synthesis that faithfully captures the substance of the task force's exchanges. As an addition, two points from the paper deserve more emphasis and need some degree of customization, especially for a non-U.S. audience, starting from a European audience.

Taiwan has undeniably moved higher on the foreign policy agendas of many European states. It has also gained prominence through the European Union's diplomatic messaging toward China, with repeated mentions by European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen that the European Union "stand[s] strongly against any unilateral change of the status quo, in particular by the use of force."²⁰ Europe has increasingly engaged Taiwan on its own merits rather than as part of its China policy, as seen in policy areas such as public health, semiconductors, supply chain resilience, and countering authoritarian disinformation against democracies. Parliamentary exchanges have been flourishing in recent years, signaling democratic empathy and solidarity, even though the substance of what they bring to Taiwan is not always tangible. Ministerial visits have grown in number, too.

But the limits placed on Europe's engagement with Taiwan by the various versions of the "One China" policy followed by the European Union and its member states remain crystal clear. The European decision not to pursue the negotiation of a bilateral investment agreement with Taiwan, despite Canada recently signing one, or India renewing its own agreement, both without any noticeable costs on their relations with China, is a case in point.

Europe-Taiwan interactions still have much room to grow within the limits Europe imposes on itself by guessing Chinese possible responses. Areas such as people-to-people exchanges, talent development, and digital industries are particularly promising. The recent upward trend in Taiwanese foreign direct investment in Europe is also a very positive development that will continue to nurture sympathy for Taiwan across the European continent.

But Europe is far from ready to face a Taiwan Strait crisis in good order. A crisis tomorrow would almost certainly reveal deep intra-European differences, with the risk that those differences would neutralize, or at

least considerably weaken, any coherent European response to a contingency. To reduce the likelihood of such an outcome, coordination efforts should be pursued in two directions.

First, European political leaders have a role to play in countering the Chinese narrative that the United States is engaged in a dangerously destabilizing “NATO-ization of the Asia-Pacific” through a “2+3+4+5 strategy” (the U.S.-Japan alliance, AUKUS, the Quad, and Five Eyes). How much this narrative is winning over audiences across the world is not well measured. It is certainly winning sympathy in some circles in Taiwan, even though it is far from mainstream. It is well-accepted across Southeast Asia. But it is also encountering a friendly ear across Europe, often from the same political forces that blame the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s eastward expansion. Many political leaders in Europe will be reluctant to embrace the language of deterrence or peace through strength in the context of Asian security. As an alternative, they may consider two options to develop and promote a counternarrative. One would be to simply focus on building a positive vision for lasting peace in Asia. The other would be to build on the perspective offered by Estonian prime minister Kaja Kallas at the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, in which she described the Russian war in Ukraine as a colonial war of imperialist expansion, reminding the audience that defense is not escalation. Taiwan tomorrow may not be Ukraine today, but countering Russian propaganda worldwide certainly helps the cause of peace in the Taiwan Strait. Either way, there is a need to refocus European audiences on Chinese expansionist policies and the legitimate defensive responses they elicit in Asia.

Second, there is a need to elaborate a solid international legal narrative on which support for maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait can be premised. European support for Ukraine is entirely legitimized by the UN Charter (article 51, chapter VII, “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations”). A similar approach obviously does not work in the case of Taiwan. But it is important not to let decisionmakers in Beijing assume that the lack of recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign state will entirely

neutralize the international response to an attempt at military coercion, or worse. Does article 41 of the UN Charter, which mentions “threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression”—but not statehood—provide a sufficiently solid international legal argument to justify a response to unilateral action by Beijing in the Taiwan Strait? This is a question that deserves careful consideration and coordination among European member states. Beyond Europe, there is a need to reframe peace in the Taiwan Strait outside of the restrictive frameworks of the various versions of the “One China” policy that all states have now accepted. Otherwise, when a coercive action against Taiwan is portrayed as a legitimate law enforcement operation “within One China,” the international community will be paralyzed by confusion and divisions.

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