



Dreamstime

TAIWAN IN THE INDO-PACIFIC AND INDIA-TAIWAN TIES

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Taiwan is an important player in the Indo-Pacific. It is a democratically governed, economically prosperous, culturally rich, and educationally and scientifically advanced island in the western Pacific. It is a key link in global supply chains. It is among the top twenty trading economies in the world. Its companies have leading positions in electronics, information technology, and communications, particularly in semiconductor technology, where its TSMC is a global giant. Taiwan had around USD 10 billion in outward investment in 2022, which does not include the figure for investment in China.

Taiwan's Complicated Status

Yet treating Taiwan as a normal country in the Indo-Pacific is difficult. China considers it a breakaway Chinese province that has remained separated from the mainland due to the

legacy of the Chinese Civil War. The Communist Party of China considers the reunification of Taiwan its national commitment. However, every major political formation in Taiwan opposes the Chinese claim. While the current ruling party, the Democratic People's Party, opposes 'reunification' unless the Taiwanese people themselves want it, the leading opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), which fought the Chinese Civil War and has its own pan-China conviction, supports reunification but under its own vision, not the CPC's vision. Taiwan has survived as a de facto independent country despite constant Chinese threats because, first, of the formal security guarantee under the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty from 1954 to 1979, and then because of the informal security guarantee under the US's Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) since 1979. Incidentally, only 13 very small countries recognise Taiwan as a sovereign country.

No major country recognises it as a sovereign country. It is not a member of any international organisation in which sovereignty is the membership criteria. The international community, by statement or implication, supports the PRC's One-China policy, which seeks the countries not to have any diplomatic or political relations with Taiwan if they want to have these relations with China.

Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific Strategic Flux

In recent years, the Taiwan issue has yet again attracted global attention. After eight years of cross-Strait stability from 2008-2016, during which period the KMT government's reconciliatory approach and policies ensured cross-Strait rapprochement by papering over the cracks, the issue of the nature of cross-Strait relations again came to the fore after the DPP's victory in 2016. In keeping its long-standing positions on the nature of cross-Strait ties, the DPP refused to uphold the One China principle, which was the prerequisite for China to continue cross-Strait dialogue with the DPP (the KMT believes in the principle, albeit under its own version, One China, with Respective Interpretations).

Further, the sharp deterioration in US-China relations in the last few years, basically from the Trump presidency onwards, has contributed to the cross-Strait complications. Taiwan has emerged as a major issue in the ongoing Sino-US strategic standoff. During this period, the US's political, diplomatic, economic, and military support for Taiwan has increased. On the other hand, China has been demonstrating its resolve by asserting its claim over Taiwan through tough military and diplomatic posturing. The security and strategic situation in the Taiwan Strait has become very fragile. The international community is concerned about any unwarranted military conflict erupting in the Taiwan Strait.

Support for Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific

Any military conflict in the Taiwan Strait will have a drastic impact on the political and economic security of the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, Taiwan has been mentioned in the Indo-Pacific strategies and policy guidelines of many countries, such as the US, Canada, and the Republic of Korea.

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy document of 2022 declared that the US 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..."

Canada, in its Indo-Pacific Strategy, released in 2022, declared that it will "continue to work with partners to push back against any unilateral actions that threaten the status quo in the Taiwan Strait... While remaining consistent with [its]

One China Policy, Canada will continue [its] multifaceted engagement with Taiwan, which includes collaborating on trade, technology, health, democratic governance and countering disinformation."

The Republic of Korea (ROK) 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."

Japan, in its National Defense Strategy, 2022, stated, "China thus has intensified its coercive military activities around Taiwan, and concerns about the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait are rapidly growing not only in the Indo-Pacific region including Japan but also in the entire international community."

The countries in their Indo-Pacific strategies or outside them have recognised the threat to Taiwan from China. Some of them, such as the US and Canada, have explicitly stated that they would oppose the unilateral change in the status quo. Some others, such as the ROK and Japan, recognise the gravity of the security situation in the Taiwan Strait and warn the world about it. And, they express commitment to deepening economic and cultural ties with Taiwan. The US, of course, has a historical commitment to Taiwan's defence, which it reaffirms, reiterates, and implements through arms sales among other security measures.

Taiwan's Promotion of its Interests in the Indo-Pacific

Taiwan needs a stable, peaceful, and secure Indo-Pacific for its growth and prosperity. Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen maintains that "as an integral democratic partner in the Indo-Pacific, and as a key to maintaining regional and global security, Taiwan will continue to stand with our like-minded partners in protecting our shared values, so that future generations can enjoy the hard-earned democratic freedoms passed down to us."

Taiwan promotes its interests in the Indo-Pacific mainly in three ways: it seeks to strengthen its ties with the US; it seeks to deepen its cooperation with the major members of the international community in a pragmatic manner and sensitise them about Taiwan's position on the cross-Strait issue; and it promotes its economic, cultural, educational, and scientific research and development ties with Southeast Asian and South Asian countries through its New Southbound Policy (NSP).

A View of India-Taiwan Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

India maintains 'unofficial' ties with Taiwan. They had an appreciable amount of USD 10.90 billion in bilateral trade

in the year 2022-23. As of April 2022, Taiwan had USD 1.5 billion worth of investments in India. Taiwanese companies were reported to be employing around 65,000 people in India. 2783 Indian students were reported to be studying in Taiwan in 2019-20 and 2239 students in 2020-21. They were among the top 10 “groups of international students.” Overall, bilateral relations have made considerable progress since they were first established in 1995. Incidentally, India is a key target country in Taiwan’s NSP. Any disruption in the security and stability of the Taiwan Strait will understandably impact India as well. Therefore, the MEA remarked, “Like many other countries, India too is concerned at recent developments... We urge the exercise of restraint, avoidance of unilateral actions to change status quo, de-escalation of tensions and efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region.” This statement was given after the Speaker of the

House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August 2022, which created a big scene between China on one side and the US and Taiwan on the other.

Finally, Taiwan is a major geo-strategic and geo-economic player in the Indo-Pacific. India has stakes in the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, like every other major country. However, India has to take its complicated relations with its giant neighbour, China, into account. Managing relations with China is always a priority for India. The best course for India-Taiwan relations is to increase consultative space at multiple levels, deepen their bilateral relations within the frameworks of Taiwan’s NSP and India’s Act East Policy, and contribute to creating alternative and resilient supply chains. This would be their contribution to stabilising the Indo-Pacific region.



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