

its international allies. However, with other issues bedevilling Western ties with China, the key challenge would be to not arm Taiwan to the point where it provokes China. The downside to pursuing such an approach would be a precipitous blurring of the line between assertiveness and appeasement, which is hardly a reassuring prospect during perilous times.

### 5. It's said: India risks China's wrath for stronger ties with Taipei. Do you agree?

Significantly, India remains at the centre of two major flashpoints for China. An overt coupling of the Tibet and Taiwan issues by New Delhi would raise the stakes considerably in the India-China equation. So far, New Delhi has studiously avoided doing so, despite pronounced calls from sections of its strategic community.

In the absence of formal political ties, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, and India's Act East policy, among others, have served as guideposts for greater cooperation. The imperative of Indo-Pacific outreach has also encouraged wider and deeper engagement. However, any natural progression in India's ties with China is bound to increase China's anger, especially given the already bitter legacy of the Tibet issue in the bilateral relationship. Even though India-Taiwan ties are being bolstered by non-government organizations and civil society, it is official India that would have to contend with China's wrath. This realization must have contributed New Delhi's cautious approach to Taipei.

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### FPRC Journal No. 48 -Focus: Taiwan Response to Questionnaire

1. I am sure China would like to be able to mount a successful invasion of Taiwan in which it faced limited opposition on the ground and a failure by the international community to respond thus bringing Taiwan's *de facto* independence to an end (as happened to Tibet in 1950). If the authorities in Taipei were subsequently to accede to China's sovereignty

over the island, and to have little or no autonomy, then it would be all to the good for Beijing. Such parallels seem extremely unlikely in all respects and thus the Tibet experience cannot be replicated in the Taiwan case. The timing of China's air incursions into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), involving greater numbers of People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft than ever before, is significant though not because of any fear that it means an invasion is imminent. The timing and scale of these air incursions appears to result from a conjunction of domestic (in China, that is) and international factors. First, the incursion by the greatest number of PLAAF aircraft on any one day was timed to coincide with China's national day holiday marking the formation of the People's Republic of China. It thus gave the air force the opportunity to demonstrate its loyalty to the Communist Party and to defend and promote China's core interests. Secondly, they provided a distraction from some of the problems China has been facing including the re-emergence of Covid-19 and the power shortages and attendant factory closures. Thirdly, President Xi would have wanted to show himself as a strong leader in advance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Communist Party of China's Central Committee which was due to pass a 'history resolution' elevating him to the same status as Mao and Deng. Fourthly, it has been suggested that China was feeling under pressure because of the apparent increase in international support for Taiwan. This pressure being evinced, for example, in Lithuania's decision to allow Taiwan to open a representative office there and the presence of a greater number of foreign warships in the waters close to the first island chain some of which (including two US and one British aircraft carrier) were engaged in multilateral naval exercises. Lastly, some of the PLAAF aircraft were reported to have been practising simulated attacks on the US and other warships. In some senses, of course, the PLAAF activity was entirely routine, albeit on a different scale: the PLAAF regularly practises flying into Taiwan's ADIZ in aircraft formations which would be employed in any invasion.

2. The notion that President Biden has shifted to a more conciliatory approach toward Taiwan from China's perspective resulted from one of his all too frequent confusing

utterances. Following a phone call with President Xi in the wake of the air incursions at the beginning of October 2021, the president stated that the US and China had agreed to “abide by the Taiwan agreement”. As *Foreign Policy* noted, there was scope for China to see this statement as a change in US policy or use it as a means of conveying that Washington now agreed with Beijing’s position on Taiwan. Of course, only a matter of weeks later Biden appeared to signal a fundamental change in US policy. In response to a question asked by a CNN anchor as to whether the US would come to the island’s defence should it be attacked by China, Biden said that: “Yes, we have a commitment to do that”. A White House spokesperson was again (the president had given a similar response in a previous interview) forced to reiterate that the US has not changed its long-standing policy on Taiwan. Aside from the confusion over Taiwan policy generated by Biden’s comments, his administration has displayed a firm stance. There has been no reversal of the Trump administration’s lifting of restrictions in January 2021 on contacts between US and Taiwanese officials; there was an early signal that there would be no let-up in the conduct of freedom of navigation operations in the Taiwan Strait (indeed, these have occurred on an almost monthly basis); and the new administration’s first arms sales to Taiwan were approved rapidly. There have also been unconfirmed reports that the US is to expand upon its military training assistance presence in Taiwan. This firm stance by the executive branch in the US has its parallels in the legislative one. Several resolutions have been put before Congress recently including the Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act and the Taiwan Deterrence Act (intended, amongst other things, to update arms sales laws and provide for US\$2 billion of annual military financing). Moreover, a number of Senators and members of the House of Representatives have called for change in the policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ which the US has hitherto adhered to. It is here, arguably, where the US does face a difficult choice. Does it abandon the strategy which has seemingly proved effective but in the present circumstances may no longer be enough to deter an invasion of Taiwan and, instead, opt for one of ‘strategic clarity’ whereby the US states unequivocally that it

would come to the defence of Taiwan? Such an undertaking, it has been contended, could have the effect of heightening tensions with China even further and validating Beijing's feeling that the US's goal all along has been to bring about an independent Taiwanese state. The net effect of a shift to an unambiguous strategy, it is feared by some, might be to precipitate the very invasion it is designed to prevent.

3. The risks of an attack on, and invasion of, Taiwan are undoubtedly acute for Japan. At the very least, major conflict over Taiwan involving the US is likely to see China launch missile strikes on US bases in Okinawa (especially Kadena AFB) whilst it has also been suggested that an attack on Taiwan could be carried out in conjunction with one on the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea or islands belonging to Okinawa Prefecture. Japan has long had a very warm relationship with Taiwan. Although dwarfed by China, Taiwan is one of Japan's top five export markets and opinion polls have shown regularly that a majority of the Japanese and Taiwanese publics feel close to each other's country. Not surprisingly, therefore, it has been readily apparent that there are growing concerns in Japan about increased Chinese pressure on Taiwan. These concerns have led to a very public firming up of Tokyo's policy on Taiwan and an acknowledgement that the security of Japan is interconnected with that of Taiwan. Indicative of this strengthened policy have been several public statements by Japanese politicians and officials. In April 2021, for example, the Japanese Defence Minister said that Taiwan was an "important friend" located "extremely close" to Japan and in July the Deputy Prime Minister, Taro Aso, said that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would represent an "existential threat" which might require Japan to exercise collective self-defence. Many observers noted that Taro Aso was reflecting what has hitherto been the view of Japanese officials in private. The *Defence of Japan 2021*, which was released in July, made explicit reference to Taiwan. It stated that "stabilizing the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan's security and the stability of the international community" and that the cross-Taiwan Strait situation needs to be monitored with a "sense of crisis". In a clear response to these concerns, in September there was an unprecedented meeting between the

members of the ruling parties of Japan and Taiwan – the LDP and the DPP respectively – to discuss their common security concerns and the chance of holding joint coastguard exercises. These talks, it has been contended, can be viewed as the ruling party version of the government 2+2 talks that Japan holds with the US. In this sense, they are effectively an unofficial version of the official security dialogue with Japan which the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, called for two years' previously.

The position of US allies is an unenviable one. On the one hand, should the US mount a full-scale military response to an attempt by China to invade Taiwan then they could find themselves drawn into the conflict with China targeting US forces stationed on their territory or transiting through it. This would more likely be the case for the Philippines and ROK than for Thailand which, some would argue, has already moved into China's sphere of influence even if it is not actually bandwagoning with it. On the other hand, if the US fails to prevent Taiwan from being defeated then US allies face the prospect of a radically different strategic environment in East Asia and the Western Pacific with China readily able to assert its dominance. Indeed, the first island chain, which includes Taiwan, would no longer act as an effective barrier to the projection of Chinese military power further afield. At the very least, the Philippines and South Korea would be forced to reconsider their dependence on a US security guarantee (as would Japan itself).

The European Union (EU) has also been showing support for Taiwan as it has become more concerned about China's international strategy and its behaviour under President Xi. Following Chinese pressure on Lithuania, the EU Commission Vice-President expressed 'solidarity' with, and support for, Vilnius and in October the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution calling for the deepening of ties with Taiwan. Furthermore, during the first official visit by a European Parliament delegation to Taiwan, the delegation's leader called for "high-level concrete steps" to create a "stronger EU-Taiwan partnership". He also stressed that Taiwan is not alone and that "Europe is standing with you". An obvious move for national legislatures in states

favourably inclined towards Taiwan would be for them to follow the example of the French Senate. In May 2021, the Senate passed a unanimous resolution calling for Taiwan to be allowed to participate in several international organisations including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation. As the resolution noted, such bodies have statutes which permit non-state entities to belong to them provided this does not infringe on the rights of the member states. Herein lies the problem though. After having been an observer the WHO for several years up until 2016, Taiwan's invitation to attend was stopped at China's request. This did not prevent several states, including New Zealand, calling for Taiwan to be allowed to return in 2020 due to its highly effective response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, Taiwan has now applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP): an application which has been endorsed by Japan. Other member states, such as Australia and New Zealand could similarly do so. After all, Taiwan already has a Free Trade Agreement with New Zealand and is a member of APEC, the Asian Development Bank and the World Trade Organisation. Again, however, Taiwan's application faces opposition from China which has indicated it is opposed to Taiwan taking part in "any trade agreements of an official nature". Taiwan's supporters will have to be prepared to face external challenges of their own emanating from Beijing.

4. I will confine my comments to some of the external challenges Taiwan faces. The most obvious of these, of course, is the increased pressure on China from the PRC which has already featured. This pressure has not only taken the form of the air incursions, but also in Chinese attempts to further its influence in Taiwan and reduce its diplomatic space and international ties. Indeed, Taiwan's long-standing external challenge has been to try to retain its formal diplomatic relations with as many states as possible whilst maintaining, or expanding upon, its membership of and participation in international organisations and regional trade groupings. By raising concerns about China's behaviour and preventing Taiwan from becoming more isolated the international community can do much to help Taiwan meet these challenges. In so

doing, it will add further factors to China's calculations on the costs of invading the island. Some steps have already been taken in this direction. In July 2021, for example, the G7 summit communique emphasised the "importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" and, the same month, Lithuania announced the opening of a **Taiwanese** representative office in Vilnius: the wording of such offices, the *South China Morning Post* noted, usually being Taipei. Although Taiwan saw Kiribati and the Solomon Islands switch their diplomatic representation to the PRC in 2019, following recent attempts by Beijing to use vaccine diplomacy to persuade Paraguay to do the same, the US Secretary of State called the Paraguayan president to stress the importance of working with partners such as Taiwan. The US Ambassador to Palau also travelled with the island's president on a visit to Taiwan in March 2021 for the opening of a quarantine free bubble. Giving the growing concerns about China's increased presence in the South Pacific, Australia and New Zealand could encourage Taiwan's other three remaining diplomatic allies in the region (Nauru, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands) to retain their recognition of Taiwan.

5. The short answer would have to be yes. After all, as the *DW* piece in October 2020 which asked this very question noted, it only took two MPs from the BJP referring to Taiwan as a "democratic country" for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue a demarche. At a time of heightened Chinese sensitivity over Taiwan amidst increased cross-strait friction and pushback from the US and EU (among others), then anything which New Delhi does to strengthen its ties with Taiwan is highly likely to elicit a furious response from Beijing. This is more so, of course, when the bilateral relationship is already fraught due to the situation in Ladakh and China's construction of buildings in Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh. There is much to commend in any Indian efforts to develop its relationship with a like-minded democracy in the Indo-Pacific. These, however, may well be perceived by China as part of an international attempt to encourage Taiwan to seek independence and as further proof that India is part of a hostile coalition of forces bent on containing and encircling it. India, therefore, may well

prefer to maintain its traditionally cautious approach towards its relations with Taiwan and thus enhance rather than strengthen its ties.

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**FPRC Journal (48) Focus: TAIWAN  
Response to Questionnaire**

1. Do you believe China seems eager for Taiwan to go the way of once-autonomous Tibet in the early 1950s? Is the timing of China's muscle-flexing by display of air power against Taiwan recently significant?

There has been no change in the stance of the PRC on Taiwan. It has been identified as one of the core interests along with Tibet, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea. The recent sabre rattling is alarming and there are concerns on possible escalation. Mao has to his credit the takeover of Tibet and Xinjiang, Deng Xiaping likewise has Hong Kong and Macau which were taken over. Xi, who is now looking to a third term and an extension for life term, will look to cement his place in the CCP as the leader who took over Taiwan. So, it is clear that Xi would be working with a single minded purpose to achieve this aim. However, the global climate is not favourable and any misadventure as of now is a risky proposition that has the potential to explode into a full-fledged war depending on the response of the USA which even under Joe Biden has made it clear that there would be no compromise in supporting Taiwan.

Yes, there is an escalation in the number of incursions and ADIZ violations by China of Taiwan air space to put pressure on the small neighbour. However, Taiwan has stood firm and has been preparing for a misadventure by China. Taiwan will be taken over by China only if the rest of the world led by the USA abandons Taiwan. If China tries to take over Taiwan, the only thing that will prevent it is an all-out war which both China and USA would not like to be drawn into. So, what the world will witness is the increased demonstration by China to break the status quo including a war which at least by the statement of Xi is not a remote possibility.

2. Has US President Joe Biden's recent shift to a more conciliatory approach toward China probably bolstered Xi's confidence further? Is Taiwan really a "Difficult Choice" for US?

The recent meeting showed that both sides are trying to find common ground to de-escalate and resume better bilateral relations which includes Trade and Tariff, Taiwan, and Human rights issues. However, going by the statement of the officials post the meeting, it appears