

# Taiwan's 2024 Elections: Perspectives from the Region and Beyond

Edited by  
Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy

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Institute for Security &  
Development Policy



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## Abbreviations

AIT	American Institute in Taiwan
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
BIA	Bilateral Investment Agreement
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
IDU	International Democratic Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISDP	Institute for Security and Development Studies
KMT	Kuomintang
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore
MND	Ministry of National Defence, Taiwan
MOE	Ministry of Education, Taiwan
MOEA	Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan
MOST	Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan
NSP	New Southbound Policy
NTU	National Taiwan University
OFW	Overseas Filipino Workers
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
TEEMA	Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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# Introduction

Roughly half the world's population is expected to go to the polls in 2024, with some of the world's most populous countries holding elections, including India and Indonesia. On January 13, 2024, Taiwan held presidential and legislative elections. The elections attracted international attention because of the increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, but also because Taiwan successfully managed to navigate these tensions and protect its democracy. The People's Republic of China (PRC), which considers Taiwan as its own although it never ruled it, has doubled down on efforts to interfere in domestic debates and manipulate the process.

Two days before the elections China warned voters to make the "right choice". Beijing maintained that a vote for Lai Ching-te, the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is a vote for war, and amplified those domestic narratives inside Taiwan that it perceived to serve its interests. Beijing has aimed to create chaos, discredit Taiwan's political leadership, and weaken people's trust in their leaders. At the same time, China has refused to engage in cross-strait dialogue since the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen was first elected in 2016.

Yet, Taiwan has effectively withstood pressure while expanding its international space despite Beijing's isolation attempts. Winning just over 40 percent of the ballot, the DPP secured an unprecedented third consecutive term, the first time any political party achieved such a result since 1996 when Taiwan held its first direct presidential vote. On the eve of the elections, president-elect Lai stressed "Between democracy and autocracy, Taiwan stands on the side of democracy".

Beijing will likely continue its pressure on the island, including military maneuvering and exercises and non-military pressure, such as cyberattacks, trade coercion, information manipulation and influence operations. At the same time, and perhaps learning the lesson of the elections which showed Taiwanese identity strengthen, rather than

weaken, Beijing will likely develop new strategies to convince the people of Taiwan that their future would be better off under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. While these efforts have thus far proved ineffective and even counter-productive, they have impacted the entire region. Going forward, whatever Beijing chooses to do concerning Taiwan will have implications beyond the island.

The Institute for Security & Development Policy invited a group of international experts to explore the implications of the elections for the region and beyond. The publication covers a group of countries in Taiwan's vicinity in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the European Union (EU), with an additional focus on Central Eastern Europe. The countries covered are **Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, India, the United States, and the EU**. The leaders of most of these countries have extended congratulations on the outcome of the elections, with the President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., delivering the strongest message of support, while others, namely the EU, have been more restrained.

While Beijing has reacted angrily to these gestures, in the case of India it has interestingly restrained its anger. This publication offers valuable insights on the factors that have shaped the dynamics in China's relations with regional states and with Taiwan, and on the complexity of cross-Strait relations in light of Lai's victory. The publication also provides forward-looking reflections on how like-minded democracies in the region and beyond can work together with Taiwan as a partner, and contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, which is in the interest of all, including that of the PRC.

Notwithstanding differences in regional states' relations with the PRC and Taiwan, the individual contributions suggest that common interests bind democracies together to embrace Taiwan as a partner and push back against PRC coercion. They all have a stake in peace and security in the Taiwan Strait, and unimpeded trade routes. The Taiwan Strait is a key shipping route, with almost half of the global container fleet passing through it. Taiwan's geostrategic location in the heart of the Indo-Pacific therefore suggests that the outcome of the elections has global implications,

likely to affect the future of international trade and global governance.

The papers in this edited volume explore the ways in which Taiwan's elections are likely to impact relations that democracies in the region and beyond maintain with Taiwan. The geography of the **Philippines** is vital to China's access to the maritime transport corridors that its export-oriented economy depends on. While Taipei's ties with most of its ASEAN neighbors continue to blossom, the partnership faces significant challenges brought by China's growing assertiveness. Southeast Asian states have been generally cautious in their political engagements towards Taiwan and a major shift in Philippine foreign policy towards Taiwan is unlikely. It is however likely that unofficial bilateral ties will strengthen in a wide array of areas including trade, investment, education, and technology, argues **Don McLain Gill, lecturer at the Department of International Studies, De La Salle University, Manila**. Despite their growing convergence, Manila will not drastically change its course towards Taipei, but is likely to stay committed to its one China policy.

**Japan's** proximity to Taiwan raises similar questions in Tokyo concerning a contingency, hence a more muscular defense posture. Aside from its importance as an economic partner, Taiwan's geographic position linking the South China Sea to the East China Sea through the Taiwan Strait makes the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that encircle Taiwan, existential trade arteries to the Japanese economy. Considering the breadth and depth of bilateral relations in the framework of Japan's one China policy, Tokyo is likely to aim to work toward a continuation of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and prioritize maintaining the status quo, while balancing between Beijing and Taipei, argues **Stephen Nagy, Professor at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the International Christian University**.

**Singapore** has been relatively quiet in reaction to Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines developing their self-defense capabilities and enhancing their already strong security cooperation with the U.S. Singapore is also silent on the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) by the U.S and its allies in Asia. This may be tacit acceptance that stability in Asia, including around Taiwan, involves effective deterrence of Beijing.

Therefore, Singapore is likely to keep relations with Taiwan low-key to avoid backlash from the PRC, writes **Chong Ja Ian of the National University of Singapore**. Given that ties with Taiwan are valuable for Singapore, the current administration will most likely shield these with passivity and low publicity. There is reason to be confident that in the next four years continuity will prevail in ties between Singapore and Taiwan. The unknown factor remains the PRC and Xi Jinping's desire to take Taiwan.

Taiwan is one of the major destinations for Indonesia's migrant workers. According to 2023 data by Indonesia's Trade and Economy Office in Taipei, there are 272,855 migrant workers in Taiwan. The Taiwan Strait itself bears great importance for the country. Recently Indonesia has been anxiously watching emerging developments in cross-Strait relations and the past eight years of no communication between Taipei and Beijing has kept Jakarta worried. Indonesia, as well as ASEAN as a whole, needs Taiwan to balance between building connections within Southeast Asia's grassroot communities and maintaining a stable relationship with China. This is a very basic, but vital need, argues **Dane Anwar, journalist at Indonesia's Kompas**. In her contribution she explores where Taiwan fits in Indonesians' perception of global affairs.

Given the complementarities between **India** and Taiwan, and how the relationship has taken off under President Tsai Ing-wen after she took office in 2016, the same is expected to continue under Taiwan's new leader, writes **Dr. Sriparna Pathak, Associate Professor in the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) of O.P. Jindal Global University, (JGU) Haryana, India**. Ties between India and Taiwan are only set to improve further under Lai, she argues. Looking to reduce reliance on China's market, Taiwan sees India as an important partner, given its current stupendous growth rates, and as one of the very few encouraging spots in the gloomy global economy.

Although far from the region, the **European Union** remains Taiwan's biggest foreign investor accounting for over 25 percent (USD 50.1bn) of its total FDI. Europe has started to engage in discussions on how to better protect its interests in the region, rebalance its ties with China,

help protect Taiwan as a frontline democracy and contribute to the rules-based international order, all at once. Seen from Brussels, for Europe and Taiwan, democratic elections provide a chance to address long-standing issues on the bilateral agenda, and transform the existing like-mindedness into concrete benefits for both sides, writes **Abigaël Vasselier** of **MERICCS**. Taiwan and Europe have the potential to move from a defensive to a more offensive posture with regard to the defense of common democratic values.

Several European parliaments have demonstrated a tendency to be ahead of their executive bodies, promoting pragmatic cooperation with Taiwan, while the latter can officially maintain adherence to their respective one China policies, writes **Kristina Kironska** of **CEIAS**. Thus, despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, Taiwan has managed to cultivate robust informal and substantive connections, leading to flourishing engagement particularly with countries in Central Eastern Europe. The outcome of Taiwan's parliamentary elections warrants careful consideration. Taiwan's new parliament, and particularly its speaker, should recognize that parliamentary diplomacy is a crucial instrument for enhancing Taiwan's international profile in Europe, argues Kironska.

The recent trend in U.S.-China relations is that both Washington and Beijing seek to stabilize bilateral relations to prevent competition from veering into conflict, writes **Shu-ren Koo**, **Senior Managing Editor for Research, Commonwealth Magazine**. Beijing's and Washington's reaction to Taiwan's election could be interpreted as managing potential risks to avoid Taiwan becoming an obstacle to stabilizing U.S.-China relations. However, the U.S. presidential election in November is likely to make U.S.-China relations more volatile. The primary force shaping the direction of cross-strait relations would still be U.S.-China relations. If Washington increasingly courts Taiwan, leading it to lean more toward the U.S., Beijing would likely exert greater pressure on the island. Conversely, if U.S.-China relations stabilize, Washington would be more inclined to see official cross-strait dialogue take place, and Beijing would believe that even if a tendency for Taiwanese independence remains in Taiwan's politics, Washington would play the role of a brake.

# 1. The Dynamics of Philippines-Taiwan Ties

## Don McLain Gill

The victory of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Lai Ching-te in the 2024 Taiwanese presidential election was the first time any party in Taiwan has secured a third consecutive win for office. Additionally, among the pillars of Taiwanese decision-making, foreign policy remains as significant as it is controversial, given the complexity of cross-Strait relations and Beijing's growing belligerence in the region. Nevertheless, throughout the past decades Taiwan has forged strong unofficial ties within the region with Southeast Asia as a significant cornerstone in Taipei's external policy calculations.

This was evident with the inauguration of the New Southbound Policy (NSP) by President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, with a clear focus on Southeast Asian states despite its broader geographical scope.<sup>1</sup> However, while Taipei's ties with most of its ASEAN neighbors continue to blossom, the partnership faces significant challenges brought about by China's increasing assertiveness and expansionist ambitions in the Western Pacific. Thus, Southeast Asian states have been generally cautious in their political engagements towards Taiwan. Consequently, Lai's electoral victory generated a range of reactions from the region, with most incorporating stoic or, at most, lukewarm responses.<sup>2</sup>

However, what garnered significant attention was the enthusiastic message of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in congratulating Lai's presidential victory. For obvious reasons, Beijing reacted repulsively towards Marcos Jr's message, despite the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs maintaining that Manila remains committed to the one China policy.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as Lai will seek to enhance the utility of the NSP in Taiwan's relations with Southeast Asian states, it is interesting to understand where Manila stands in its ties with Taiwan.

## **Conceptualizing Philippine Foreign Policy under Marcos Jr.**

Since Manila's transition from internal to external security, maritime security cooperation has been a pivotal pillar in Philippine foreign policy. In addition, while Western Pacific geopolitics encompasses several structural challenges, the intensifying U.S.-China power competition has been the most immediate structural factor impacting Philippine politics and decision-making since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When Marcos Jr. won the presidential election in 2022, he paved the way for a recalibrated foreign policy that reflected pragmatism and an unwavering commitment to safeguarding Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights. At the beginning of the Marcos Jr. administration, Manila wanted to broaden the utility of the alliance with the U.S., while also prioritizing the maintenance of stable ties with Beijing. However, despite extending goodwill to China, Beijing remained committed towards its narrowly driven regional ambitions, while forgoing the opportunity to act like a responsible neighbor.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, unlike the previous administration's lack of proactivity in openly dealing with the growing challenges China poses to Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights,<sup>5</sup> the Marcos Jr. administration sought to leverage Manila's growing ties with both traditional and non-traditional partners in order to enhance its deterrence capabilities and interests to keep the West Philippine Sea<sup>6</sup> free, open, inclusive, and rules-based.

The past few months have witnessed notable developments in this regard, ranging from the expansion of sites under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the U.S. and a first-ever trilateral exercise with the U.S. and Japan in Philippine waters to a series of new defense and security centered agreements with India, France, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam. This coincided with Manila's efforts to operationalize a transparency initiative that aimed to expose the Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militia's provocative maneuvers within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone through the active collaboration between national and international media and the Philippine Coast Guard.<sup>7</sup>



However, while Manila has been leveraging its emerging security ties in the face of Chinese assertiveness, the Marcos Jr. administration remains committed to keeping all lines of communication with Beijing open to resolve outstanding conflicts through negotiations. This demonstrates how Manila's intent to enhance its security ties is not aimed at provoking the volatile U.S.-China power competition by taking sides; instead, it serves as a means to better secure Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights by applying more cost on China's belligerent activities without actively participating in rigid bloc politics.<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates a clear operationalization of Marcos Jr.'s emphasis on the Philippines seeking to maximize its agency amidst the unfolding major power competition in the region.<sup>9</sup>

## **Putting Philippines-Taiwan Ties into Context**

Based on the decision-making patterns of the Marcos Jr. administration, it is unlikely that Manila will revise its position towards Taiwan in the context of the one China policy. However, it is first necessary to outline this position objectively.

Generally speaking, there are as many one China policies as there are countries in the international system. Accordingly, what guides Manila's position is the 1975 joint communique forged between the Philippines and the People's Republic of China, which centered on Manila ending formal and official diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>10</sup> However, it is clear that unofficial relations between Manila and Taipei would persist. The Philippines and Taiwan share a historical and multifaceted partnership founded on democratic principles. Moreover, with over 200,000 Filipino nationals working in Taiwan, it has become a preferred destination for overseas Filipino workers (OFW). Trade and investment are also crucial pillars of the partnership, with the NSP adding more momentum.

One of the most notable developments was the signing of a bilateral investment agreement in December 2017, a much-needed revision since 1992 and one of the first of its kind between Taiwan and NSP states. Beijing lodged official complaints upon recognizing that the reinvigorated agreement reflected the desire of the Philippines and Taiwan to deepen

their non-official ties further.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is also important to note that in the same year Taiwan became the Philippines' second-largest source of foreign direct investment.

These figures continued to improve as both sides remained steadfast in exploring more opportunities to maximize the utility of their partnership. In 2021, the Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) stated that Taiwan ranked as the Southeast Asian state's ninth-largest trading partner, ninth export market, and eighth-largest import supplier.<sup>12</sup> While Philippine exports to Taiwan grew by 19.05 percent from 2020 to 2021, its imports from Taiwan also witnessed significant growth, with a 23.04 percent increase within the same timeline.<sup>13</sup> In November 2023, Taiwanese businesses pledged over USD 357 million in investment.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, with a vibrant relationship and foundation of shared values, under the current Marcos Jr. administration, Manila will likely seek to deepen and broaden ties with Taipei within the existing cooperation framework.

However, a major shift in Philippine foreign policy towards Taiwan is unlikely. Accordingly, three points must be highlighted. First, Marcos Jr. seeks to keep his foreign policy centered on pragmatism and the immediate security challenges that provoke Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights. This has been a consistent position of the current administration as it illustrates how expanding defense ties with like-minded democracies are not aimed at provoking the U.S.-China power competition. Instead, these ties are meant to provide the country with more options and opportunities to better secure its sovereignty and sovereign rights, consistent with international law. In this regard, Manila also maintains its interest in keeping channels of communication open with Beijing. Therefore, an abrupt shift towards Taiwan (e.g., discarding the one China policy) may create difficulties for Manila in maintaining its strategic signaling toward the U.S. and China.

In April 2023, the Philippines' National Security Council also reiterated this position, amidst rising speculations about the new EDCA sites in the Philippines' northern provinces. It stated that the Philippines' expansion of EDCA sites is aimed at better securing its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and sovereign rights against emerging threats. More importantly, the

NSC emphasized how interfering in Taiwan's affairs and the overarching U.S.-China competition is not in Manila's interests.<sup>15</sup> However, Manila's growing economic interests towards Taiwan, its geographical proximity, and the presence of over 200,000 OFWs serve as undeniable catalysts for the Philippines to stay alert towards cross-Strait developments.

Second, as stated earlier, countries across the world have their own one China policy—resulting in differences. In fact, it is Beijing's evolving understanding of it that creates more problems. In line with Beijing's one China principle, countries are expected to cease any form of engagement with and mention of Taiwan. This is consistently imposed on countries while emphasizing their need to respect China's sensitivities and interests, which is interesting given Beijing's complete disregard for international law and the sovereignty and sovereign rights of its neighbors, including the Philippines. Therefore, given Beijing's growing insecurity and paranoia as it seeks to climb the international power hierarchy, it is likely it will react critically towards any form of engagement Manila will have with Taiwan, even if it is well in line with the one China policy that the two sides agreed upon in 1975.

## **Conclusion**

With Lai's election victory, it is likely for the unofficial ties between the Philippines and Taiwan to strengthen further in a wide array of areas including trade, investment, education, and technology. However, despite the growing convergence between both democracies, it is unlikely Manila will drastically change its course towards Taipei. While the Philippines is likely to stay committed to the one China policy for the long term, it will seek to deepen and broaden the nature of its existing collaboration with Taiwan.

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## 2. Japan's Taiwan Tightrope: Securing Taiwan as a Global Public Good

**Stephen Nagy**

### Japan-Taiwan Relations in Context

As a former colony, Taiwan has had long and mostly positive relations with Japan. As a result, today Taipei-Tokyo relations have never been stronger. To illustrate, Taiwan is Japan's 4<sup>th</sup> largest export destination at ¥505B in 2023 with the United States at ¥1.81T, China at ¥1.6T, South Korea at ¥569B, and Hong Kong at ¥413B.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from its importance as an economic partner, Taiwan's geographic position linking the South China Sea to the East China Sea through the Taiwan Strait makes the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that encircle Taiwan, existential trade arteries to the Japanese economy. Taiwan also shares Japan's commitment to democracy, freedom of press, rule-of-law and human rights, linking these two societies at a politico-cultural level.

Considering the breadth and depth of bilateral relations in the framework of Japan's one China policy, Tokyo is likely to aim for a continuation of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and prioritize maintaining the status quo, while balancing between Beijing and Taipei, based on the Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China signed on September 29, 1972.<sup>2</sup> Concretely, this means abeyance to points two and three of the joint communiqué as below:

The Government of Japan recognizes that Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China.

The Government of the People's Republic of China reiterates that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Government of Japan fully understands and respects

this stand of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and it firmly maintains its stand under Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation.

## **Tokyo's National Interests**

There are at least two key questions that need to be addressed when discussing the implications of the January 2024 Taiwanese presidential and legislative elections for Japan's national interests, and the strategic imperatives for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region.

What does another four years of DPP rule mean for Japan-Taiwan relations? Second, what recommendations can we put forward to maintain constructive relations that help to preserve the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, while at the same time helps to deter conflict across the Strait or any interaction that would undermine Japan's national interests?

First and foremost, whether the DPP, KMT or some combination of political parties had won the presidential election, Tokyo prioritized peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, supporting whichever party won in that context.

The rationale behind Tokyo's position is simple. Approximately, USD 5.5 trillion in imports/ exports according to some estimates, traveled through the arteries that link the South China Sea in and around the Taiwan Strait, East China Sea to Japan.<sup>3</sup> Disruption through forced "reunification", political instability, or accidental conflict across the Taiwan Strait would be an existential crisis to Japan's economy and thus its security within the region.

## **Internationalizing Taiwan as a Global Public Good**

Since the Suga Yoshihide administration's visit to Washington in 2021 April, we have seen Tokyo position itself on the Taiwan Strait very clearly. In its bilateral statement with Washington, it stressed peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>4</sup> This position has become internationalized in the G-7<sup>5</sup> and the NATO AP4<sup>6</sup> statements, as well as other statements such as the recent Camp David Principles.<sup>7</sup>

Taiwan's importance to Japan was also explicitly voiced by the late

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo when he said in a speech that “a Taiwan contingency would be a security emergency for Japan requiring Japanese and U.S. intervention.”<sup>8</sup> This position has been consistently reiterated over many administrations in Japan, taking into account its historical, economic, and strategic relationships with Taiwan and its economic relationship with China.

In line with the importance Tokyo places on its relationships with both Beijing and Taipei, Japan continues to not support independence while prioritizing peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. In a similar vein, as Tokyo communicates this message to Taipei, it’s also communicating to Beijing that it has not deviated from its one China policy.

### **Priorities with New Leadership in Taiwan**

With these positions in mind, when we consider the question as to what the prospects are for another four years of DPP and its impact on Japan-Taiwan relations, Tokyo aims for a continuation of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. It aims to support increased trade with Taiwan, more exchanges at the non-state level, such as the consideration of the establishment of an Emergency Assistance Office in Taipei to function as a key institution involved in the evacuation of Japanese citizens in the case of a natural disaster or Taiwan contingency. Continued commerce as well as continued alignment with Taipei on international and regional issues will also be key priorities for Tokyo as it seeks to invest in a rules-based Indo-Pacific region and the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.

Taipei sees Tokyo as a close friend, partner and important source of diplomatic clout and capital behind closed doors. For Tokyo, Taipei represents an important link on its economy for the forementioned sea lines of communication. Also, Taiwan occupies an important position in technology supply chains in particular semiconductors, produced by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). Lastly, Taiwan represents a democratic Chinese political entity within the region that has prospered economically and is a free and open society with a free press and values that resonate with Tokyo.

## **Deepening Non-State Bilateral Cooperation**

We will likely see increased collaboration between Tokyo and Taipei on many regional issues because they have mutual interest in finding ways to cooperate and be aligned on issues such as trade, disinformation prevention or preserving a free and open region.

As Tokyo continues to find creative ways to deepen relations with Taipei at the non-state level and within the context of its one China policy, it will include internationalizing Taiwan so that what happens to Taiwan matters to the international community.

This translates into the promotion of Taiwan as a global public good that contributes to the global economy, global technology supply chains and the promotion of free and open societies based on democracy, freedom of press, and rule of law.

Tokyo is likely to find creative ways to enhance Taiwan's deterrence through the provision of technologies, cooperation on countering disinformation, informal diplomatic cooperation on issues such as health security or infrastructure and securing an environment in which Japan advocates for Taiwan's internationalization.

Beijing will no doubt have mixed feelings about this approach. On the one hand, it will welcome Tokyo's commitment to maintaining the status quo and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait based on Japan's one China policy. On the other hand, it will not appreciate the internationalization of Taiwan as a global public good. For Beijing, Taiwan remains an internal issue that should not be interfered with.

It is important to understand that there is increasing concern within Tokyo about China's position vis-à-vis Taipei and how its calculations on forced "reunification" may be impacted by the structural slowdown in the Chinese economy and increasing challenges to the political environment within Beijing.

The disappearance of the former foreign minister Qin Gang, the former Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu, and the replacement of the rocket force and other high-ranking PLA officers in recent months, suggests that there are many uncertainties within the Chinese political system that could affect Tokyo's and other like-minded countries' interests across



the Taiwan Strait. As a result, Tokyo aims to inculcate stability into the trilateral relationship firmly based on the U.S., China, Japan alliance, as well as to incorporate detail deterrence structures, based on extended strategic partnerships with countries like Australia and the UK in the form of reciprocal access agreements.

Going forward, Tokyo-Taipei relations will continue to deepen at the political, cultural and economic levels. We will also see creative ways for Tokyo to enhance the status quo across the Taiwan Strait through deterrence and direct diplomacy with both Taipei and Beijing, mindful of the importance of not deviating away from the status quo.

## **Policy Recommendations post-Taiwan Presidential election**

In the process of deepening Tokyo-Taipei relations within the context of Tokyo's one China policy and investing in the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, it will be important that Japan practices nuanced and coordinated diplomacy that reflects the consensus of the international community on the importance of Taiwan as a global public good.

First, Tokyo should continue to inculcate the importance of the status quo across the Taiwan Strait in multilateral, minilateral and bilateral statements on every occasion. This includes highlighting the importance of Taiwan in regional technology and other supply chains and how any incident, kinetic or otherwise, could have deep and broad negative impact on the regional and global economy.

Second, Tokyo needs to find ways to help incorporate Taiwan into international institutions and agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the World Health Organization (WHO), Supply Chain Resilience Initiatives (SCRI) and initiatives that focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as well as search and rescue operations.

Third, working with other like-minded countries, Japan should seek to establish a joint research institute focusing on disinformation. Universities and research institutes in Japan, Taiwan, Canada, South Korea, Australia, and the U.S. should work at the non-state level and conduct research on

disinformation identification, mitigation, education, and coordination response mechanisms. This could be then used as policy recommendations for participating countries and Taiwan.

Fourth, Tokyo must be explicit to Taipei that it does not support a unilateral declaration of independence by any government in Taiwan. Fifth, Tokyo must be explicit to Beijing that Japan can only support a peaceful “reunification” based on mutual agreement between the two stakeholders, an agreement not manifested through force and/or coercion.

Finally, Tokyo needs to work unilaterally and with like-minded countries to strengthen Taiwan’s civil society, democratic institutions, rule-of-law, and freedom of press and speech. This could be through educational exchanges, non-state exchanges between NGOs, unions and other entities.

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### 3. Stability Above All Else: Singapore Seeks Quiet but Substantive Ties with Taiwan

**Ja Ian Chong**

During Tsai Ing-Wen's two-term presidency since 2016, Taiwan and Singapore have enjoyed smooth, substantive, but relatively low-key relations. Going forward under Taiwan's newly elected leader, Lai Ching-te, following the January presidential elections, both sides seem eager to continue this level of interaction. Continuity may be the most comfortable and sustainable path for both sides. Singapore is likely to keep relations with Taiwan low-key to avoid backlash from the PRC. The Taiwan relationship is however, important to Singapore and the current administration will most likely shield ties with passivity and low publicity. Despite highly mutually beneficial bilateral relations, Singapore seems to figure that avoiding Beijing's anger is the way forward.

#### **Not Just the Economy**

Taiwan is one of Singapore's top trading partners and a key investor.<sup>1</sup> The two collaborate extensively in the technology sector while they are consistently among the most popular destinations for each other's tourists.<sup>2</sup> Helping to undergird and facilitate strong bilateral economic ties is a 2013 trade and investment agreement between Taiwan and Singapore.<sup>3</sup> Singapore continues to loan space in Taiwan to conduct unilateral military training, building on a military relationship that started in the early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The current Lee Hsien Loong administration recognizes Taiwan's importance for its supply chains as well as trade and connectivity with Northeast Asia. The nature of current ties is comfortable for Singapore and its administration is likely to favor continuity in Lai's upcoming four-year presidential term.

Singapore was among the governments that publicly congratulated

Lai on his presidential victory in January 2024. The move naturally invited criticism from the PRC Foreign Ministry, but the language of the statement of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is telling of the Lee administration's orientation. The short statement noted that "Singapore shares a close and long-standing relationship with Taiwan and the Taiwanese people".<sup>5</sup> It further stressed that Singapore has consistently supported the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, adding that cross-Strait peace is critical to regional stability and prosperity.

Importantly, the MFA statement reiterated Singapore's adherence to its own "one China policy," which, while accepting that Taiwan is a part of China, is vague on the definition of "China." Specifically, the preamble of a 2000 joint Singapore-PRC communiqué on cooperation, commemorating a decade of formal diplomatic relations stated that Singapore "recognizes that there is one China and Taiwan is part of China. Singapore recognizes the government of the People's Republic of China."<sup>6</sup> Unlike the PRC's "one China principle" which explicitly equates China to the People's Republic of China, the communiqué is vague on this point.<sup>7</sup> The language of the congratulatory statement, therefore, suggests that the Lee administration sought to express its support for the status quo while preserving the current state of relations with Taiwan and, for that matter, the PRC.

## **Foundations and Fears**

Singapore's position is unsurprising given its relations with Taiwan as well as the fact that Taiwan is critical to the global supply chain and sits astride major sea lanes, air routes, and submarine data cables important to its own security. Major disruption to any of these elements will be costly to Singapore. Given its access arrangements with the United States, any contingency involving Taiwan is likely to see Washington seek passage for military assets through Singapore and corresponding PRC pressure to block such transits. Such complications can hurt Singapore's economy, intensify tensions within its population, and worsen ties with one or both major powers that also happen to be its key economic partners. Singapore's approach to Taiwan over the next four years will almost certainly seek

to prevent such outcomes, whether this means working with Taipei or partnering with other actors.

Otherwise, Singapore will want to build on the economic and social aspects of existing ties with Taiwan. This means further promoting bilateral trade and investment to expand on already excellent ongoing cooperation. Singapore is likely to be particularly interested in collaboration with Taiwan's leading technology firms, such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), in the hopes of acquiring world-beating skills and technologies that can upgrade its own technology sector. Singapore is already working hard to entice the TSMC-affiliate, Vanguard International Semiconductor (VIS), to establish an advanced microchip production facility in the country.<sup>8</sup> The economic partnership between Singapore and Taiwan also makes sense given that the latter has much more advanced manufacturing than the former. Yet, Singapore has a much more developed capital market that can help finance Taiwanese enterprises.

However positive bilateral ties may be, Singapore is likely to keep relations with Taiwan low-key simply to avoid backlash from the PRC. The PRC is Singapore's largest trading partner in goods although it trades more in services with others. The PRC is also the largest single destination for outbound Singapore investment, even though there are far larger inward FDI sources to Singapore. These conditions mean that the PRC can punish Singapore economically should it decide to do so, which would be costly, albeit not crippling, for Singapore. Singapore is already dealing with political influence from the PRC, including the use of ethno-nationalism directed at its ethnic Chinese population.<sup>9</sup> Singapore worries that such efforts could widen cleavages in its multi-ethnic society.

The Lee administration remembers the detention of Singaporean armored vehicles in Hong Kong in late 2016, following exercises in Taiwan, possibly given Beijing's unhappiness with Singapore supporting the South China Sea arbitral tribunal process.<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that Singapore was officially agnostic about the outcome of the tribunal process, even if non-compliance is unthinkable. There was also a brief freezing of more senior-level contacts, which echoed the PRC's response

to Lee Hsien Loong's private trip to Taiwan in 2004 just before he took office as Prime Minister.<sup>11</sup> Singapore's People's Action Party government, while undergoing its own extended leadership transition, is likely to be eager to avoid trouble, especially when it comes to Beijing's sensitivities.

## Looking Ahead

Over the next four years this caution is likely to continue coloring Singapore's handling of ties with Taiwan and other PRC-related issues, such as the South China Sea. It may be more vocal only when its fellow ASEAN members are more upfront, such as in the wake of PRC military exercises after then-Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Even then, ASEAN's statement on the "cross-Strait situation" avoided even explicitly mentioning the Taiwan Strait and the various protagonists by name, referring to them only as "parties." This was most probably to avoid triggering Beijing. Notably, Singapore's current leaders do not have the same normative commitment to democracy or liberal values as Taiwan and many of the latter's closer partners.

The nature of Taiwan-Singapore ties and Singapore's current sensitivities mean that going forward keeping to the current state of relations may be the most comfortable and sustainable path for both sides. After all, both gain from growing substantive exchanges and perhaps there is little need to complicate matters unnecessarily. Singapore consistently reiterates its own "one China policy" in public statements relating to Taiwan and uses this position to guide its ties with Taiwan and the PRC.<sup>13</sup> Distinguishing Singapore's policy from the PRC's similarly named but substantively different "one China principle" helped stabilize relations among all three sides since it has created clear and stable expectations.<sup>14</sup> By insisting on its own position, Singapore can avoid being too partial toward Beijing and help ensure that its public understands its need for flexibility in ties with all partners, including Taiwan. Nonetheless, Singapore can clarify and strengthen its position if its officials can also regularly point out the country's economy is not as dependent on the PRC as many, especially among the public, sometimes assume.

## Remaining under the Radar

Notably, Singapore has become relatively quiet when it comes to Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines developing their self-defense capabilities as well as enhancing their already strong security cooperation with the United States. For that matter, Singapore is also silent on the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) by the United States and its allies in Asia. Doing so may be tacit acceptance that stability in Asia, including around Taiwan, involves effective deterrence of Beijing. After all, Beijing is the only party that seeks to change the status quo that Singapore has benefitted from, by extending control over Taiwan, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea. Since Singapore can freeride on the stability that results from any deterrent effect without having to commit resources of its own, it has every reason to accept the situation.

There is reason to be confident that in the next four years continuity will prevail and secure stable and mutually beneficial ties between Singapore and Taiwan. Whatever the aspirations of people in Taiwan might be regarding their political future, there is a clear, overriding preference for a status quo where the island maintains substantive autonomy and its democratic system. Singapore stands to gain from these conditions and is therefore likely to be quietly supportive of Taiwan doing its part to maintain the status quo rather than either capitulating or acting in potentially provocative ways. Singapore is probably happy to enjoy stability through deterrence that Taiwan and its close partners provide by largely freeriding on any benefits of regional stability that results without having to risk friction with Beijing. Singapore's involvement at most extends to not criticizing such actions and affording the U.S. military peacetime transit.

The unknown factor remains the PRC and the desire to control Taiwan under the leadership of State Chairman Xi Jinping. There may be potential mutual gains from closer Singapore-Taiwan cooperation and coordination, especially in such areas as supply chain resilience, counter-economic coercion, and responding to disinformation as well as influence operations. These advantages come in addition to the already substantial returns from the close bilateral economic relationship. Singapore's fears

of backlash from Beijing may well prevent it from seeking more active collaboration that risks becoming public. It may prefer instead to forego the benefits of working with Taipei and discount its agency to assuage Beijing, making even mild public statements about ties with Taiwan rare. The trajectory of Singapore-Taiwan relations may ultimately come down to enjoying the deterrence provided by Taiwan, its partners, and other Northeast Asian states, with an eye on Beijing's sensitivities.



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## 4. How Indonesia's Welfare Relies on Cross-Strait Relations

**Dane Anwar**

The year 2024 has been called the most dangerous year for elections, with globally more voters than ever in history heading to the polls.<sup>1</sup> Seven of ten of the world's most populous nations, including Indonesia and the United States of America, will hold elections this year. On January 13, Taiwan, a frontline democracy, held its presidential and legislative elections in one of the most consequential elections in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. On February 14, in Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, over 200 million voters went to the polls to elect their next president.

Indonesia adheres to its one China policy according to which Jakarta maintains diplomatic relations with Beijing. But at the same time, Indonesia has cultivated a unique relationship with Taipei. Although they have no diplomatic relations, Taiwan plays an important role in Indonesia's economy, be it from trade and also foreign direct investments.

As a country with a population of 270 million people, Indonesia has been inward looking, rather than outward looking in terms of its foreign policies. This means that for several consecutive presidents, foreign policy has been an extension of domestic policy. Therefore, Indonesia's foreign policy throughout the years has heavily focused on the economy, beneficial for the country's domestic development.

There were times when Indonesia played a significant role on the global stage, i.e. the Non-Alliance Movement in 1955, the birth of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, and holding the G20 presidency in 2022. In recent years however, Indonesia has been treating foreign policy as an extension of its domestic policy.

In 2022, Australia's Lowy Institute released a survey conducted involving 3,000 Indonesians, representing all provinces.<sup>2</sup> As per the survey,

only 17 percent of the respondents think that foreign policy was important. The majority, 61 percent, say international relations are important only when this brings economic benefit and welfare to Indonesian people.

At the same time, this majority view foreign relations as a potential threat. Foreign policy discussions in Indonesia usually only cover international instability that results in some sort of crisis in Indonesia and trickles down into economic hardship at the grassroots level.

### **The Meaning of 'Abroad' for Indonesians**

The concept of "abroad" or "international" mostly means four things to Indonesians. First, abroad translates into going for pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. About 89 percent of Indonesians are Muslim and going for the obligatory pilgrimage (*hajj*) is something that they dream about. Muslim Indonesians save their money, then queue for years, even decades, to get a turn to go to Saudi Arabia. This is often the only international trip many Indonesians ever experience.

Second, other than for *hajj*, going abroad is to seek employment. As a developing country with 51.49 percent of its working-age population only having graduated from primary school, 24.85 percent from secondary school and 28.33 percent from high school,<sup>3</sup> there are limited jobs available in Indonesia's formal sectors. Going abroad, therefore, is a way to fill the employment gap.

Third, to some lucky ones, be it the very smart or the very rich, going abroad means better education opportunities. One has to be diligent in order to secure a scholarship or have a wealthy background that can support the administration fee, not to mention travel tickets, tuition fee, and living costs.

Fourth, to a few very lucky ones, be it those with enough money or savings and enough time, going abroad is to travel. It is a luxury that, even including backpacking, not everybody can afford. The notion of "international" therefore is always a remote, dream-like, and in some cases a necessity one must take when there are no options available at home.

So where does Taiwan fit in the Indonesians' perception of global affairs? It is linked to the second reason above, namely seeking employment. Taiwan

is one of the major destinations of Indonesia's migrant workers. According to 2023 data by Indonesia Trade and Economy Office in Taipei, there are 272,855 migrant workers in Taiwan. Combined with crew in Taiwanese fishing vessels and overstayed workers, there are 314,601 workers. In addition, there are 19,197 Indonesian students in Taiwan.<sup>4</sup>

As the Lowy survey suggests, the majority of Indonesians think that foreign policy is about global threats, and instability can interfere with Indonesia's politics. As much as 41 percent of respondents see the U.S.-China geopolitical rivalry as a threat. Everyday Indonesians have knowledge, albeit limited, that the Taiwan Strait is one of the world's regional hotspots and at the core of this rivalry.

### **It's All About the Stomachs**

Regional instability can shift or determine the trajectory of international relations. In terms of Indonesia's sovereignty, the population fears that foreign influence may steer domestic politics. But their most important fear is that foreign policy will deprive many Indonesians of economic opportunities. The first thing that pops into one's mind when talking about crisis in the Taiwan Strait is "what about our workers?" This question is then followed by "How will we evacuate them? Will their wages be paid if anything happens? Will we have the opportunity to come back and work?"

The fear of this foreign threat revolves around almost 300,000 minds. The fear is that these workers are going to be unable to feed themselves and their families back home, given that migrant workers are usually their family's backbone. One worker is responsible for supporting three or more family members. Seen from this angle, the mouths of almost a million of Indonesians are under threat if conflict happens in Taiwan.

The Taiwan Strait itself bears great importance for Indonesia. The waterway is responsible for 54 percent of global trade. For Indonesia, it is equal to US\$83 billion of exports or 7 percent of its GDP in 2021. In April 2023, Jakarta was nervous because China's People's Liberation Army held a military drill that besieged Taiwan. A day later, the U.S., Philippines, and Australia held their own drills in the south of Taiwan.

In response, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a

contingency plan to evacuate around 350,000 Indonesian citizens from Taiwan. Not only that, the plan then expanded into evacuating Indonesian citizens in Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea. In total, Indonesia's MOFA calculated that about one million people must be evacuated if conflict erupted. It took the government a month to evacuate Indonesians from Ukraine in 2022; one million citizens spread across East Asia will be a nightmare.<sup>5</sup>

Since April 2023, Indonesia has been on its toes watching emerging developments in cross-strait relations. In January, the people of Taiwan elected Lai Ching-te as their next president. The main difference compared to the previous eight years of Democratic Progressive Party leadership is that this time DPP no longer dominates the legislative. It remains to be seen how this will shape Taiwan's foreign policy.

Indonesia has been grateful for Taiwan's New Southbound Policy.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Jakarta was hoping Taiwan and China would restore communication. These past eight years of no communication between Taipei and Beijing has kept Jakarta anxious. Indonesia, as well as ASEAN as a whole, needs Taiwan to balance between building connections within Southeast Asia's grassroots communities and maintaining stable relationship with China, in order to secure their everyday livelihood. This is a very basic, but vital need.

With Indonesia's leadership in 2023, ASEAN put forward the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a vessel of regional cooperation. To develop the region, conflict must be avoided. ASEAN members are already struggling to address the situation in Myanmar. They cannot afford another clash in Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, or anywhere in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesia and ASEAN will have to do their homework in the region. Taiwan also needs to step up efforts to re-establish communication with China. Nobody can tell Taiwan how to do that, but everybody is expecting Taiwan to do it. The same goes for China as the stability and prosperity of the region cannot be dealt with only by one side. Both Beijing and Taipei must make time and effort to talk, whilst ASEAN must play an active part to help to ensure this happens. If ASEAN is an important aspect of this region, then it should not be sidelined onto the audience bench.

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## 5. India-Taiwan Relations Under the Third Term of the DPP

**Sriparna Pathak**

On January 13 this year, the people of Taiwan elected William Lai as their next president. At a reception in Taipei to celebrate India's Republic Day soon after, India's representative to Taiwan, Manharsinh Laxmanbhai Yadav, congratulated the newly elected leader. Yadav extended his wishes to those who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the democratic process.<sup>1</sup> China did not flare up at India's congratulations.

A host of other countries, including the U.S., the Philippines, Singapore, the UK, Japan, among others congratulated the president-elect. As expected, China protested.<sup>2</sup> So why was there no response from Beijing to Delhi's gesture? To answer this question, an overview of recent dynamics in India-Taiwan relations and of emerging dynamics in the Indo-Pacific is important.

Given the complementarities between India and Taiwan, and how the relationship has taken off under President Tsai Ing-wen after she took office in 2016, the same is expected to continue under Taiwan's new leader. Major divergences are unlikely since Tsai and Lai belong to the same party. If any, change will only be for the betterment of India-Taiwan relations. Nevertheless, a brief look at some key developments leading up to the elections in Taiwan are important.

### **Disinformation and Racism on India-Taiwan Labor Mobility Pact**

In 2023, Taiwanese cyberspace went into a frenzy in response to disinformation about a possible labor mobility pact between India and Taiwan. While Taiwan is interested in acquiring labor from India, the false narrative on social media was that the existing government of the



Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) would introduce 100,000 Indian laborers in one go into Taiwan, which would upset the social stability and balance in the island.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in Taiwan quickly exposed the false information and clarified that there was no such agreement.<sup>4</sup> The anxiety the manipulation unleashed was so immense that in December it even led to a protest in Taipei. The false narrative painted the DPP as a party that did not care about social stability.

Given China's attempts to interfere in Taiwan's elections, elections were tense. On January 13, just hours leading up to the elections, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) detected five Chinese balloons which threatened aviation safety, in addition to helping unleash psychological warfare across the island.<sup>5</sup> MND stated that it had detected eight military aircraft, one of which had crossed into Taiwan's southwest air defence identification zone.<sup>6</sup> On the same day, six ships from the Chinese navy were also seen around the island.<sup>7</sup>

China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning stated, "The elections of the Taiwan region are China's internal affairs. Regardless of the result, the basic fact that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China will not be changed".<sup>8</sup> On January 9, the Chinese commerce ministry announced that it was studying further measures to suspend tariff concessions for machinery and auto parts from Taiwan.<sup>9</sup>

A few weeks earlier, Taiwan had accused China of economic coercion and election interference after Beijing announced coercive economic measures against some chemical imports from Taiwan, stating that Taipei had violated a trade agreement. All these moves were aimed at the Taiwanese electorate to sway them away from voting for the DPP which Beijing had labelled "pro-war".

## **Why Didn't China Flare Up at India for Congratulating Lai?**

So why the silence to India's congratulations to Lai? While this could mean that there is no ire, the more plausible reason is caution from China following India's response to China's diktat to adhere to the one China

policy in 2022 after Nancy Pelosi's visit. In 2022, irked by the visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives to Taiwan, China sent out a not-at-all-subtle message to India, urging it to stick to its one China policy instead of following the footsteps of the U.S.

The then spokesperson of India's Ministry of External Affairs stated that, like many countries, India too was concerned about recent developments and urged the exercise of restraint, the avoidance of unilateral actions to change the status quo, de-escalation of tensions and efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region.<sup>10</sup> A reporter from China's state-run media, Xinhua news agency pointedly mentioned Pelosi's visit to "China's Taiwan region" and asked about India's position.

India responded by stating that it does not need to reiterate its policies, as they are well-known and consistent.<sup>11</sup> Understanding why China did not flare up at India congratulating Lai is important. The quagmire that Beijing finds itself in with the West, China would want India to be its subordinate player, accepting its violations of India's sovereignty and a long list of other concessions. India tilting towards the West is not acceptable for Beijing. Since India's point-blank rebuttal of China's diktat on Taiwan in 2022, China has been cautious.

## **Prospects of India-Taiwan Relations**

Ties between India and Taiwan are only set to improve further under Lai. Looking to reduce reliance on China's market, Taiwan sees India as an important partner, given its current stupendous growth rates, and as one of the very few encouraging spots in the gloomy global economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has identified India as a "bright spot" in the world economy and a key contributor to global growth in the coming years.

In its World Economic Outlook report, the IMF cites India's impressive performance with digitization, helping to pull the country out of pandemic lows and prudent fiscal policies and significant financing for capital investments expected to sustain growth momentum.<sup>12</sup> In January, Taiwan's Foreign Minister, Joseph Wu expressed deep admiration for India during an event commemorating its 75<sup>th</sup> Republic Day, particularly

applauding the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

Addressing the gathering, Wu stated that there are two types of people—those who are going to fall in love with India and those who already have, adding that he falls into the latter category.<sup>13</sup> When President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, she sought to use Taiwan's technological base, its cultural and educational quotient which found expression in the New Southbound Policy. India's Act East Policy, launched in 2014 shared complementarities and convergences with the NSP.

Taiwan's interest in greater cooperation with India is also tangible through the actions of the Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association (TEEMA). The TEEMA, the biggest body of some of the most well-known Taiwanese firms, dedicated their Lunar New Year Gala to India in 2024.

India's interest in Taiwan is shown by the fact that on the country's 75<sup>th</sup> Republic Day in 2024, the Indian government announced it was honouring Taiwan's Young Liu, Chairman and CEO of Taiwan's Foxconn, with the Padma Bhushan award.<sup>14</sup> The award is the country's third-highest civilian award. While this mutual respect is based on its own merits, and cannot be pinned down to the China factor, the fact remains that China opened a tax enquiry against Apple's supplier, Foxconn, after its founder Terry Gou announced his intention to be in the race for Taiwan's elections.<sup>15</sup> India, in contrast, honoured Foxconn's Chairman and CEO with one of its highest civilian awards.

## **What Needs to be Done?**

Going forward, how can Taiwan and India reinforce their cooperation under the island's new leadership, against the backdrop of an ever more assertive China in the neighborhood? Some concrete steps in terms of formalising the labor mobility pact, direct flights between India and Taiwan, and more economic and cultural exchanges between India and Taiwan would be beneficial to leverage the full potential of the complementarities.

Mobility of students between the two can go a long way in enhancing mutual understanding of each other's cultures and value systems. In 2023,

Taiwan announced the opening of a third Taipei Economic and Culture Centre in India, which is a welcome step, and this could be matched with India opening more ITA branches in Taiwan. Opening more India study centers in Taiwan and vice versa, beyond the existing China Studies centres in India would also go a long way in facilitating greater academic and scientific collaboration between the two sides. A few of these steps are currently under process and a push for greater exchanges in all realms—be it in academia, media, or business-to-business contacts—will go a long way.

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## 6. Europe-Taiwan Relations: A Post-2024 Elections Roadmap

**Abigaël Vasselier**

Europe followed the elections in Taiwan closely, appreciating its vibrant democracy, and at the same time wondering about the consequences for Europe. The victory of Lai Ching-te of the Democratic People Party (DPP) is good news for Europe. DPP has a track record of eight years of close cooperation with Europe under President Tsai-Ing wen, in power since 2016. The past years have indeed seen the bilateral agenda reach new heights. With an increasing number of official visits and parliamentary exchanges, synergies have increased and new areas of cooperation have emerged ranging from human rights to green energy, health and digital.

Democratic elections create new opportunities by offering momentum for new ideas. For Europe and Taiwan, this is a chance to address long-standing issues on the bilateral agenda, and transform the existing like-mindedness into concrete benefits for both sides. A weakened DPP, losing majority in the Legislative Yuan, should also push Europe to consider the vulnerabilities that would stem from not being able to address growing instability in the Taiwan Strait.

### **The European Option for Taiwan**

In her two terms President Tsai invested in raising Taiwan's profile in the international community, encouraging Europe to recognize Taiwan on its own merit. While Beijing has framed the question of Taiwan for Europe as part of the Sino-American geopolitical competition, Europe should continue pushing back on this narrative while reassuring Beijing that it is within the framework of EU's one China policy that Europe and Taiwan will continue cooperation. This means boosting engagement with Taiwan in all areas and sectors that do not require diplomatic recognition. The EU has been clear that it recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole

legal government of China.

The DPP should be clear about what it wants from Europe and develop a real strategy, starting by solving the outstanding issues and proposing new areas of cooperation, being pragmatic on whether a national or European approach is the most suited. The lack of coordination of Taiwanese representations in Europe as well as the absence of representation of a number of member-states in Taipei, together with a lack of understanding of the scope of EU's one China policy, have undermined the respective capacity to unlock potential.

One of the weaknesses of European support to Taiwan has been the lack of public knowledge on Taiwan. The new Taiwanese government should address this as a matter of priority. Through Erasmus+, the exchange of students from both sides has reached 1000 young people between 2014 and 2020. This is not sufficient. Strengthening people-to-people exchanges and joint education programs should be a priority for both sides.

The development of a solid bilateral value-based agenda is essential in the current geopolitical context in which democracies are under pressure. Taiwan and Europe have the potential to move from a defensive to a more offensive posture with regard to the defense of common democratic values. The first battle is the one of narratives, whereby Taipei and Brussels have built up a solid mechanism to learn from each other on information manipulation and foreign interference. The DPP should further consider similar initiatives with EU member-states. Second, the value-based agenda cannot ignore the defense and promotion of human rights. The DPP should consider the European call to abolish death penalty. While Taipei could become a hotspot for human rights defenders and organizations in the region, Europe could certainly support such initiative.

Both sides should consider the idea of promoting bilateral practical and pragmatic cooperation in the world within the framework of the EU's one China policy. Development cooperation in the Pacific or in Africa, disaster management, humanitarian aid, and Taiwan's participation in donor platforms count among the many initiatives that Europe and Taiwan could explore. Taiwan has already proven to be a reliable partner in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and in contributing to relief efforts

in the war in Ukraine. Addressing regional crises and global challenges together in international fora to which Taiwan already belongs, such as the World Trade Organization, is also of joint interest. Full membership may not always be the way forward but Taiwan should be able to contribute in the global fight against major challenges with an observer status—for instance in the World Health Organization.

## **Moving from Symbolism to Pragmatism: A Strengthened Trade and Economic Agenda**

Taiwan has advanced as an economic and trade partner for the EU, becoming its 14th trading partner in the world in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, there is untapped potential, both at national and European levels that can be unlocked. The existing trade barriers and lack of reciprocity in certain domains should be addressed. As most of other European trading partners in Asia, Taipei would need to lift tariffs and non-tariff barriers in certain sectors such as the automotive sector or services, restrictions over phyto-sanitary and pharmaceutical products.

In addition, addressing the underlying regulatory issues and improving the business environment would increase the attractiveness of the island for European companies. The new Taiwanese administration could consider positioning itself as one of the best examples in Asia for economic and trade convergence with the EU. In addition, while steadily growing, Taiwanese investment in Europe remains low. As an advanced economy, the objective should be to also better penetrate the Single Market with an increasing number of greenfield investments across Europe.

Unleashing this potential would nonetheless mean for the new Taiwanese administration to move away from the failure to conclude a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA), which is sometimes perceived by the Taiwanese side as a disappointment vis-à-vis Europe. It is now time for a change of mindset in Taipei and to move from symbolism to pragmatism. Europe is unlikely to engage like Canada or India into the negotiation of a comprehensive economic framework. Regardless of the existence of an agreement between the EU and Taiwan, addressing trade barriers and boosting investments in both ways could have the same



effect. Sectoral agreements, such as a Resilient Supply Chain Agreement, could also be discussed.<sup>2</sup>

Investing in trade is a strategic decision that can support joint efforts on economic security. Increasing supply chains resilience is a shared concern. The challenges for president-elect Lai will be to continue integrating Taiwan into the global supply chains by addressing the questions of manufacturing capacity, labor shortage, and energy efficiency while maintaining the core of the silicon shield strategy. On these three issues, the EU would bring additional value for Taiwan. Since the adoption of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU has made clear its commitment to work with Taiwan on the diversification of its supply chains, especially on semiconductors, with expanded interests in the areas of rare earths, green energy, and global health.<sup>3</sup>

## **Bridging the Gap on the Security Agenda**

To ensure Taiwan's security and maintain the status quo, Lai was elected under the assumption that he would pursue the political and policy measures of his predecessors. While the United States will remain the primary security partner for the new government, Europe and other like-minded partners will be called upon by their partners to support Taipei in maintaining a robust defensive posture, by strengthening defense capabilities, building international support and preparing for further coercion. When Taiwan's new president turns to Europe, will the bloc have the capacity to deliver?

European capacity to deal with Taiwan and cross-Strait relations is a good benchmark to assess the capacity of the bloc to act as a geopolitical player in the Indo-Pacific. But this will come at a price for Europe when this translates into resisting Beijing's coercion and pressure over Europe. European legitimate interests in the security and economy of the region which are highlighted in the different Indo-Pacific strategies of individual member-states lay the foundation to recognize that Taiwan is a security challenge for a peaceful and prosperous Asia.

In this regard, Europe has a responsibility to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. This duty should translate into being ready for all

scenarios and having considered all possible responses, as well as all the avenues to prevent a deterioration of the situation. Taiwan should also consider Europe as a player when building its defense capabilities and continue to turn to France, Germany, and the United Kingdom as well as other EU member-states.

The three difficulties that the DPP government would need to overcome together with Europe and learn to better manage are: one, China's narrative and framing of Taiwan in the context of the Sino-American competition; two, a lack of EU-level consensus on Taiwan as a security and defense issue; and three, the lack of a common European strategic culture. The new Taiwanese government needs to support Europe in better understanding the security challenges and intricacies of cross-strait relations. This would allow European experts and leaders to develop a strategic reflex on Asia and enable them to adequately respond to crisis and instability in the region.

Unlike Hong Kong, relations between Taiwan and mainland China are based on traditions, tacit agreements and a limited legal basis. Hence the importance to understand cross-strait relations and deepen the existing knowledge base on Taiwan in Europe. For instance, the tacit agreement between Taipei and Beijing over the "median line" can no longer be reserved for the European Taiwan experts. Increasing people-to-people exchanges in the sectors of intelligence, security, and defense, developing joint training in the sectors of cyber security and foreign interference and manipulation of information could be avenues. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has shown to the world that Europe has the resources and means to react in case of a war that challenges its existential interests and values. Based on this experience and with the challenges it would pose to Europe, when instability erupts in the Taiwan Strait, Europe will come to be resourceful. However, this will be based on a deep understanding of cross-strait relations. Navigating European divergences on respective one China policies will also be the key factor in devising a common European response.

## Considering External Factors for a Roadmap for Europe and Taiwan

The election of the DPP for a third mandate offers new opportunities, but the window of opportunities is restricted. The path forward for Taiwan and Europe depends on several factors, including elections across Europe and in the U.S., as well as on China's policy vis-à-vis Europe — and Taiwan. The European Parliament, thus far a strong supporter of closer relations with Taiwan, might change its mind with the likely rise of populist parties in Europe in the June elections. In addition, all eyes are on the U.S. elections which may well redefine the security and economic architecture in the Indo-Pacific and surprise a Europe that is not ready to react in the region.

There is no time to lose, only time to invest for both Europe and Taiwan.

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## 7. CEE-Taiwan Relations: Current State and Outlook Following the 2024 Taiwan Elections

**Kristina Kironska**

In recent years, EU-Taiwan, namely relations between Taiwan and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), have grown stronger. What do the 2024 Taiwan election results mean for the next four years of CEE-Taiwan relations?

The DPP's presidential victory implies a certain degree of continuity in Taiwan's posture towards the outside world, considering that foreign policy is in the hands of the president. In international affairs, it is expected that future President Lai Ching-te, set to assume office in May 2024, will increase ties with democratic countries and continue closer cooperation with like-minded countries, including the EU and its member-states.

However, a hung parliament, such as the one resulting from the 2024 elections in Taiwan, poses challenges for the ruling administration due to the absence of a parliamentary majority. The forthcoming government, likely consisting of DPP ministers (with President Lai expected to appoint a DPP premier, who in turn will appoint DPP ministers) will need to incorporate suggestions from other parties into its policies constructively. In the realm of Taiwan's foreign policy, in the previous electoral cycle (2020-2024), with the ruling party (DPP) holding a majority in parliament, there was a close alignment with the administration. This time, although differences will arise, particularly regarding relations with the PRC, ties with Europe are expected to remain unaffected.

The outcome of the parliamentary elections warrant careful consideration, as parliamentary diplomacy is particularly important for Taiwan's relations with Europe. Many European parliaments have demonstrated a tendency to be ahead of their executive bodies, promoting pragmatic cooperation with Taiwan, while the latter can officially maintain

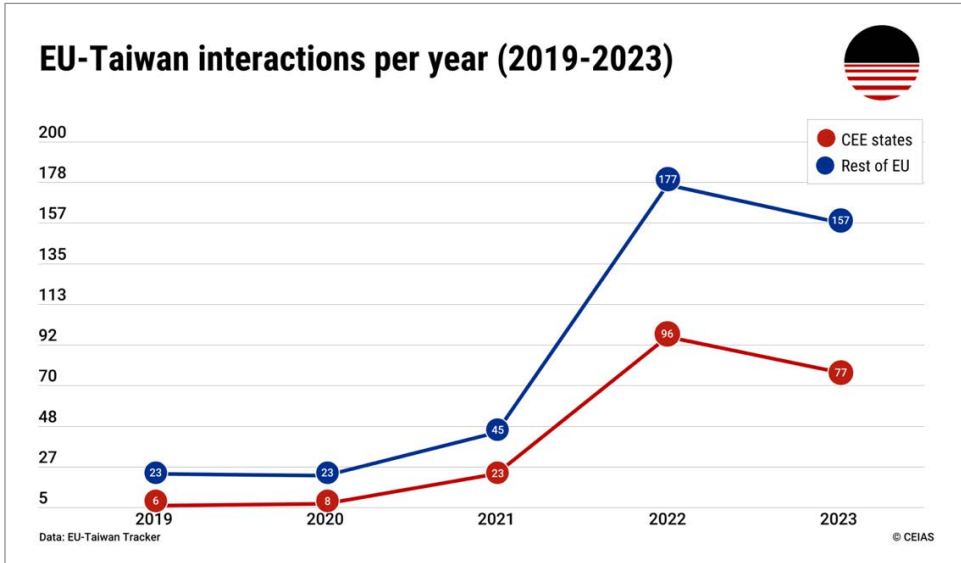
adherence to their respective one China policies. Thus, despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations, Taiwan has managed to cultivate robust informal and substantive connections, leading to flourishing engagement with Europe.

### **Strengthening Bonds: CEE and Taiwan Relations**

A significant change to EU-Taiwan relations came with the adoption of the EU-China Strategic Outlook in 2019 and the launch of the Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2021. These reflect the importance of Taiwan in line with the EU's de-risking approach towards China (rather than decoupling) and willingness to strengthen the EU's resilience by cooperating with like-minded partners. Moreover, in 2021, the European Parliament passed its first resolution on EU-Taiwan political relations, explicitly urging the European External Action Service, EU member-states, and the Commission to strengthen their political partnerships with Taiwan.<sup>1</sup>

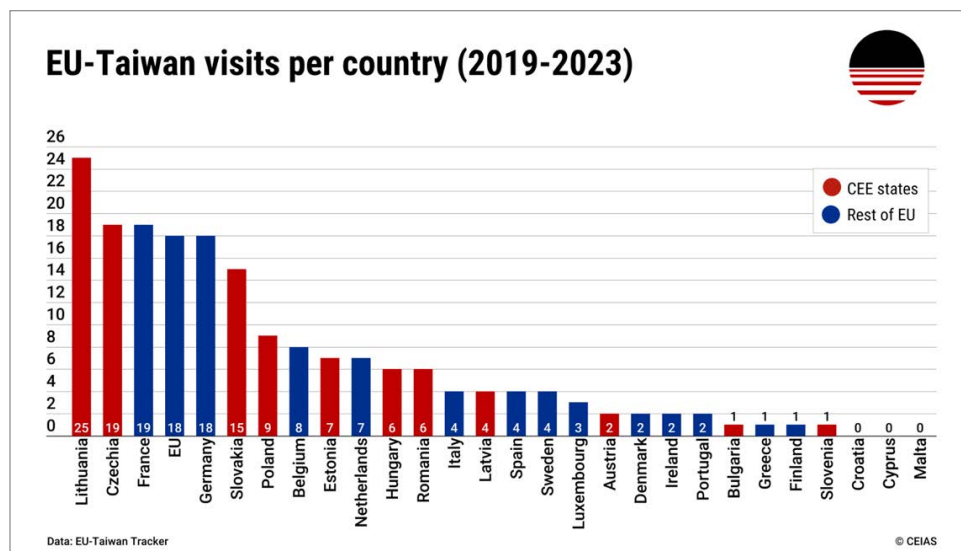
Over the years, according to the data collected by the CEIAS EU-Taiwan Tracker (an online tool developed by the author), EU-Taiwan relations grew stronger in all aspects, with interactions between the two sides growing six-fold between 2019 and 2023 (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> In 2019, only 23 interactions were recorded across the EU—these were governmental, economic, security, and cultural engagements, as well as mutual visits. Despite recovering from the pandemic, these increased seven-fold in 2022 to 177 recorded interactions, and in 2023 to 157 interactions. The CEE countries emerged as the primary contributors to the surge in interactions between Europe and Taiwan, accounting for over half of all engagements in 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: EU-Taiwan interactions per year (2019-2023)



This notable trend can be attributed largely to the proactive efforts of the so-called vanguards, a term introduced by CEIAS in its publication “Beyond the Dumpling Alliance.”<sup>3</sup> The group of vanguard countries comprises Slovakia, Poland, Czechia, and Lithuania, nations that have exhibited heightened levels of activity in both political and economic relations with Taiwan over the past years. Among them, Czechia and Lithuania stand out with the highest frequency of mutual visits (see Figure 2). Moreover, Czechia became the first non-diplomatic ally, in 2020, to have a senior politician, Senate President Milos Vystrcil, deliver a speech at the Taiwanese Parliament, where he famously proclaimed “Wo Shi Taiwan Ren” (“I am Taiwanese” in English).<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2: EU-Taiwan visits per country (2019-2023)



Motivated by growing skepticism regarding China's capacity to deliver economic benefits, the vanguard countries shifted their focus to Taiwan as the next East Asian cornucopia.<sup>5</sup> Political interactions between Taiwan and these four nations have paved the way for the establishment of new economic partnerships in areas such as investment, trade, and research and development.

Czechia and Lithuania in particular have adopted a high-visibility symbolic action approach, raising Taiwan's visibility and thus fostering faster-paced relations. Following the 2024 elections in Taiwan, Czech President Petr Pavel was the first European head of state to congratulate Lai Ching-te on his electoral victory. Also, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis congratulated the newly elected President. These instances represent a significant departure from the established European practice of congratulating the Taiwanese electorate without explicitly naming the new President-elect and emphasizing support for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and adherence to the one China policy.

This strategy, however, comes with considerable downsides, such as the high-risk potential for coercive measures from China against the

European partner (as has been the case with Lithuania) and the risk of domestic politicization (as has been the case in Czechia), the latter leading to potential slowdowns in case of political changes.

On the other hand, Slovakia and Poland have embraced a practicality-based approach, resulting in lower risks of Chinese reaction or coercion. This approach focuses on the steady development of relations in specific agendas and minimizes politicization. It comes with the trade-off of less visibility for Taiwan and may not reflect a significant impact on public opinion about Taiwan in these countries.<sup>6</sup>

There are additional nations in the CEE region, like Austria and Hungary, that despite exercising caution in pursuing political relations with Taiwan (for various reasons) enjoy mutually beneficial economic relations. In fact, their economic engagement with Taiwan sometimes surpasses even that of the vanguard nations, albeit without a pronounced eagerness to champion Taiwan in their political agenda.

## **Parliamentary Diplomacy: Engagement with Europe following the 2024 Elections**

In February 2024, the newly convened parliament elected the controversial former mayor of Kaohsiung and 2020 presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu (KMT) as its speaker. Since he hails from the opposition, there is potential for friction that could also impact the efficiency of parliamentary diplomacy.

Insider reports from the parliament, however, suggest that Han has expressed willingness to continue engaging with European partners by both hosting and sending out delegations. Indeed, another Czech delegation is in preparation to visit Taiwan soon. Additionally, there is talk of a Romanian delegation, which could contribute to the development of a growing relationship (currently, there are no representative offices in Romania or Taiwan).

To ensure the continuity of parliamentary diplomacy and support overseas engagements, the parliament must avoid transferring tensions and frictions into its diplomatic endeavors. It should also maintain the infrastructure established in the previous term by Han's predecessor



and build upon it. This includes the International Affairs Working Group and the Department of International Affairs, both units within the parliament responsible for comprehensively managing all matters related to parliamentary diplomacy. The new parliament, and particularly its speaker, should recognize that parliamentary diplomacy is a crucial instrument for enhancing Taiwan's international profile in Europe.

## Endnotes

- 1 Vladimira Lickova and Kristina Kironska, "Taiwan's quasi-diplomatic interactions with Europe: representative offices," CEIAS Insights, December 14, 2023, <https://ceias.eu/taiwans-quasi-diplomatic-interactions-with-europe/>.
- 2 Kristina Kironska, et al, "EU-Taiwan Relations Tracker" [online tool], CEIAS, 2024, <https://eutwtracker.ceias.eu/tracker>.
- 3 Matej Simalcik, et al, "Beyond the Dumpling Alliance: Tracking Taiwan's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe," CEIAS, March 2023, [https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEEtaiwan\\_paper\\_final\\_PRINT.pdf](https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEEtaiwan_paper_final_PRINT.pdf).
- 4 Kristina Kironska, et al, "EU-Taiwan Relations Tracker" [online tool], CEIAS, 2024, <https://eutwtracker.ceias.eu/tracker>.
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## 8. Outlook on US-China-Taiwan Relations After the Taiwan Elections

### Shuren Koo

Over the past five years, cross-Strait relations have been essentially shaped and dominated by U.S.-China relations. Many experts in Taiwan describe the current situation as not about “cross-Strait relations” any more, but rather “cross-Pacific relations.” Therefore, in discussing the post-Taiwan presidential election, cross-Strait relations and U.S.-China-Taiwan interactions, we cannot overlook the dynamics of U.S.-China relations.

### U.S. and China collectively manage cross-Strait relations?

The recent trend in U.S.-China relations is that, amid increasingly intense competition, both Washington and Beijing seek to manage and stabilize bilateral relations to prevent competition from veering into conflict.

Therefore, we can see that following the summit between U.S. President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November 2023, both sides are actively restoring various high-level dialogues and communication mechanisms, including the recent resumption of military dialogue.

This includes bilateral meetings between U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also the Director of the Chinese Communist Party’s Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission, as well as the visit of Minister of the CCP International Department Liu Jianchao (劉建超) to the U.S. It was recently reported that Biden and Xi would arrange a telephone conference this spring. Among the intensive communications between the U.S. and China, Taiwan-related issues are inevitably being discussed.

Under such circumstances, Beijing’s and Washington’s reaction to the January presidential election in Taiwan could be interpreted as

managing potential risks to avoid the Taiwan issue becoming an obstacle to stabilizing U.S.-China relations.

In response to the victory of DPP candidate Lai Ching-te, who had previously declared himself a “pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence,” Beijing has been relatively restrained, though it did take away one more of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies. The first response came through a spokesperson from the Taiwan Affairs Office, stating that the DPP “no longer represents Taiwan’s mainstream public opinion” (with only 40 percent of the vote).

Washington’s response seems to indicate a risk management approach more apparently.

Before the Taiwan election, both U.S. National Security Council’s background briefings for American media and the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Laura Rosenberger’s statement to the press reiterated the U.S.’ one China policy and its Taiwan policy, opposing any unilateral changes by either side, including reiterating non-support for Taiwan independence, and stating that the ultimate solution to cross-Strait issues must be peaceful, with the U.S. not taking a specific stance. Biden also stated in response to media inquiries after the Taiwan elections, “We do not support independence for Taiwan.”

Although not supporting Taiwanese independence and not taking a specific stance on the ultimate solution to cross-Strait issues have long been U.S. policy toward Taiwan, U.S. government officials had rarely openly stated this position in recent years until before and after the elections.

When faced with media inquiries, Biden could have congratulated Taiwan on completing democratic elections, expressed opposition to Beijing pressuring Taiwan, or reiterated U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan, but he chose to say, “We do not support the independence for Taiwan,” indicating an intent to manage potential risks.

Since both Beijing and Washington want to manage risks in the Taiwan Strait, the likelihood of conflict in the short term is low.

## US Presidential Election would Create Uncertainty

However, with the U.S. presidential election this November, we expect that U.S.-China relations would become more volatile since candidates usually need to appear tough toward China and supporting Taiwan during campaigns.

More importantly, we would see more unstable U.S.-China relations in the coming four years if Trump were to win a second presidency.

In the long run, whether Beijing will eventually resort to force to “reunify” Taiwan and trigger a conflict in the Taiwan Strait depends on Beijing’s perceptions.

If Beijing believes that Washington intends to keep Taiwan indefinitely independent, does not favor cross-Strait unification, and continues to court Taiwan to contain China; if it perceives Taiwan’s political trajectory moving further away from unification; or if Beijing loses confidence in its own strength and economic attractiveness, it would conclude that peaceful unification is hopeless and resort to military means to resolve the Taiwan issue.

On the contrary, if Beijing is convinced that Washington will continue to adhere to the one China policy, believes there is still room for unification in Taiwan’s political trajectory, and has confidence in its own strength and economic attractiveness, then Beijing will continue to exercise strategic patience, believing that Taiwan would one day come to the negotiation table for reunification. A very important article published in 2018 by a CCP policy theory journal *Qiu Shi* (求是) stated “General Secretary Xi Jinping indicated that the most critical factor determining the direction of cross-Strait relations is the motherland’s (Mainland China) own economic development and progress.”<sup>1</sup>

## Beijing Still has Strategic Patience at this Moment

From Beijing’s reaction to the results of Taiwan’s presidential election, it appears that Beijing still maintains a certain degree of strategic patience.

Although there is a lack of mutual trust and interaction between the two sides of the strait, with the vote share for the DPP presidential candidate this time being only 40 percent, much lower than President Tsai

Ing-wen's in 2016 (56 percent) and 2020 (57 percent), Beijing believes that most public opinion in Taiwan does not support the DPP, indicating that its Taiwan policy remains effective and there is still hope for unification, and the Taiwan issue has not spiraled out of control.

In the foreseeable future, the primary force shaping the direction of cross-Strait relations would still be the relations between the U.S. and China. If U.S.-China confrontation escalates and Washington increasingly courts Taiwan, leading Taiwan to lean more toward the U.S., Beijing would likely become more uneasy and exert greater pressure on Taiwan.

Conversely, if U.S.-China relations stabilize, Washington would be more inclined to see official cross-Strait dialogue take place, and Beijing would believe that even if there is still a tendency for Taiwanese independence in Taiwan's politics, Washington would play the role of a brake.

## Endnotes

- 1 Taiwan Affairs Office of CCP Central Committee, "Guiding Taiwan Policy Work in the New Era based on General Secretary Xin Jinping's Important Thoughts on Taiwan Policy Work (以习近平总书记对台工作重要思想引领新时代对台工作)," QSTheory.cn (求是網), March 15, 2018, [http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-03/15/c\\_1122534388.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-03/15/c_1122534388.htm).

