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By: Russell Hsiao

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**Senior White House Official Holds Up Taiwan's Democracy as Model for China's Political Evolution**

In a [widely cited](#) speech that was as much about substance as it was about form, US Deputy National Security Adviser Matt Pottinger commemorated China's historic May Fourth Movement (also known as the New Culture Movement, 新文化運動) with a speech delivered entirely in Mandarin Chinese at an online academic conference on US-China relations. On the 101st anniversary of the 1919 movement—in which Chinese students called for the embrace of Western ideals such as “Mr. Science” (賽先生) and “Mr. Democracy” (德先生) and ignited a nationalistic revolution in China's long political evolution—the White House official [extolled](#) the original virtues of the movement while specifically referencing the island-democracy 180 kilometers across the Strait: “The cliché that Chinese people can't be trusted with democracy was [...] the most unpatriotic idea of all. Taiwan today is a living repudiation of that threadbare mistruth.”

Pottinger's explicit reference to Taiwan's democracy is not the first time that a senior US administration official has held it up as a model for China and other countries. Indeed, as Vice President Mike Pence unequivocally stated in his flag-planting [China policy speech](#) as early as October 2018: “America will always believe Taiwan's embrace of democracy shows a better path for all the Chinese people.” Furthermore, as Myanmar was opening up in 2015, then-Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Danny Russel also [mentioned](#) that the United States thought Taiwan could serve as a model for the southeast Asian country's democratization. While US officials have praised Taiwan's democracy in the past, this theme has clearly [been elevated](#) under the Trump administration during the current era of great power competition.

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Last year, at a high-powered celebration of the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement—which historians argue helped contribute to the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—CCP General Secretary [Xi Jinping](#) (習近平) praised the virtues of the student protests that called for the nation’s embrace of Western ideals. This praise was somewhat ironic given China’s current political conditions. Additionally, Xi provided guidance on the role of Chinese youth movements in China’s “new era.” While the students in the May Fourth Movement were calling for democracy, the CCP General Secretary emphasized that Chinese youth should essentially uphold the CCP’s one-party rule in order to achieve Xi’s goal of “two hundred years” (兩個一百年) and realize the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and the “Chinese Dream” (中國夢)—core mantras of Xi’s ruling philosophy. Building on this, the CCP’s propaganda czar, Wang Huning (王滬寧), [praised](#) the May Fourth Movement as a historically significant demonstration of Chinese patriotism and nationalism.

In equating the significance of the historic event to the present day, Pottinger [explained](#) how “[t]he movement galvanized a long-running struggle for the soul of modern China.” Also referring to the May Fourth Movement as the “Chinese Enlightenment,” he described the Chinese doctor who was censored by authorities after warning about the virus outbreak in China in late 2019 as a flag-bearer of the May Fourth spirit:

*“So who embodies the May Fourth spirit in China today? To my mind, the heirs of May Fourth are civic-minded citizens who commit small acts of bravery. And sometimes big acts of bravery. Dr. Li Wenliang was such a person.”*

The audience for Pottinger’s speech was clearly the Chinese-speaking world. Beijing’s reaction, while not surprising, was telling. The deputy national security adviser’s speech was [taken down](#) from Weibo, the Chinese social media site, five minutes after it had been posted.

Since the founding of the People’s Republic, the CCP has been undertaking a systematic reinterpretation or censoring of the Party’s murky past and continuously reinventing the CCP’s place in contemporary Chinese history. As a result, it is not surprising that the May Fourth Movement has been similarly targeted by

Xi’s campaign against “[historical nihilism](#),” a term that refers to growing public skepticism about the CCP’s version of history. Indeed, as a [Project 2049 Institute study](#) pointed out:

*“Over the decades, leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have used the control of history to bolster their own political standing, as well as the continued primacy of the CCP in ruling the People’s Republic of China (PRC).”*

Just as the Party has worked to whitewash its own role in historical events or attempting to erase it altogether—most conspicuously in the Sino-Japanese war, Tianshanmen Massacre, and currently in real time with the massive cover up over the origins of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)—the CCP is [reframing history](#) as well as current events with a pro-CCP narrative by employing a propaganda and disinformation campaign that also targets [educational institutions](#) and cultural industries.

As Taiwan’s democratically elected president begins her second term, the contrast spotlighted in Pottinger’s speech could not be clearer. Taiwan and China represent two starkly different paths taken by Chinese-speaking societies. On the one hand, Taiwan’s thriving democracy emerged from decades of struggle against one-party rule and in which a recent [Pew Survey](#) showed 68 percent favored closer relations with the United States. On the other hand, China developed into an increasingly authoritarian, revisionist power that is an adversarial competitor of the United States, which in some ways still bears the trappings of the government that the student protestors sought to change over a century ago. What paths China takes at the outset of the 21st century could very well shape not only its own fate, but also the future of the free world.

**The main point:** A recent speech commemorating China’s May Fourth Movement by a senior White House official highlighted Taiwan’s democracy as compared to China’s political evolution. In turn, China’s response has shed light on Xi Jinping’s ongoing campaign to reshape historical narratives in the CCP’s favor.

## China has South China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone: Taiwan

On May 4, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) may have finally put to rest long-held suspicions by many security experts that the People's Republic has established an [air defense identification zone](#) (ADIZ) over the hotly-contested South China Sea. An ADIZ refers to airspace over land or water, in which the country [operating the zone](#) could require incoming aircraft to identify themselves and have control over their flight paths in the interest of national security. The purported intelligence disclosed by the Taiwanese government is the first acknowledgement by an official source that China has an ADIZ over the disputed region. The ADIZ has neither been confirmed by the Chinese government nor has it been corroborated by other official or authoritative sources as of this writing.

The confirmation by Taiwan's MND followed media speculation sparked by Defense Minister Yen Teh-Fa's (嚴德發) [statement](#) at a legislative hearing earlier that day. According to local media reports, Yen's statement was made in response to a question about ADIZs around Taiwan by an opposition lawmaker. In that exchange, the Defense Minister reportedly [stated](#): "To the south of our country is the Philippines' [ADIZ], to the north is China's East China Sea [ADIZ]; and China has two identification zones: one is the East China Sea, the other is in the South China Sea." Some observers accused the defense minister of making a gaffe and the Defense Ministry later clarified that China had already stated its intention to establish one in the South China Sea although it has not formally declared one.

Revelation by the Tsai administration of the South China Sea ADIZ follows other public reporting that points to an uptick in [Chinese activities](#) in the region that began in mid-April, suggesting that Beijing may be using the global distraction caused by the COVID-19 crisis to consolidate control over the region. Most notably, Beijing announced on April 18 that the PRC State Council has approved the establishment of two districts, Xisha (西沙) and Nansha (南沙), below Sansha City (三沙市) in Hainan Province. [According to CGTN](#), "Xisha District will administer the Xisha and Zhongsha islands (中沙群島) and their surrounding waters, with the district government located on Yongxing Island (永興島, Woody Island)," while Nansha District will govern "Nansha Is-

land (南沙群島, Spratly Islands) and its surrounding waters," with the administration "located on Yongshu Jiao (永暑礁)." Subsequently, Vietnam and the Philippines [accused](#) China of a "serious violation of sovereignty." China previously [announced](#) the creation of Sansha as a district level unit with jurisdiction over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in 2007, only to [upgrade it](#) into a prefecture-level city administrative unit in 2012.

China's purported decision to establish a South China Sea ADIZ—since Beijing has not officially announced one yet—follows a [similar move](#) in 2013, when China established an ADIZ in the East China Sea. Then president of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), in reference to the Chinese decision, stated: "The move does not bring positive development to cross-strait relations. In the future, we will talk to mainland China and ask them not to set up a similar ADIZ over the South China Sea." When the East China Sea ADIZ was announced, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman [clearly stated](#) that "China will establish other air defense identification zones at an appropriate time after completing preparations." Publicly available resources did not indicate whether Beijing had provided prior notification to Taiwan if and when it was planning to establish an ADIZ in the South China Sea.

As early as 2015, American policymakers [worried openly](#) about the establishment of an ADIZ in the South China Sea. The late Senator John McCain [noted](#): "They build runways; they are going to put weapons there, and the next thing you will see the Chinese do is when an American aircraft [flies by], whether being a commercial craft or what, they will say 'identify yourself'—establishing an Air Defense Identification Zone, which then means territorial sovereignty."

For countries in the region, this is already old news. According to the former acting chief justice of the Philippines' Supreme Court, [Antonio Carpio](#), China has already been enforcing a quasi-ADIZ in the South China Sea, reportedly warning Philippine planes flying over the Spratlys via radio to "stay away from the area." [Similar warnings](#) have been sent to military and civilian flights from other countries, including the United States and Australia.

According to [one expert](#), China may have been holding off on announcing a South China Sea air defense zone

only until it is able to implement it. Indeed, the People's Liberation Army has been expanding radar surveillance infrastructure over the region. As former Pentagon official Lt. Col. (ret.) Mark Stokes mapped out in a [2018 study](#) published by the Project 2049 Institute, China has already established a robust radar surveillance infrastructure ostensibly for a South China Sea ADIZ, with at least two regiments and four brigades. According to [Stokes](#): "For the PRC, diminishing Taiwan's air space would play into its strategic objectives and claims over disputed territories in the region."

At the same time, the Chinese military has been ramping up military exercises in the South China Sea. Recently, Japan's Kyodo News [reported](#) that the PLA is planning to hold a large-scale beach landing exercise near China's Hainan Province in August, with a scenario of capturing the Dongsha Islands (東沙群島, Pratas Islands), currently controlled by Taiwan.

According to a [professor](#) at the Honolulu-based Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies:

*"The utility of an ADIZ goes beyond the military realm and an ADIZ does not need to be effectively enforced in order to bring benefits to the country that declares it. As with other policy tools, it can perform political, diplomatic and legal functions. An ADIZ can perform one or more of at least six functions. Two of these functions (early warning mechanism and exclusion zone) require effective enforcement, while three other (sovereignty marker, bargaining chip and signaling device) rely more on a formal declaration. One of the functions (deterrent) can only work without a declaration of the related ADIZ."*

Whether Beijing in fact has a South China Sea ADIZ will only be clear when it formally declares one. While Beijing's recent move to establish administrative districts for both the Paracel and Spratly islands appears intended to reinforce existing sovereignty claims without a formal declaration, the revelation from Taiwan about China's ADIZ in the South China Sea, if true, have broader implications. Beijing's moves to exert additional administrative controls and expanding its military infrastructure over the region seem to be, at the very least, precursors to a formal declaration of a South China Sea ADIZ in only a matter of time.

**The main point:** Beijing's steps to expand control through administrative means and surveillance infrastructure over the South China Sea appears consistent with Taipei's disclosure that China has established an ADIZ over the region.

## Stepping Up Taiwan's Links with Malaysia

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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In early May, Malaysia's defense minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, [praised Taiwan](#) for its relative success in keeping the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection and mortality rates low. [He observed that](#) Taiwanese citizens wear masks, maintain social distance, and wash their hands frequently to maintain personal hygiene and argued that Malaysians should learn from the Taiwanese people's [self-discipline](#) in following government guidelines. The Malaysian government's praise of Taiwan marked a positive tone during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic after a [ban on Taiwanese travelers](#) to the Malaysian state of Sarawak, ostensibly due to [pressure from China](#), hit a sour note with Taipei. Indeed, the looming presence of [China](#) in Malaysia's national development and foreign policy priorities has impeded new and significant breakthroughs in Taiwan's relations with Malaysia. Although both sides have enjoyed longstanding [economic and cultural links](#), Taiwan and Malaysia have often looked past each other and prioritized other regional partners.

### **Malaysia's Look East Policy Now Includes China**

Learning lessons from the experiences of other countries has been a persistent theme in Malaysia's foreign policy. Malaysia's [Look East Policy](#) (向東學習政策), introduced by then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in [1982](#), elevated the industrialized economies of [Japan and South Korea](#) as models for national development. Mahathir wanted Malaysia to [emulate East Asian work ethics](#) and personal values, pointing to Japan's [culture of meticulousness](#) in creating high-quality national

products. Malaysia's Look East Policy not only brought the country [economically closer to Japan](#), but it also contributed to the [industrialization](#) of Malaysia's economy and helped to build its [automobile industry](#). "Malaysia can take a leaf out of the success stories of these two countries, and weave it into our own culture," [Mahathir said](#) to college students in 2019.

During his second tenure as prime minister starting in 2018, Mahathir renewed his Look East Policy's focus on Japan and South Korea, while also [adding China](#). Taken together, they constitute the [three main Asian economies](#) that Malaysia should target in its foreign economic relations, Mahathir said. Furthermore, he observed that [Asian economic growth](#) was mainly driven by Japan, followed by South Korea, but now China's time had come. Mahathir pointed to China's [large amount of capital](#) available for investment and [new technologies](#), and said he hopes Malaysian companies can [learn from Chinese companies](#) that have become world-class players in an effort to achieve Malaysia's goal to become a [high-income country](#). Perhaps owing to Malaysia's [rivalry](#) with Chinese-dominant Singapore and inter-ethnic relations within Malaysia, the prime minister argued that Malaysians—in particular the ethnic Malay majority—should adopt the [work ethic of ethnic Chinese](#) to achieve economic success, both as an ethnic group and a nation. According to Mahathir, Malays have [lost in economic competition](#) with ethnic Chinese residents – despite the former enjoying various forms of government assistance – due to [relatively lax work attitudes](#) among Malays.

### ***Rising China Factor***

When Mahathir became prime minister again in 2018, there were hopes that he would [rebalance Malaysia's foreign relations](#) away from excessive dependence on China. Mahathir said he would reconsider "[unfair](#)" Chinese investment projects under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative) that were signed by his predecessor Najib Razak. The Mahathir government canceled but later revived a major [Chinese train project](#) in northern Malaysia, though it axed Chinese-backed [petroleum and natural gas pipeline](#) projects in Sabah. Despite Mahathir's rhetoric against his political opponent Najib, both prime ministers saw the benefits of closer political and [economic relations with China](#).

Prior to his sudden [resignation](#) in February 2020, Mahathir had underscored Malaysia's pragmatic approach to relations with China and Taiwan. He said his country wants to [trade with both economies](#) and does not want to become [entangled in cross-Strait affairs](#). "We can't ignore [that] China is a very big market. But on the other hand, Taiwan has long relation[s] with us. Even before we had relation[s] with China, we already had relation[s] with Taiwan," [he said](#) in a 2018 interview.

Malaysia [established diplomatic relations](#) with the Republic of China (ROC) in 1964, which lasted until 1974, when Kuala Lumpur switched recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Even in the absence of formal diplomatic relations, Taiwan enjoys an overall positive image in Malaysia due to a long history of [educational exchanges](#) and [people-to-people interactions](#). Furthermore, for a small country that is also a [strategic maritime hub](#) along the Strait of Malacca, Malaysia has benefited from [balancing its diplomacy](#) among many nations and diversifying its foreign economic partners, which include Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, the United States, Singapore, and other neighboring countries.

### ***Shifting Economic and Trade Dynamics***

Trade and investment lie at the core of Taiwan's relations with Malaysia. In the 1990s, [Taiwan](#) was Malaysia's largest investment partner. At the height of Taiwanese investment in Malaysia in 2015, Taiwan was Malaysia's fourth-largest source of foreign investment, boasting a total investment of [USD \\$12.1 billion](#). Since then, other foreign countries, such as China, Japan, Singapore, and the United States have become major investors in Malaysia. In 2019, [the United States](#) overtook China as Malaysia's top investment source as US companies shifted production out of China to avoid US tariffs erected during the US-China trade war. At the same time, Malaysia has [fallen behind](#) its regional competitors in attracting redirected investments from China. Many foreign companies, including [Taiwanese businesses](#), that were previously operating in China have increasingly shifted their investments to other ASEAN countries, notably Vietnam.

Nonetheless, Taiwan continues to rank among the [top 10 foreign investors](#) in Malaysia. Around [1,700 Tai-](#)

[Taiwanese companies](#) have invested in more than [2,500 projects](#) in Malaysia, with approximately [USD \\$12.4 billion](#) in total investments. Taiwanese businesses have left a positive footprint on Malaysia's economic growth through the [creation of jobs](#) and [technological upgrades](#), said Taiwan's Representative to Malaysia Anne Hung (洪慧珠). Taiwanese businesses prefer to invest in [Kuala Lumpur](#), the country's financial center, followed by [Penang and Johor](#) in the northern and southern parts of Malaysia, respectively, according to Taipei's former Representative to Malaysia James Chi-Ping Chang (章計平). Malaysia's political stability, sound infrastructure and investment laws, and common use of English and Chinese are [attractive features](#) for Taiwanese businesses. However, a major shortcoming is Malaysia's [labor shortage](#) and reliance on foreign workers. [Taiwanese companies](#) operating in Malaysia have in the past complained about the domestic shortage of workers.

Taiwan is the [sixth-largest trade partner](#) of Malaysia, while Malaysia is the [seventh-largest trade partner](#) for Taiwan. Malaysia was Taiwan's [second-largest Southeast Asian trade partner](#) in 2019, trailing only Singapore. Taiwan imported [USD \\$10.4 billion](#) from Malaysia in 2019, while exporting [USD \\$9.4 billion](#) to the Southeast Asian country the same year. [Taiwanese exports](#) to Malaysia have included integrated circuits and components, gasoline, basic metals, steel products, and machinery. Meanwhile, Taiwan [mainly imports](#) liquefied natural gas (LNG), fuel oil, machinery, and chemical products from Malaysia. Taiwan imports about [99 percent](#) of its natural gas, with most of its LNG supplies from Qatar ([28 percent](#)), Australia ([26 percent](#)), and Malaysia ([15 percent](#)). As the island purchases more LNG supplies from abroad amid a [reduction](#) in nuclear power and coal consumption, Taipei has an incentive to cultivate steady LNG trade relations with Malaysia.

### ***Exchanges with Malaysia's Ethnic Groups***

Malaysia is a [multi-ethnic and multi-lingual](#) country. Historically, the [ethnic Chinese population](#) in Malaysia has served as a bridge to Taiwan and has played a key role in fostering close economic, cultural, and people-to-people ties between the two sides. Given that many ethnic Chinese families in Malaysia prefer to send their children abroad for Chinese-language training as well as post-secondary education, rather than

have them attend Malaysian schools and universities, Taiwan is a natural choice for Chinese Malaysians. [1] Indeed, Malaysian students comprise the [largest source](#) of foreign students in Taiwan. In 2017, as many as [17,000 Malaysians](#) studied in Taiwan, nearly three times higher than the number of Malaysian students studying in China. That same year, a record high of [500,000 Malaysian tourists](#) visited Taiwan. In 2018, more than [380,000 Taiwanese](#) traveled to Malaysia. However, just as Taiwan's exchanges with ethnic Chinese Malaysians have proven beneficial in promoting bilateral commercial and social exchanges, they also result in a shortcoming, in that Taiwan's [contacts with other ethnic groups](#) in Malaysia—such as the Malays and Indians—tend to lag behind.

In recent years, however—particularly under Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) [New Southbound Policy](#) (新南向政策)—Taiwan has been eager to enhance trade and other engagement with [Muslim populations in Southeast Asia](#), including ethnic Malays in Malaysia. Taiwan has significantly ramped up its eating facilities for Muslim tourists, with nearly [200 halal-certified](#) restaurants and hotels. The [Taiwan Halal Center](#) opened in Taipei in 2017 to assist local businesses with expanding trade and business ties with Muslim markets. Additionally, Taiwan's government has worked with the [Malaysian Islamic Development Department](#) to gain halal certification for Taiwanese businesses, food, and other products. In April 2018, the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) with the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA, 中華民國對外貿易發展協會) to enhance bilateral trade cooperation in the halal food sector. As a result, Taiwan is now considered one of the most [Muslim-friendly](#) non-Muslim countries, a status that can potentially boost its people-to-people diplomacy with Malaysia's dominant Malay population.

Taiwan's relationship with Malaysia includes a long history of close people-to-people exchanges as well as trade and investment ties, yet there is still room for substantial growth. Malaysia's turn towards East Asian countries has traditionally prioritized economic relations with Japan and South Korea, with a more recent emphasis on China. Beijing's growing [economic and political clout](#) in Malaysia, coupled with Malaysia's

[growth in foreign investments](#) from many countries, has often caused Taiwan to get lost in the crowd.

Moving forward, Taiwan could leverage its expertise in agriculture, medical treatment, and science and technology to broaden and deepen bilateral cooperation with the Malaysian government, such as by sharing public health knowledge on combatting the coronavirus. In a more pressing and perhaps sensitive arena, Malaysia would also be keen in learning from Taipei on countering Chinese [influence operations](#) that are targeting the country's sizeable ethnic Chinese population, and could work with Malaysian actors to counter China's disinformation campaign. Over the long-run, Taipei and Kuala Lumpur may find more areas of collaboration as Beijing becomes more assertive in the Indo-Pacific region.

**The main point:** The development of Taiwan-Malaysia relations has long been centered on economic relations, educational exchanges, and people-to-people ties. However, Malaysia's economic and political turn towards China has impeded new breakthroughs in the Taiwan-Malaysia relationship.

[1] Author's observations during a trip to Malaysia, July 2016.

## US, Taiwan Aim to Rectify Missile Imbalance in the Indo-Pacific

By: J. Michael Cole

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Amid ongoing efforts by China to alter the status quo in the Indo-Pacific, Washington is preparing to introduce a new series of land-based, long-range cruise missiles in the region to address the growing missile gap with China. Other security partners of the United States, including Taiwan and possibly Japan, have also initiated programs to deploy their own missiles or are considering new opportunities to do so.

According to a special report by [Reuters](#), the White House budget request for 2021 includes provisions

to equip US Marines with a land-based version of the Tomahawk long-range cruise missile. Besides land-attack cruise missiles (LACM), the request—which was supported by military commanders during Congressional testimonies in March—also calls for speeding up the delivery of long-range anti-ship missiles ("[Naval Strike Missile](#)") to the region.

Over the past two decades, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has dramatically expanded and modernized its capabilities in the region, with the acquisition, development, and deployment of various naval, aerial, and missile platforms. In the East and South China Sea, the PLA Navy (PLAN) has sought to establish a new status quo through the frequent presence of large displacement vessels equipped with a variety of anti-ship missiles, as well as the introduction of an aircraft carrier. During that period, China's land-based missile force has greatly improved, both in terms of range and accuracy of delivery, through a combination of short-, medium-, and long-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and artillery. It is estimated that Taiwan alone—a [key target](#) of the PLA—faces a missile threat that [includes](#) anywhere between 1,500 and 2,000 short- and medium-range ground-to-ground ballistic missiles from the Dong Feng category—including the medium-range DF-16—as well as hundreds of LACMs.

The PLA has also refined its anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities, which are believed to be principally aimed at deterring or countering the US military in the early phases of a regional conflict. China has an estimated three-to-one [advantage in cruise missiles](#) over the US within the region.

### **Changing the Equation**

Until recently, the regional response to growing PLA capabilities and assertiveness in the region has been largely passive, allowing China to create new facts on the ground, as it has done to great effect in the South China Sea, over whose expanse of water it claims full sovereignty. At the same time, China has limited itself to improving missile-defense outlays, hardening C4ISR (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) architecture and expanding systems redundancy. However, continued Chinese assertiveness and escalating tensions between the United States and China have compelled

a reassessment of the allied defensive posture in the Asia-Pacific region. If the above-mentioned White House budget is any indication, there will be a growing focus on counterforce—that is, the ability to strike military targets along coastal areas and deep in the mainland of China. Given the formidable air defenses deployed by China in recent years—thanks in large part to the acquisition of advanced air defense systems from Russia such as the [S-400](#)—China’s adversaries have recognized the inherent difficulties in safely penetrating China’s airspace to deliver air-to-ground ordnance and are instead putting a premium on LACMs.

Within the region, Taiwan has taken the lead in developing a counterforce missile capability. Notably, this includes the development by the National Chung-shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST, 國家中山科學研究院) of the [Hsiung Feng \(“Brave Wind”\) 2E LACM](#), which was mass-produced and deployed beginning in 2011. The missile—which comes in the form of both fixed- and road-mobile launch systems—has an estimated range of 650 km and a payload of 225 kg. Over the years, US opposition to Taiwan’s acquisition or development of purely offensive defense technology has weakened in the face of a growing threat—both in quantitative and qualitative terms—from the PLA. This may explain why Taiwan was able to get away with producing the HF-2E. More recently, Taiwan announced it had test-fired a new variant of the missile, the [Yun Feng \(“Cloud Peak”\) LACM](#), with a reported range of 1,500 km. The new missile will give Taiwan the ability to strike airports, harbors, and command centers throughout China.

Although the new missiles technically provide Taiwan with the ability to deliver payloads deeper inside China, the US State Department does not appear to have opposed the move—at least not publicly—and, if so, would represent a meaningful shift from its longstanding focus on the transfer of only “defensive” technology. Such an adjustment is arguably defensible on the grounds that, while Taiwan adhered to the [Missile Technology Control Regime \(MTCR\) regulations](#) (which restricted Taipei from acquiring the technology necessary to extend the range of its missiles or increase the size of its warheads), China’s missile development and acquisitions were continuing apace and the corrosion in quantitative and qualitative terms of Taiwan’s de-

fense capability relative to that of the PRC necessitated an adjustment in that policy.

In August 2019, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper [said](#) that following the US [withdrawal](#) from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty that same month, the United States was hoping that conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missiles would be deployed in Asia and Europe. As the landmark Cold War [treaty](#) between the United States and the Soviet Union prohibited all land-based ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 km and 5,500 km with both nuclear or conventional warheads, this represented a major development.

Although Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono downplayed the prospect that Japan could “host” intermediate-range conventional missiles in its territory at the time, new [reports](#) in April suggested that Tokyo and Washington were holding discussions on the subject. While government officials in Japan are aware of the potential for domestic opposition to the use of Japanese territory to launch attacks on military bases in a foreign country, the [threat perception of China](#) may have mitigated such attitudes over time and made it more feasible for Japan to adopt such a policy. While no such opposition has emerged in Taiwan, some opposition lawmakers within the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) have expressed fears over Taiwan getting “too close” to the Americans or unduly alienating Beijing with a more defiant military posture.

### ***The Post-INF World***

The US’ withdrawal from the INF has permitted the [testing, in August 2019, of a ground-launched variant](#) of the Tomahawk Block IV cruise missile (the missile has traditionally been ship-launched) using a Mark 41 Vertical Launch System. The Tomahawk missile has a range of approximately 1,600 km. In December 2019, the US Air Force, in conjunction with the Strategic Capabilities Office, also tested a [ground-launched ballistic missile](#).

While the introduction of a few medium-range cruise missiles in the region would not immediately alter the balance of power, a triumvirate of countries—the US, Japan, and Taiwan—equipped with such technology and working in concert could pose a serious challenge to the PLA in the long term. In particular, the three vec-

tors of attack would make it more difficult for China to counter or defend against the threat. A truly optimal, concerted counterforce effort involving US security partners in the region would also factor in the need for intelligence-sharing, using unmanned and satellite imagery, target acquisition, and tracking.

Unsurprisingly, Beijing has reacted angrily to the possibility of a new US missile strategy for the region. In early May, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [stated](#) that, "recently, the United States has gotten worse, stepping up its pursuit of a so-called 'Indo-Pacific strategy' that seeks to deploy new weapons, including ground-launched intermediate-range missiles, in the Asia-Pacific region ... China firmly opposes that."

Critics of the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty and new missile strategy for the Indo-Pacific have [argued](#) that this move could spark a new arms race in the region. Lost in this narrative, however, is the fact that a more lax defensive posture over the past decade has allowed China—with tech transfers from Russia—to substantially alter the balance of power in Asia. There is no indication that continuing this strategy would in any way compel decisionmakers in Beijing and within the PLA to shift course. Rather than accede to China's territorial ambitions regarding Taiwan, the East and South China Sea, the new ground-based LACM strategy represents a necessary—albeit undeniably escalatory—adjustment. Washington's allowing Taiwan to embark on a medium-range LACM program also suggests that the US Department of Defense is considering a role for Taiwan as part of that new strategy.

**The main point:** Following its withdrawal from the INF Treaty, the US is testing and considering the deployment of medium-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific region to counter China's growing military. Taiwan and Japan could also join forces in this initiative.

## Defending Taiwan Short of Diplomatic Recognition

By: Patrick M. Cronin and Ryan Neuhard

*Dr. Patrick M. Cronin is Asia-Pacific Security Chair, and Ryan Neuhard is a Research Associate at the Hudson Institute.*

On May 13, the *USS McCampbell* guided-missile destroyer [sailed through the Taiwan Strait](#). This passage marked the sixth time a US Navy vessel transited the Strait this year in what has become a routine demonstration of the United States' commitment to ensuring China's relationship with Taiwan remains peaceful. The *USS McCampbell's* transit comes amidst heightened tension between [China and the United States](#) and between China and Taiwan. People in Taiwan are understandably frustrated by [China's mishandling of the coronavirus](#), [obstruction of Taiwan's bid](#) for World Health Assembly (WHA) observer status, and [interference in Taiwan's January 2020 presidential election](#). If that were not enough, last week [rumors surfaced](#) of a provocative Chinese military exercise planned for August that would simulate an amphibious assault on Taiwan. Because Beijing continues to threaten force, many Americans are eager to send a stronger signal to China's leadership to deter a military attack on Taiwan. Others are searching for ways to impose costs on China for its early mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak. Some of these observers have begun calling for the United States to send China a message by reestablishing official relations with Taiwan and formally recognizing Taiwan as an independent country. High-profile advocates include former National Security Advisor, [John Bolton](#), and the President's son, [Donald Trump Junior](#). Feel-good policy sentiments have serious implications if implemented without qualifications. If done so, they could ultimately jeopardize US national interests and increase Taiwan's risk without providing any material benefits. There are at least three essential considerations to weigh when considering the costs and benefits of extending official recognition and formally recognizing Taiwan as an independent country.

### ***Balance of Three Considerations***

First, it is essential to anticipate China's response. Xi Jinping (习近平) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

are hypersensitive to words and symbolism. They often care more about optics than they do about facts on the ground. Consider China's [meme censoring](#), [surreal parades](#), and [whistleblower abductions](#). These efforts demonstrate the lengths to which China's leadership will go to *appear* successful, even when it undermines actual effectiveness and sacrifices national resources.

The same applies to Taiwan's independence. For China's leadership, the optics matter more than the facts on the ground. Taiwan is entirely self-governing and maintains *de facto* diplomatic relations with the United States and many other countries through its unofficial embassies. *De facto* independence is the number one issue for Taiwan and the United States, but it is a distant second for China's government.

China's top priority is preventing a declaration of Taiwan independence or formal diplomatic relations that differentiate between Taiwan and mainland China. Either of these actions would violate China's "One-China" principle and officially separate a part of the territory from China. Xi has [publicly vowed](#) never to allow Taiwan's formal independence. Beijing can live with the status quo for now, even though it never ceases to push unilaterally and pull Taiwan closer into unification. Formal independence or formal recognition would arguably be the most significant loss for the regime in China's history under the CCP, with the party centenary occurring next year. If the United States and Taiwan cross that line, it would not just create a pretext for Xi to seize Taiwan with military force; it would almost certainly create a requirement for him to do so. Failing to act would be a political death sentence for Xi.

Second, it is important to anticipate Taiwan's ability to survive the consequences of formal recognition. Taiwan's military can impose painful costs on China but cannot win. They cannot prevent China's military from occupying Taiwan. Even with the support of the US military, the tyranny of time, distance, and attrition from China's anti-access area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities leave the serious possibility that China could quickly seize Taiwan before anyone could stop them. China would suffer tremendous human, financial, and material losses and forever damage its relationship with the United States, but it could succeed. Those costs have been sufficient to deter China's leaders up to this point. However, if the political costs of inaction ever

outweighed the political costs of war, China's leadership could accept the costs of war. Bear in mind that the [US loses](#) some serious simulations of Taiwan scenarios.

Third, it is crucial to weigh the potential risk of instigating a Taiwan invasion against the material benefits of formal recognition for the US national interest and Taiwan's national interest. That is easy to do because there are arguably no tangible benefits. For the United States and Taiwan, formal recognition of Taiwan is a purely symbolic act.

Yet, a Taiwan invasion would carry high costs. For Taiwan, the price is existential. An attack would spell the destruction of infrastructure, the death of civilians, and likely the end of Taiwan's freedom. For the United States, the price of an invasion would be paid in blood and influence. The US stands ready to defend our partners in Taiwan. Still, it would cost the lives of many members of the US military and, should China succeed, it would permanently damage the credibility of the United States as a security guarantor for other allies and partners in the region.

On balance, formal recognition arguably carries all risk and no tangible reward for either the United States or Taiwan. If the United States wants to strengthen Taiwan's independence or punish China, there are better alternatives. These options center on improving Taiwan's defenses for denial or punishment and enhancing the scope and depth of engagement.

### ***Better Ways to Support Taiwan***

One option is to encourage Taiwan to develop asymmetric, A2/AD capabilities. The [Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018](#) calls on the US government to provide Taiwan with arms that include asymmetric capabilities that are integrated, mobile, survivable, and cost-effective. Policymakers should follow that guidance.

As former Trump administration DoD strategist [Elbridge Colby argues](#), the United States should encourage different allies to focus on different roles tailored to their military environment and capacity. Front-line allies like Taiwan should focus on capabilities that blunt China's attacks on their territory and restrict China's ability to maneuver through nearby airspace and waterways.

For example, Taiwan could consider acquiring capabili-

ties and employing the operational concepts described in the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment's "[Hard ROC 2.0](#)" concept. Key features include "guerilla sea denial," which emphasizes unmanned underwater vehicles, midget submarines, land-based coastal defenses, and offensive mining rather than the current emphasis on surface combatants. For surface combatants already on hand, Taiwan could invest in relatively inexpensive countermeasures, like [missile decoys](#), to try to increase their survivability. The "Hard ROC 2.0" concept also features "guerilla air defense," which calls for a distributed and resilient network of layered ground-based air defense systems that employ camouflage, concealment, deception, and mobility instead of the current focus on fixed-wing air-to-air warfare. The concept's "layered ground defense" would entail counter-landing operations, followed by hybrid and urban warfare, then guerilla warfare. The layered ground defense requires landmines, mobile firepower like truck-based multiple-launch rocket systems and howitzers, and flexible ground forces capable of operating in an information-denied environment.

This option would also include discouraging Taiwan from wasting resources on small numbers of expensive yet vulnerable high-end platforms. For example, Taiwan should stop procuring [amphibious landing helicopter dock ships](#), [M1 Abrams main battle tanks](#), and [fixed-wing fighter jets](#). These capabilities simply do not fit Taiwan's security and geographic environment.

A second option is to help Taiwan supplement its deterrent by denial capabilities with "[deterrence by punishment](#)" capabilities. Instead of threatening China's invading forces, these capabilities would seek to deter China by threatening countervalue targets with conventional weapons.

For example, the United States could help Taiwan develop or acquire inexpensive solid-fuel medium-range ballistic missiles, like India's Agni-II or China's DF-21s, but with upgraded guidance systems for greater accuracy. Once Taiwan assembled a large inventory, it could credibly threaten countervalue targets deep within China with missile salvos that could launch on short notice before a disarming strike arrives. Other countervalue weapons could include cluster-munitions or incendiary weapons. Given that a Chinese invasion is an existential threat, Taiwan could credibly threaten

non-military targets that have significant political value to CCP leadership.

In addition to helping Taiwan with either defense by denial or defense by punishment, the United States should clarify its commitment to stand up to aggression. Without giving Taiwan any incentive to deliberately jab at Beijing, administration officials should [remove some of the ambiguity](#) about what they think privately; namely, that an unprovoked attack on the people of Taiwan would trigger a US military response.

A third option is to implement the recommendations from the 2018 [Taiwan Travel Act](#) and increase engagement between the US and Taiwanese officials at all levels, including cabinet-level officials and general officers. Increasing the frequency and seniority of meetings sends a message to Beijing about US commitment to Taiwan. Still, they could also allow working-level and senior policymakers to flesh out substantive issues in greater depth, including defense contingency planning, intelligence-sharing, cybersecurity, and joint messaging.

The United States could also consider increasing the number of Defense Department career civilian or non-combat military personnel who stay in Taiwan on a rotating basis to serve as trainers, advisors, and liaisons to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense. Not only would a larger semi-permanent presence help enhance US-Taiwan cooperation, but it would also reinforce the US deterrent's credibility by effectively creating a large tripwire force.

### ***The TAIPEI Act***

The United States government should also fully implement the [TAIPEI Act of 2019](#). The act is a matter of law, and the US government has a responsibility to execute it. The TAIPEI Act calls on the President and other representatives of the United States to advocate for "Taiwan's membership in all international organizations in which statehood is not a requirement and in which the United States is also a participant; and for Taiwan to be granted observer status in other appropriate international organizations." This includes the World Health Assembly (WHA) that governs the World Health Organization (WHO).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan has repeatedly

contributed to global health and has more than proved its worthiness of WHA observer status. Taiwan provided the WHO with [the earliest warnings](#) about the then-undisclosed COVID-19 outbreak and later the evidence of human-to-human transmission. Taiwan has donated generous amounts of [high-quality medical aid](#) to the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, and has provided the world with a remarkably effective [model for managing the COVID-19 outbreak](#). The WHA would benefit from Taiwan's participation as an observer, and the United States and other like-minded countries should [continue to push for Taiwan's admission](#).

The TAIPEI Act also calls for the US administration to advocate for Taiwan's membership or observer status in organizations when the US negotiates "any relevant bilateral engagements between the United States and the People's Republic of China, including leader summits and the US-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue." US policymakers can and should consider doing that as well.

None of these actions constitute formal recognition of Taiwan as an independent country or violate the United States' "One-China" policy—which provides a less rigid definition of cross-strait relations than Beijing's preferred "One-China" principle. Further, these actions would allow Taiwan to contribute to the international system and ensure that other states are invested in Taiwan's survival.

### **Strategic Context**

The United States' complicated relationship with Taiwan and China is a product of 70 years of evolving US strategy and hard-nosed negotiation. Despite their imperfections, the three joint communiqués ([1972](#), [1979](#), [1982](#)), [Six Assurances](#), [Taiwan Relations Act](#), and other acts of Congress have prevented armed conflict, preserved Taiwan's autonomy, and served the US interest.

The foreign policy framework that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger helped to create back in 1972 remains a crucial legacy from which current US policy must evolve. The nearly half-century ["One-China" policy](#) needs to be adapted, not abandoned. The US acknowledgment that "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China," was predicated on Beijing's pledge to resolve the Taiwan question peacefully. Likewise,

the US promise to gradually wind down arms support for Taiwan was premised on China's commitment to a diminution of tension.

In recent years, China has opted for a more assertive policy in general and a more high-pressure strategy against Taiwan in particular. The United States should be doing everything short of outright diplomatic recognition to boost Taiwan's confidence and capabilities. Accordingly, it is fitting for the United States to make corresponding adjustments to maintain an equilibrium. The US executive branch has a growing toolkit backed by legislative mandates. Mechanisms like adjusted arms sales, enhanced engagement between officials, and advocating for Taiwan's inclusion in international meetings can deliver that balance.

Make no mistake: Americans are prepared to fight and die to protect Taiwanese from naked aggression. But we should not go so far as provoke a fight just to prove it.

**The main point:** As Xi Jinping ratchets pressure on Taiwan to stoke nationalist fervor as compensation for economic and political torpor, the United States needs to signal clearly its political, security, and economic support. However, it should stop short of dramatic gestures like restoring full diplomatic relations with Taiwan, as this almost surely hands Xi an ultimatum: use force or lose power.

## **39-Year-Old Murder Mystery Corroborates Congressional Concerns**

By: Shirley Kan

*Shirley Kan is an independent specialist in Asian security affairs whose service for the US government has included working for Congress at the Congressional Research Service (CRS). She is a founding member of GTI's Advisory Board.*

Taiwan's Transitional Justice Commission (TJC) just released a report on a murder mystery with US ties, vindicating the US Congress' historical alarms about violations of human rights under Taiwan's past martial law. The TJC found that pro-democracy activist

and US professor Chen Wen-chen (陳文成) probably was murdered in 1981 with the involvement of the Taiwan Garrison Command (the past powerful internal security force). Today, some US officials newer to military-to-military (mil-to-mil) engagement or civilian work with Taiwan can be surprised to learn of its past egregious experiences. On this day of President Tsai Ing-wen's second inauguration, senior US officials (especially in the State Department) congratulate the Taiwanese on their democracy. This gain comes after a tortuous route. What are the issues for policy?

### ***Murder Mystery***

In May 2018, President Tsai presided over a [ceremony](#) to establish the TJC. Around that time, she defined transitional justice as an important effort for national unity, so all Taiwan's people recognize a shared past and face a shared future. She said that transitional justice would reach reconciliation by telling the truth about cases of repression under martial law (1949-1987).

Dominated by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and then his son, Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), had ruled Taiwan in that authoritarian period. The KMT imposed and later lifted martial law. Historically called Dang Wai (黨外, or "outside the party," namely, the KMT), Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was founded in September 1986. President Chiang Ching-kuo allowed the opposition DPP to form, even before he ended martial law in July 1987.

On May 4, 2020, Taiwan's TJC reported on its [investigation](#) into the case of pro-democracy activist Chen Wen-chen. Using evidence from newly declassified files, the commission found that Chen was likely murdered in 1981. Previous reports claimed the cause of death was a suicide or an accident. The TJC implicated the now-disbanded internal security force called the Taiwan Garrison Command (TGC).

In 1981, Chen was a 31-year-old US professor of mathematics who taught in Pennsylvania. The TJC recounted that Taiwan's government carried out surveillance of Chen and his family for a year before his death, even in the United States. The government monitored Chen's activities to foster freedom in Taiwan, including donations to the pro-democracy publication called Formosa Magazine (Formosa is a historical name for Taiwan).

Then, when he was back in Taiwan, the TGC interrogated him on July 2. The next day, his body was found at National Taiwan University in Taipei, his alma mater. However, he died elsewhere and his body was moved, according to the TJC. A forensics expert concluded that a blunt object caused two wounds on Chen's back, injuries not consistent with a fall, as previously claimed.

### ***American Soil***

Today, the Republic of China (ROC), commonly called Taiwan, is a beacon of democracy, particularly as a model to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Some US officials and others relatively new to mil-to-mil, diplomatic, or other work with Taiwan can be surprised to learn of its past egregious experiences. Agents even perpetrated abuses on American soil. Struggling against authoritarianism, liberalization occurred due to actions partly by the KMT, DPP, and the United States (particularly Congress).

Congress has played a significant role in fostering freedom in Taiwan as a part of US policy. Starting in 1977, Congress placed pressure (including the leverage of arms sales) on the moderate part of the KMT's authoritarian regime to liberalize the political system. The regime's actions even on US soil against Taiwanese activists prompted greater congressional concern before and after Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing and the passage of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), P.L. 96-8, in 1979.

Representatives Stephen Solarz and Jim Leach as well as Senators Claiborne Pell and Edward Kennedy paid particular attention to repression in Taiwan. Beyond these four Members, the Congress carefully crafted the TRA to cover human rights. Section 2(c) states: "Nothing contained in this Act shall contravene the interest of the United States in human rights, especially with respect to the human rights of all the approximately eighteen million inhabitants of Taiwan. The preservation and enhancement of the human rights of all the people on Taiwan are hereby reaffirmed as objectives of the United States." [1]

Considered by Congress as outrageous operations on US soil, the KMT's activities included the suspected surveillance of professor Chen before his death in 1981. After Chen's death, Representative Solarz said, "what happens in America is primarily the business of

the Congress of the United States, and we cannot and will not tolerate any act to intimidate or harass Taiwanese or other people living in our country. It is high time for the United States to make clear to the world that our soil will not become a playing field for international hoodlums.” [2]

In July and October 1981, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Human Rights and International Organizations held hearings on “Taiwan Agents in America and the Death of Professor Wen-chen Chen.” The hearings found that Chen, a Taiwan-born professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, died in Taiwan on July 3, 1981, while under detention by the TGC that entailed surveillance of him by Taiwan’s security agents operating in the United States. An American forensic scientist testified that Chen was beaten before he was thrown to his death from the fifth floor of the library at National Taiwan University. Reportedly, the TGC interrogated Chen for 13 hours for alleged anti-KMT activities by using tape recordings of his phone calls and speeches in Pittsburgh as well as photographs of his letters written to a jailed dissident named Shih Ming-teh (施明德). Representative Leach said, “at issue is the infiltration of American universities by informants who, directly or indirectly, report to the Taiwan Government.” Leach added, “it would appear that massive violations of US law have been made by Taiwanese officials in this country. It would also appear that information gathered in Pittsburgh is directly responsible for a death in Taiwan.” [3]

Even after this controversy, another high-profile case concerned the murder of author Henry Liu (劉宜良) in California in 1984.

### **Current Issues**

The congressional actions have reaped results. On this day of Tsai’s second inauguration, Members of Congress and other senior US officials congratulate Taiwan’s people for their hard-fought democracy. Nonetheless, new findings about Chen’s murder mystery remind US officials in mil-to-mil and civilian partnerships of Taiwan’s lingering political sensitivities.

Congress was correct to cite comprehensive concerns that covered human rights. Congress was brilliant, without benefit of hindsight or precedent. The

TRA has helped to achieve US objectives. Lester Wolff, then Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, continues to credit the unique TRA (in my interviews and his writings). He wrote, “Taiwan has become an economic success and the most vibrant democracy in that part of the world.” According to Wolff, the TRA does not attempt to determine Taiwan’s destiny, “except to support self-determination for the people of Taiwan.” [4]

Chen’s case invokes an important investment of US policy in Taiwan’s freedom, with returns also for the interests of the United States and other countries. How might US policy treasure and sustain this asset to help protect Taiwan, as it counters the PRC’s threats of coercion and force as well as disinformation and interference?

How is Taiwan contributing to strategic competition with the PRC, as discussed in the National Security Strategy and Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy? How might the United States and other countries support Taiwan as it faces PRC attempts to discredit democracy?

How significant is democracy to US interests in helping Taiwan’s sufficient self-defense, as the TRA stipulates? Since 2018, US officials in the Defense Department have articulated [expanded interests](#) to include democracy in assisting Taiwan to deter China.

What are Taiwan’s current challenges? The State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) reports to Congress on numerous countries. The [report](#) on Taiwan in 2019 expressed US concerns about the PRC’s efforts to censor Taiwanese media outlets based on the conflicting interests of their parent companies in the PRC.

To what extent is Taiwan promoting human rights, particularly in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, and other places? Are any of Taiwan’s companies undermining such rights anywhere?

How can the US-Taiwan partnership promote democracy and good governance globally? For example, in March 2019, the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom visited Taipei to discuss [religious freedom](#) in the Indo-Pacific. In April 2020, the Assistant Secretary of State for the DRL Bureau spoke

at a virtual [workshop](#) on the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) on countering disinformation about COVID-19.

Should foreign countries support Taiwan’s right to self-determination? The legislative history of the TRA showed that the definition of human rights for Section 2(c) referred to the Helsinki Declaration of 1975. That Declaration included respect for human rights as well as the right of self-determination in accordance with the United Nations’ Charter.

**The main point:** Chen’s case confirms congressional concerns. As testament to the TRA, a free Taiwan shares US values and stands with democratic countries.

[1] Shirley Kan, “Democratic Reforms in Taiwan: Issues for Congress,” CRS Report R41263, May 26, 2010.

[2] Richard Bush, *At Cross Purposes* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

[3] Bush, *At Cross Purposes; United Press International*, July 14, 1981; *Newsweek*, August 3, 1981; *Associated Press*, September 12 and 14, 1981; *Pittsburgh Post*, November 9, 2001.

[4] Lester Wolff, Jon Holstine, and John Brady, *A Legislative History of the Taiwan Relations Act (Vol. 4)*, Pacific Community Institute, Inc., 2004.

## Assessing the Arguments for Immediately Extending Diplomatic Recognition to Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

*Michael Mazza is a senior non-resident fellow at GTI. He is also a visiting fellow in foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he analyzes US defense policy in the Asia-Pacific region.*

Should the United States establish formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan? The question received renewed attention in early April when Benny Johnson, chief creative officer for Turning Point USA—a non-profit organization that [seeks](#) “to identify, educate, train, and

organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government”—argued via [tweet](#) that the United States should “immediately recognize Taiwan,” among other actions, “after China Virus dies.” Donald Trump, Jr., the president’s eldest son, [shared](#) the tweet on Facebook with a comment: “I agree. Who is with me?” The post has been liked more than 68,000 times. A month later, [The National Interest](#) and [Foreign Policy](#) published pieces on back-to-back days urging the United States to “recognize Taiwan,” providing two alternative, though related, cases for doing so. This is a topic deserving of serious consideration. A more normal relationship between the United States and Taiwan is merited—as is, arguably, ultimate normalization of ties—but these calls for immediate and unqualified action fall short in making the case effectively.

### Failing to Make the Case

Writing for *The National Interest*, Azeem Ibrahim, program director for displacement and migration at the Center for Global Policy, bases his call for [recognition](#) on Taiwan and China’s comparative performances in handling COVID-19. Unfortunately, miscues in analysis undermine his conclusion.

His first mistake is to describe Taiwan’s government as “pro-independence.” It is decidedly not. President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) [position](#) is that Taiwan already exists as a free and independent state formally known as the Republic of China (ROC). This is, in fact, a status quo position, and as president she has been [clear](#) that she wishes to maintain the cross-Strait status quo. Specifically, President Tsai wants to maintain communication mechanisms with Beijing, she wants to continue to abide by previous cross-Strait agreements, she has pledged to continue upholding the ROC constitution (in which the national boundaries of the state are defined in accordance with “one China”), and she has not taken steps to pursue a fundamental change in Taiwan’s relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

Ibrahim’s second mistake is in getting the history wrong: “If we had acknowledged the fact [that Taiwan is an independent country], if Taiwan had already been accepted as a normal independent member of the UN system and of the WHO as it fully deserves to be, their warnings would have been heard, and the course of

this pandemic could have been very different indeed.” The author here is presumably referring to Washington’s failure to successfully pursue a “two Chinas” or “one China, two governments” approach during the 1970s and to ensure Taipei maintained a seat in the United Nations. This of course fails to take into account the ROC’s own decisions during that time—when it rejected the possibility of dual recognition and of dual seats in the United Nations. In a related matter, Chris Horton, a freelance journalist in Taipei, tells an [illuminating tale](#):

*“In 1981, Chiang Ching-kuo’s (蔣經國) government rejected the International Olympic Committee’s suggestion of competing in the Olympics under the name Taiwan, insisting on a name with a connection to China, settling on the one that Taiwanese athletes still compete under today: Chinese Taipei.”*

This is not ancient history. The Kuomintang—the party of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and Chiang Ching-kuo—is alive and well in Taiwan. The party has changed along with Taiwan, but its complex legacy continues to shape its policies today, as well as debates in Taiwanese society at large. It is not possible to grapple with the question of diplomatic recognition if we do not grapple with how we got here. The history should perhaps have led to a more cautious conclusion. Ibrahim’s, however, is bold:

*“Of course, Beijing will lash against anyone who asks for, or recognizes Taiwanese independence. But the United States is not (yet) constrained by any threat of Chinese backlash. As recognition of our mistakes, as correction for past errors, and in gratitude for showing the world the best way on how to handle such a pandemic, the United States should now, at long last, formally acknowledge Taiwanese reality: the United States should unilaterally recognize Taiwan as an independent country.”*

There are two significant, interrelated issues here. First, the author does not consider that the primary target of “Chinese backlash” would likely be Taiwan, not the United States. Given how infuriating Beijing would find the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the United States and given Bei-

jing’s obvious interest in proving Washington to be a paper tiger, it might well substantially up the pressure on Taipei, potentially including the use of force. Taipei and Washington could each decide that is a risk worth taking, but it is doubtful they would simply dismiss it, as Ibrahim does here.

On that note, and secondly, Ibrahim does not seem to consider the people of Taiwan’s diverse preferences. It is questionable whether the Tsai government would even want the United States to immediately “recognize Taiwan as an independent country,” whatever that would entail. It may be interested in formal diplomatic relations, but there are risks involved in pursuing such a course, as noted. Indeed, the United States could not act “unilaterally” even if it wanted to do so—the establishment of diplomatic relations takes two. An argument for formal recognition that does not take account of Taiwan’s own interests is not an argument that can be taken seriously.

Did the United States make mistakes in its pursuit of normalization with the PRC? Almost certainly. Was the decision to break diplomatic ties with Taipei a betrayal? It is difficult to describe it any other way. Are Taiwan’s current circumstances unjust? Most definitely. Is there an easy fix? Probably not.

### ***Risk a Crisis to Avoid One?***

A journalist based in Taiwan, Hilton Yip, likewise [argued](#) for *Foreign Policy* that the time may be ripe for the United States to “recognize Taiwan.” Like Ibrahim, Yip appears to give little thought to Taiwan’s own preferences, seemingly assuming that if given the opportunity to establish formal ties with Washington, Taipei would jump at the chance. Maybe—but maybe not.

The first two reasons Yip offers for now being the right time could just as well militate against extending diplomatic recognition. China’s handling of COVID-19, its “wolf warrior” diplomacy, and its treatment of Africans in Guangzhou have all brought China to a point at which its “relations with the international community are at a very low point.” Yip’s argument appears to be that because China has seen its international standing fall, other countries will see little reason to continue minding Chinese sensitivities.

Yip may be right, but that does not mean Beijing would

refrain from lashing out in response to perceived slights. A weakened China is arguably a more dangerous China. Beijing might perceive Taiwan's expanding diplomatic relationships—especially with the United States—at this particular moment as especially threatening to its national security interests. On this point, caution, rather than opportunism, should be in order.

The author's second reason for formal recognition now is that China's military threat to Taiwan is growing:

*“Even if Taiwan’s international status remains unchanged, there is a strong likelihood that China will initiate a conflict against Taiwan in the near future. This thus removes the main reason for not recognizing Taiwan as a country, which is to avoid provoking China and maintain peace. In fact, recognizing Taiwan’s nationhood might even act as a deterrent by making it clear the United States and the international community see Taiwan as an actual country and not part of China.”*

The threat is real—but it is not at all clear that diplomatic recognition right now is the best way to mitigate it. Indeed, as noted earlier, diplomatic recognition could precipitate conflict, perhaps by convincing China it is running out of time to achieve unification.

### ***Diplomatic Ties and Objective Reality***

The weaknesses of the Ibrahim and Yip arguments do not undermine the case for a more normal relationship between the United States and Taiwan and for the United States to take action now to ensure continuing peace in Asia. But rather than establishing diplomatic relations at this point, a better way to enhance deterrence against China's increasing aggressiveness, at least in the near term, would be for the United States to do away with strategic ambiguity, as [I argued](#) in the previous *Global Taiwan Brief* and as Representative Mike Gallagher [contended](#) in *National Review* last week. “Now is the time,” he wrote, “for a declaratory statement of policy committing the United States to the defense of Taiwan.” Clarifying the US commitment to Taiwan's defense without fundamentally altering the nature of the US-Taiwan relationship has a potentially higher payoff with lower risk.

Is there a compelling case for the United States and

Taiwan to establish formal diplomatic relations? Yes. Put simply, current US policy does not comport with objective reality. “The objective reality,” as Mark Stokes, executive director of the Project 2049 Institute, has [described](#) it, “is that Taiwan, under its current ROC constitutional framework, exists as an independent, sovereign state.”

When policy and objective reality are unaligned, outcomes are detrimental to US interests—in this case, for example, Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Organization, the lack of direct communication between US and ROC presidents, and the potentially difficult task, should it be necessary, of convincing the American people to shed blood and treasure in defense of a country with whom Washington does not share diplomatic ties.

In order to work towards the eventual establishment of such ties, however, a proper appreciation for the interests and preferences of all involved parties is required. Acting precipitously is likely to be in no one's interest. The point is not that Beijing should have a veto, but that its potential responses must be understood and that risks should be carefully weighed. And of course, Taiwan does get a veto. Any argument for recognition that fails to grapple with that fact is, like the US “One-China” policy as currently practiced, also out of sync with objective reality.

**The main point:** Any discussion of establishing US-Taiwan diplomatic relations must grapple with Taiwan's own preferences and China's potential responses.