

The UK's 'Indo-Pacific Tilt' and Taiwan Policy

Russell Hsiao

Beijing's Shifting Messaging on the Ukraine Crisis — and the Implications for Its Sovereignty Claims Over Taiwan

John Dotson

Czech-Taiwan Relations in the Wake of the 2021 Czech Elections

Marshall Reid

Revisiting Taiwan's Response to Migrant Workers Issues, and Recommended Reforms

Adrienne Wu

Reflections of an American Diplomat: The Legacy for Taiwan of February 28, 1947

Stephen M. Young

The UK's 'Indo-Pacific Tilt' and Taiwan Policy

By: Russell Hsiao

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As the war in Ukraine rages on, European countries have naturally been responding with alarm to Russia's naked aggression against a democratic country in the region and its assault on the liberal world order. Arguably, none has been more vocal than the United Kingdom (UK). While responding to the direct threat from a revisionist, authoritarian Russia, London is also keeping a close eye on Asia. In a telling statement of London's global concerns, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson [asserted recently](#) that: "If Ukraine is endangered, the shock will echo around the world. And those echoes will be heard in east Asia, will be heard in Taiwan [...] People would draw the conclusion that aggression pays, and that might is right." This remarkably straightforward statement by Johnson is reflective of a subtle but important shift in how the UK approaches its Asia policy—and by extension Taiwan. While the prime minister's charge does not indicate that the UK will alter the foundational components of its cross-Strait policy anytime soon, it suggests that the UK will be less inhibited going forward by the constraints imposed by the lack of diplomatic ties with Taiwan as it works to advance its renewed and shared interests in the Indo-Pacific with like-minded allies and partners.

The UK's De Facto "One-China Policy"

The United Kingdom has diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), and maintains only unofficial relations with Taiwan. Although not explicitly in name, the United Kingdom adopted a *de facto* "One-China Policy" when it established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1972 with the exchange of ambassadors. According to the [UK government](#): "Under the terms of the 1972 agreement with China, HMG (Her Majesty's Government) *acknowledged* the position of the government of the PRC that Taiwan was a province of the PRC and *recognized* the PRC Government as the sole legal Government

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of China” [emphasis added]. Specifically, the [communique](#) states:

“The Government of the United Kingdom, acknowledging the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the People’s Republic of China, have decided to remove their official representation in Taiwan on 13th March, 1972. The Government of the United Kingdom recognise the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China.”

Many countries that maintain diplomatic ties with the PRC have adopted a [“One-China Policy.”](#) [1] Yet, these policies are, in most cases, not synonymous with Beijing’s [“One-China Principle”](#) (一個中國原則), and the manner in which each country practices its “One-China” policy differs to varying degrees.

It is important to point out the deliberate distinction between how the UK *acknowledges* the Chinese government’s position that Taiwan is part of China—thereby not explicitly endorsing PRC sovereignty claims over Taiwan—yet *recognizes* the PRC government as the sole legal government of China, which would be necessary for the purpose of establishing diplomatic relations. In this sense, the underlying understanding of the UK’s [“One-China Policy”](#)—even though it is not formally referred to as such by UK officials—is quite similar to the US “One-China Policy,” which is based in part on its 1972 and 1979 communiqués signed with the PRC, among other instruments like the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). And even as the UK’s interests in Taiwan are clearly growing, a recent [House of Commons Debate Pack](#) on “UK-Taiwan friendship and cooperation” made clear that the UK “has no plans to recognize Taiwan as a state.”

The UK’s Indo-Pacific Shift in Policy Predates Ukraine

In a [recent op-ed](#), my colleague Mike Mazza noted that “[t]he United Kingdom embraced an ‘Indo-Pacific tilt’ in the course of its 2021 ‘integrated review of security, defense, development, and foreign policy.’” While the [Integrated Review](#) is indicative of the UK’s formal ‘tilt,’ subtle cues in the UK’s approach with regards to Taiwan could be gleaned even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, this shift arguably began in recent years in tandem with the US rebalance to Asia that be-

gan around the mid-2010s.

In 2015, the name of the United Kingdom’s *de facto* embassy in Taiwan [was changed](#) from the British Trade and Cultural Office to the British Office Taipei, while the title of its *de facto* ambassador was changed from director-general to representative. These largely symbolic moves were emblematic of a broader rethink about Taiwan that occurred against the backdrop of China’s increasingly aggressive military posture in the Indo-Pacific, which has led successive US administrations to focus greater attention on the security situation in the region. However, in the last several years, the UK has taken on a more important profile in the Indo-Pacific region, partly in response to China’s aggressive posturing in the South China Sea. This growing confrontation with China was also accentuated by Beijing’s brutal crackdown on freedom in Hong Kong, a territory with long and complex ties with the UK. According to one [estimate](#), there could be as many as 300,000 Hong Kong persons expected to flee to the UK over the next five years.

Most notably, the deployment of the carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth*—accompanied by a carrier strike group—to the South China Sea in the fall of 2021 was unprecedented for reasserting the UK’s military presence in the region. In September 2021, as Chinese military sorties into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) were surging to record highs, the UK warship *HMS Richmond*—a Type 23 frigate of the Royal Navy—made a rare [transit through Taiwan Strait](#). The last time that a [Royal Navy warship](#) transited through the Strait was over a decade before, in 2008. While another transit was conducted by the *HMS Enterprise* in 2019, that vessel was an unarmed survey ship. In July 2021, the UK [announced](#) that it was to permanently assign two warships in the region.

What is perhaps even more striking than the deployments themselves is that these Royal Navy actions in the region also included [joint submarine warfare exercises](#) with Japan. Tokyo has been even more outspoken about its concerns about the potential for a contingency over Taiwan. The former prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, has [boldly asserted](#) how “a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency,” and recently appealed to the United States to abandon its approach of strategic ambiguity with regards to the defense of Taiwan.

These bilateral moves by the United Kingdom have also been layered on top of multilateral actions. Also in September 2021, the Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States announced the trilateral security pact [AUKUS](#), which “will significantly deepen cooperation on a range of security and defense capabilities,” with a primary aim of assisting Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. Then, in November 2021, the Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton [stated](#) that it would be “inconceivable” for Australia not to join the United States should Washington take action to defend Taiwan.

Reflective of this broader shift in British strategic thinking about the Indo-Pacific and Taiwan’s role in it, a senior member of parliament, Tom Tugendhat—a member of the British Conservative Party who serves as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee—stated during a [virtual event](#) hosted by a think tank based in Washington, DC, in May 2021:

“...making sure that we demonstrate commitment is not just about protecting Taiwan, but it’s also about demonstrating to countries in the region, Indonesia and the Philippines and many others, that actually you don’t need to do the deal with Beijing. You can stick to your existing deal with free countries, you can defend your people and their interests, and maintain your economic growth without handing over your security to a country you know is looking to control and change the way you operate. So, I think that our military presence, although of course it’s about Taiwan, is not directly about Taiwan, it’s actually much more about shaping the freedom of the entire region.”

UK Parliament Debates Underscore Growing Support for Taiwan

Tugendhat is not the only MP speaking out on Taiwan in recent years. Indeed, his comments have been followed by a notable uptick in substantive debates on the floors of both the [House of Commons](#) and the [House of Lords](#), reflecting London’s ongoing transformation in its views of Taiwan. During these unprecedented debates, discussions have increasingly focused on the possibility of ministerial visits, deepening economic cooperation, and granting legal status to Taiwan’s rep-

resentative in the UK, among other measures.

Underscoring the urgent nature of this transformation, [Baroness Frances D’Souza](#), a member of the UK House of Lords who serves as vice-chair of the British-Taiwanese All-Party Parliamentary Group, noted at the outset of her remarks at a recent parliamentary debate that “Taiwan is the Ukraine of the Far East, and it behooves us to note the threats that it endures daily from its neighbors across the strait and its commitment to the democratic process and to its democratic institutions.”

Amidst the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, President Joe Biden sent an important signal by authorizing an early March visit to Taiwan by a delegation of senior former American officials led by the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Michael Mullen, who highlighted in his [opening comments](#): “Maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is not just a US interest, but also a global one.” And as the top representative of the United States in Taiwan, [Sandra Oudkirk](#), noted at a different forum: “Just as Europe has a lot to offer Taiwan, Taiwan—as a primary target of malign PRC activity—has a deep expertise it can share with European partners.”

Against the backdrop of growing Sino-Russian alignment, the elevated aggressiveness of revisionist authoritarian powers, and increasingly credible Chinese military threats against Taiwan, there have been noticeable changes in how London, and Europe *writ large*, have approached their Indo-Pacific policies—and within that context, approaches to Taiwan. Although the UK’s “Indo-Pacific tilt” suggests that we are only at the beginning stage, the tilt may become a leap sooner than later. Even though Taiwan was not explicitly mentioned in the Review, [Lord Tariq Ahmad](#), a minister in the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, stated while responding to questions from members concerning the Integrated Review and the UK’s response to China’s use of coercive economic measures that “We should be working equally hard with Taiwan in putting together the protocols to protect each other, particularly for Taiwan, and to bring about a deterrent for anyone thinking of trying it on.” Indeed, Ukraine may be the turning point for London—and perhaps other European countries—in accelerating the recalibration of their approaches to Taiwan.

The main point: There has been a subtle but important shift in how the UK approaches the Indo-Pacific region, as well as Taiwan policy within that context. Such changes are unlikely to portend a fundamental change of its cross-Strait policy anytime soon. However, going forward the UK may be less inhibited by the constraints imposed by the lack of diplomatic ties to advance its renewed and shared interests in the Indo-Pacific with like-minded allies and partners.

[1] According to former Taiwan President [Ma Ying-jeou](#) (馬英九), Beijing had 173 diplomatic ties among 196 nation-states in 2017. All but 36 signed communiques with Beijing. Among those 137 countries with communiques with China, there are three distinct categories in how those countries treated the issue of PRC's sovereignty claims over Taiwan: 52 states recognize PRC sovereignty over Taiwan (e.g., Portugal, South Africa, and Israel), 29 states use vague language to express their attitudes (e.g., United States, Japan, and Canada), and 56 states did not mention the issue (e.g., Germany, Ireland, and Mexico). See: Maeve Whelan-Wuest, "[Former Taiwan President Ma on One China, the 1992 Consensus, and Taiwan's Future](#)," Brookings Institution, March 16, 2017.

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Beijing's Shifting Messaging on the Ukraine Crisis — and the Implications for Its Sovereignty Claims Over Taiwan

By: John Dotson

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In both the lead-up to the Russian attack on Ukraine that commenced on February 23, as well as in the days that followed, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has engaged in a series of abrupt messaging shifts regarding the invasion. Having forged a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with the Russian Federation—a quasi-alliance with which Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping

(習近平) has been directly associated—PRC leaders are clearly reluctant to openly criticize their ally, even amidst near-universal condemnation of Moscow's aggression.

As smaller states threatened by the irredentist designs of a more powerful neighbor, Ukraine and Taiwan share clear commonalities, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has obvious implications for Taiwan's security. Furthermore, the nationalist and revisionist nature of the regimes in Moscow and Beijing, as well as their shared hostility towards liberal democracy and the Western-dominated international order, might seem to naturally align their interests surrounding Ukraine and Taiwan. Yet, the interests of Russia and the PRC are not so aligned as they might seem on the surface, for Russian actions are undercutting the PRC's own diplomatic and propaganda efforts to assert its claims over Taiwan.

The Chinese-Russian Joint Statement on February 4

The Chinese and Russian governments mutually announced their "[comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era](#)" (新時代全面戰略協作夥伴關係) in the course of a [visit to Russia](#) by Xi Jinping in June 2019. The relationship has continued to grow closer in the nearly three years since—including combined military exercises that have struck many observers as provocative, such as the [naval drills conducted in October 2021](#) that nearly circumnavigated Japan's main island of Honshu. This year, the month of February was noteworthy for seeing, at its outset, a major step forward in terms of solidifying the Russia-China quasi-alliance; and then, not quite three weeks later, another major step towards unraveling it.

On February 4, Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Beijing for the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, accompanied by a [direct meeting](#) with Xi Jinping. The two governments issued a [joint statement](#) that day, the text of which contained pointed language to suggest that the growing alignment between the two states was a direct response to the threat from "Some [international] actors [who] [...] interfere in the internal affairs of other states, infringing their legitimate rights and interests [...] Such attempts at hegemony pose serious threats to global and regional peace and stability and undermine the stability of the world

order.” Such language about “hegemony” (霸權), long a keystone of CCP discourse about the United States, was also pointedly and explicitly extended to NATO via language mentioning “certain military and political alliances and coalitions [that] intensify geopolitical rivalry, fuel antagonism and confrontation, and seriously undermine the international security order and global strategic stability.”

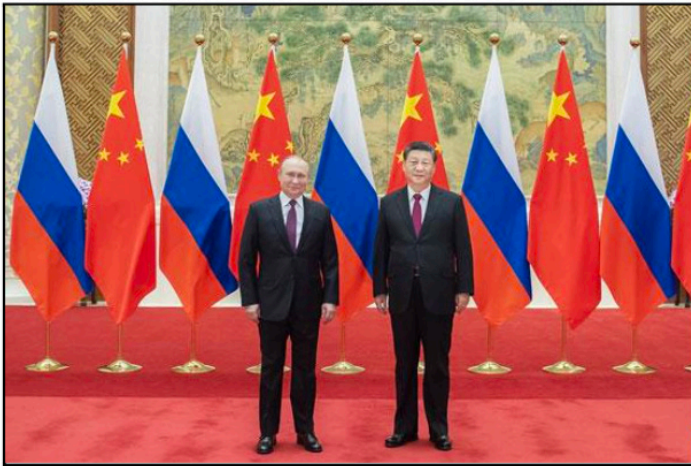


Image: Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (right) meet at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on March 4, the same day their governments released a joint communique declaring that “friendship between the two States has no limits.” (Image source: [PRC Foreign Ministry](#))

Most striking of all—particularly for those concerned with the growing military alignment between Russia and China, and for the parallels between Moscow’s irredentist ambitions towards former Soviet states and Beijing’s claims over Taiwan—the document also made the seemingly open-ended declaration that “the friendship between the two countries has no limits, [and] there are no forbidden areas of cooperation” (兩國友好沒有止境，合作沒有禁區).

Support for Russia and Accusations of “False Information Attacks” by the United States

Against this background, PRC officials maintained a very friendly posture towards Russia as tensions mounted over Ukraine. US officials reportedly [met with Chinese officials](#) multiple times in the weeks leading up to the invasion, presenting evidence of the Russian military build-up and requesting PRC assistance in getting the Russian government to back down—only to

be rebuffed, with Beijing reportedly relaying information about the meetings to Moscow. Furthermore, a leaked set of [social media directives](#) to PRC state media workers, dated just prior to the invasion, indicated that they were forbidden to “post anything unfavorable to Russia or [else] pro-Western.”

Indeed, in the lead-up to the invasion, the most consistent talking point from PRC government representatives—oftentimes employing strident language that seemed lifted straight from the Maoist era—was that the United States and European countries were whipping up a crisis with false accusations against Russia. For example, on February 16 PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Wenbin (汪文斌) gave a press conference at which he [asserted](#) that “In the Ukraine situation, the West has engaged in information terrorism” (西方在烏克蘭問題上實行了信息恐怖主義) against Russia, and demanded that America stop its “false information attacks” (虛假信息攻勢).

Beijing’s Messaging Contortions Related to Russian Actions

Beijing’s messaging was thrown into disarray by the announcement of the Russian government on February 22 that it would [recognize the separatist statelets of Luhansk and Donetsk](#) in eastern Ukraine, and send “peacekeeping” troops into the regions. In the wake of the announcement, PRC representatives issued a string of bland and non-committal statements. These included the [state media read-out](#) of a February 22 call between PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in which Wang reportedly expressed “concern” about the situation in Ukraine, and stated that “any country’s legitimate security concerns should be respected and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter should be upheld.”

Immediately following the commencement of the invasion on February 24, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying offered banal [commentary](#) that “[t]he current situation is the result of the interplay of various factors,” and that “China is closely monitoring the latest developments and calls on all sides to exercise restraint and prevent the situation from getting out of control.” Per another [state media summary](#) of a phone call between Putin and Xi dated February 25, Xi stated that Beijing was “consistent in its position to

respect sovereignty and territorial integrity,” and that “China supports Russia and Ukraine in resolving their tensions through negotiations.”

If the shifts of narrative are any indication, the CCP leadership likely found itself caught flat-footed—by the international reaction, if not by the invasion itself—and to some degree, exposed to negative international opinion for their own consistently supportive statements for Moscow in the weeks leading up to the attack. China’s [abstention](#) from a UN Security Council vote on February 25 that would have condemned Russia’s actions—rather than the veto that might be expected in light of the “friendship without limits” between the two countries—provides the clearest evidence yet that the leadership in Beijing is not pleased by the way that events have unfolded. [1]

Beijing’s Commentary on Ukraine and Taiwan

Russian actions towards Ukraine bear serious implications for the PRC’s own sovereignty claims over Taiwan. Long bristling at foreign criticism of the regime’s domestic human rights record, and fearful of potential foreign intervention on behalf of restive ethnic regions like Tibet and Xinjiang, PRC representatives have historically staked out a diplomatic position that places an uncompromising emphasis on state sovereignty. This clearly clashes with Putin’s asserted right to unilaterally recognize breakaway regions of Ukraine—and presumably, subsequent plans to annex outright some or all of Ukraine’s territory, or else establish a confederation with Ukraine under a Russian client regime. Beijing fears that such moves could set a precedent for future foreign recognition of Taiwan as a *de jure* independent state, or else for Taiwan to link itself more closely with a foreign ally. These prospects—far more so than a naked act of armed aggression that violates the UN Charter—are the precedents that Beijing seeks to avoid legitimizing.

The CCP propaganda system has moved quickly to swat down any comparisons between Ukraine and Taiwan; this theme particularly saturated PRC messaging on February 23-24, just as the invasion commenced. Hua Chunying took up a lengthy portion of her [February 23 press conference](#) making comments about Taiwan, warning “certain people of the Taiwan authorities” not to “latch on to and exploit the Ukraine issue to their

advantage,” and asserting that “Taiwan for sure is not Ukraine. Taiwan has always been an inalienable part of China’s territory. This is an indisputable historical and legal fact.” Coming to the crux of the matter, a February 23 [online commentary](#) on the website of *People’s Daily* stated that: “There are voices from the West that have tried to [...] compare the Ukraine crisis with the Taiwan question. [However] the two cases are entirely different, as Taiwan has never been a sovereign state and the Taiwan question is China’s internal affair instead of an international issue.”

Similarly, an [editorial](#) the next day in the English-language *China Daily* attacked [expressions of solidarity](#) with Ukraine made by Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), asserting that:

“Tsai and her Democratic Progressive Party [are engaged in a] conspiracy to make the question of Taiwan an “international issue”, and thus woo international support for what they are doing in pursuit of the island’s ‘independence’ [...] Tsai has forgotten the fact that Taiwan has always been part of China and never a sovereign country, which is acknowledged by the entire world and Chinese people across the Taiwan Straits. [...] Tsai and her clique should never underestimate the resolve of the central government to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.”

The Implications of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine for China’s Claims Over Taiwan

On the surface, the Russian and Chinese governments might seem to share close commonality in their desire to assert control over territories once ruled by their imperial predecessor states. Yet, Beijing has good reason to be uncomfortable with Russian actions towards Ukraine—and not merely out of a desire to avoid association with an act of naked aggression that has received near-universal condemnation.

With their own ambitions towards Taiwan in mind, the leaders of the CCP would shed few tears over a rapid and successful Russian annexation of Ukraine, particularly if such an effort further diminished the prestige and clout of a US-European order that restrains Beijing’s own ambitions. However, that system has been reenergized rather than weakened by Russian actions,

even as Moscow's diplomatic and propaganda positions cut against Beijing's own positions on Taiwan.

Accordingly, Beijing has largely side-stepped the issue, avoiding criticism of its quasi-ally Russia while also distancing itself from the latter's actions. The CCP propaganda system continues to support Moscow without explicitly endorsing its actions: by, for example, publishing [uncritical recitations of Kremlin talking points](#), and [nominal third-party op-eds](#) that blame Washington and Kiev for the war. However, as the PRC finds itself tethered to an ally that has become a pariah state, and as that ally's own actions serve to undercut Beijing's diplomatic rationales pertaining to Taiwan, the CCP leadership may have found reason for buyer's remorse regarding its alignment with Moscow—as well as encountering a setback for its own ambitions directed against Taiwan.

The main point: Despite a declared “strategic partnership” with Moscow, the PRC leadership has refrained from publicly endorsing the Russian invasion of Ukraine—an act that serves to undermine Beijing's own efforts to assert sovereignty over Taiwan.

[1] In the UN Security Council vote on February 25, 11 of the 15 current member states voted for the draft resolution condemning the invasion and calling for an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. The Russian Federation, currently holding the council's rotating presidency, predictable vetoed the resolution; while India, the United Arab Emirates, and the PRC abstained.

Czech-Taiwan Relations in the Wake of the 2021 Czech Elections

By: Marshall Reid

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On October 9, 2021, the political environment in the Czech Republic underwent a remarkable shift. Following four years under a minority government led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's populist ANO party, the Central European nation shocked many observers by [electing a coalition](#) of traditional, center-right parties.

For Babiš, whose party had consistently ranked higher than its opposition in pre-election polls, the results were undoubtedly [a disappointment](#). For Taiwan, however, the election should be seen as a significant opportunity.

Over the past several years, the Czech Republic [has emerged](#) as one of Taiwan's strongest supporters on the European continent. Spurred by shared democratic values and rising discontent with the aggressive actions of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Prague has increasingly sought to forge new connections with partners in Taipei. This outreach accelerated significantly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Taiwan's [successful approach](#) to containing the virus—focused on transparency and openness—contrasted favorably with China's overbearing, [authoritarian tactics](#). Beginning with relatively minor [medical donations](#) and building to larger, more consequential [diplomatic visits](#), the Czech-Taiwan relationship has steadily developed into a relatively productive partnership. Nevertheless, this progress was consistently hampered by Babiš, who relied heavily on the [political support](#) of Miloš Zeman, the country's Beijing-aligned president. Now, however, with Babiš sidelined and a more Taiwan-friendly government in power, Taipei has an unprecedented opportunity to make in-roads in the Central European nation.

The 2021 Czech Legislative Elections

In the lead-up to the October elections, the competition was [largely framed](#) as a chance for Babiš and his party to consolidate their somewhat precarious electoral position. [Public polling](#) had consistently shown ANO with a sizable lead over its adversaries. While that lead had diminished somewhat in the weeks prior to the election, ANO was nevertheless expected to maintain its grip on power. As the results of the contest demonstrated, however, this was not to be. In the closest election since the country's establishment in 1993, [ANO was narrowly defeated by SPOLU](#), a political alliance consisting of the center-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Christian-democratic KDU-ČSL, and the liberal-conservative TOP 09. Though ANO maintained the most seats in the 200-member Chamber of Deputies (the Czech Republic's Lower House of Parliament), SPOLU received the largest percentage of the popular vote. Subsequently, SPOLU formed a coalition

government with the left-leaning Pirates and Mayors alliance, with ODS leader [Petr Fiala](#) chosen to be the next prime minister. With a strong, 108-seat majority, the new government has the potential to fundamentally shift Czech foreign policy in the coming years. For Taiwan and China, this could prove significant.

Czech Politics and the Cross-Strait Relationship

Over the course of the decade preceding the 2021 election, the Czech Republic substantially altered its approach to the cross-Strait relationship. Starting in 2012, the Czech Republic began a steady drift towards the PRC. That year, it joined 15 other Central and Eastern European countries in signing onto the [Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries](#) (China-CEEC, popularly known as the “16+1 initiative”), a China-led grouping intended to promote ties between Beijing and regional capitals. Prague’s flirtation with China subsequently accelerated following the 2013 election of President Zeman, a former prime minister who frequently espoused pro-Beijing sentiments. Motivated by potential economic gains and a rising skepticism of the European Union, Zeman went to significant lengths to [improve the country’s relations with Beijing](#), visiting China several times and developing a personal relationship with Chinese leader Xi Jinping (习近平). Notably, the president conducted much of this outreach in a personal capacity, leading to [criticism](#) that he was pursuing an “alternative foreign policy, operating outside that of the government.” This personalistic diplomacy continued following the inauguration of Babiš in 2017. While Babiš was reportedly [wary of China](#) and its influence in the Czech Republic, he relied heavily on Zeman for political support. Accordingly, the prime minister generally deferred to Zeman on matters relating to China, supporting collaborations with Beijing and discouraging outreach to Taiwan.

Despite this challenging dynamic, the Czech Republic and Taiwan managed to develop a limited partnership during the latter half of Babiš’s tenure, albeit primarily at the municipal and legislative levels. This cooperation began in late 2019, when a diplomatic dispute over the “One-China Policy” led Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib—a member of the left-leaning Pirate Party—to [terminate](#) Prague’s sister city agreement with Beijing, and [establish](#) a new one with Taipei. Soon after, in March 2020,

the two nations signed [an agreement](#) to collaborate on efforts to combat COVID-19, which later resulted in [numerous instances](#) of medical cooperation. Building on these developments, Czech Senate President [Miloš Vystrčil](#)—a senior figure in the ODS—led an unprecedented, 90-member legislative delegation to Taiwan in August 2020. During the visit, [Vystrčil](#) met with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and spoke before the Legislative Yuan, where he declared “I am a Taiwanese.” This trip was later reciprocated in October 2021, when Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) [visited Prague](#), met with leading Czech officials, and received a medal from Vystrčil for “defending democracy and freedom.”

As these events clearly demonstrated, Taiwan has proven to be something of a wedge issue within the Czech government in recent years. While legislative leaders (such as Vystrčil) and municipal leaders (such as Hřib) proactively sought expanded ties with Taipei, national-level executive leaders have reliably resisted these efforts. This unique phenomenon was well-illustrated in the wake of Vystrčil’s delegation to Taiwan. In response to a predictably furious reaction from Beijing, President Zeman [dismissed](#) the visit as little more than a “boyish provocation,” while Babiš [scrambled](#) to maintain ties between Czech companies and their Chinese partners. As a result of this governmental discordance, ties between the Czech Republic and Taiwan have essentially followed a pattern of “two steps forward, one step back.” However, this dynamic will likely change substantially under the new government.

The Fiala Government and Taiwan

While a great deal remains uncertain about the Fiala government’s foreign policy approach, its personnel appointments and policy documents suggest that the administration will take a different tack than its predecessor *vis-à-vis* China and Taiwan. In December, Fiala selected Pirate Party lawmaker [Jan Lipavský](#) to be the new minister of foreign affairs. As several observers [have noted](#), Lipavský has long been a [critic of China](#) and its authoritarian behavior. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his appointment was met with disdain by [Zeman](#), who briefly refused to approve Lipavský’s nomination. The selection of Lipavský was very much in keeping with broader objectives of the new government. Rejecting the previous administration’s pursuit of ties with China

and Russia, the Fiala government has repeatedly [emphasized its intention](#) to strengthen its partnerships with other democracies. Specifically, members of the administration have [stated their desire](#) to pursue a foreign policy similar to that of former President Václav Havel, who famously prioritized human rights and self-determination.

This governmental focus on democratic partnerships was formally expressed in the Fiala Administration's [four-year administrative plan](#), released in January 2022. Among a wide range of initiatives, the plan outlines efforts to safeguard human rights, promote civil society groups, and improve relations with democratic nations, including Taiwan. Framing these policies as a "moral obligation," the plan firmly places the Czech Republic on the side of democracy, while also calling for a reevaluation of the country's relations with China and Russia.

While it should be noted that the new government has thus far said little about the country's relationship with Taiwan, its focus on democratic cooperation and distrust of China suggest that an expanded Czech-Taiwan partnership could be possible.

In the wake of the 2021 elections, such enhanced collaboration seems more realistic than ever. Following years of China-focused foreign policy under Babiš, the Fiala government should face fewer roadblocks in approaching Taiwan. While Zeman will technically remain in office until 2023, the president has struggled with [serious health issues](#) for several years, leading to [speculation](#) that he will not finish his term. However, even if Zeman were to fully recover, he would be unlikely to find willing collaborators in the Fiala Administration. Unlike Babiš, Fiala does not owe his political position to Zeman, and would face limited pressure to support the president's policy agenda.

Ultimately, the 2021 elections could potentially serve as a turning point in the Czech approach to China and Taiwan. With Zeman largely sidelined, China's defenders have largely been pushed out of government. While the 2023 (or earlier) presidential election could certainly change this, several of the leading candidates have already expressed [strong reservations](#) about Chinese influence, with one contender stating that China posed a greater threat to the Czech Republic than ter-

rorism. Increasingly, it seems that China's political influence in the Czech Republic has eroded significantly. For Taiwan, this could present an unprecedented opportunity.

What's Next for Taiwan?

For Taipei, the 2021 elections could prove to be critical for its relations with Central and Eastern Europe. While the region has long been a key bastion of support for Beijing, recent developments in [Lithuania](#), [Slovenia](#), and [Slovakia](#)—as well as the aforementioned Czech-Taiwan ties—suggest that China's influence may be waning. With this in mind, Taiwan should be proactive in establishing a relationship with the Fiala government, with the goal of expanding on existing arrangements and forging new ones. Specifically, Taipei should:

- **Emphasize Taiwan's strong commitment to democratic values:** As the Fiala government's four-year administrative plan makes clear, building partnerships with other democratic nations is a key priority. Given Taiwan's well-earned reputation as a resilient democracy, and its experience fending off authoritarian pressure, it could be an ideal partner for the Czech Republic—especially given Czech concerns regarding Chinese and Russian influence.
- **Encourage further diplomatic exchanges between Taiwan and the Czech Republic:** Recent diplomatic delegations have demonstrated that such visits can improve mutual understanding and create opportunities for beneficial negotiations. Taiwan should encourage members of the new administration to visit Taiwan, while also sending diplomats to Prague.
- **Seek opportunities for economic cooperation:** Given Taiwan's role as a leader in high-tech manufacturing, it could be strong partner for the Czech government, particularly as it works to disentangle its economy from that of China. Taipei should work to negotiate mutually beneficial trade deals and encourage Taiwanese companies to seek partnerships with Czech counterparts.

Taken together, these initiatives could allow Taiwan to capitalize on an unprecedented opportunity. As recent years have shown, there is already an appetite for

collaboration with Taiwan in the Czech Republic. Now, with many of the most prominent obstacles out of the way, the path towards a stronger Czech-Taiwan relationship is far clearer than it once was. If Taipei moves proactively, it could secure firm relations with a valuable diplomatic partner right in the heart of Europe.

The main point: With a surprise victory in the 2021 Czech legislative election, the Fiala government seems poised to seek expanded democratic partnerships with Taiwan. If it acts proactively, Taiwan could gain a strong partner in Central Europe.

The author would like to thank GTI Intern Adrienne Wu for her research assistance.

Revisiting Taiwan's Response to Migrant Workers Issues, and Recommended Reforms

By: Adrienne Wu

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This past summer, due in part to the challenges posed by COVID-19, the treatment of migrant workers in Taiwan came to the attention of [international media](#). Outrage voiced by the Taiwanese public and lawmakers regarding the treatment of Miaoli migrant workers, and timely actions taken by the government, point to a healthy and fully-functioning democracy. Yet, a key question remains: After the sensational coverage of the situation of migrant workers over the summer, have the underlying issues been adequately addressed by the government? Indeed, the mistreatment of migrant workers in Miaoli County reveals embedded problems facing migrant workers that require sustained interest in order to make real changes. This topic is worth revisiting, not only to ensure that Taiwan's government is not simply employing stop-gap measures to escape criticism, but also because systematic mistreatment of migrant workers from Southeast Asia could [undermine the success of the New Southbound Policy \(NSP, 新南向政策\)](#).

The Case of Miaoli and Domestic Pressure

So, what happened that brought the international me-

dia to focus on migrant workers in Taiwan? Starting on June 7, 2021, the Miaoli County government [forced migrant workers into an extreme lockdown](#), only allowing them to leave their dormitories to travel to and from work. Any migrant worker who consistently violated the order would [incur fines for their employer or broker](#). Almost immediately, these restrictions were met by outrage from lawmakers and activists alike. Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨) lawmaker [Lai Hsiang-ling \(賴香伶\)](#) said there was no legal basis to the restriction, while both the [Taiwan Association for Human Rights \(台灣人權促進會\)](#) and a [Miaoli youth group](#) condemned the decision. However, [Miaoli County magistrate Hsu Yao-chang \(徐耀昌\)](#) made it clear that containing the virus should take priority over migrant workers' human rights.



Image: Footage depicting the living conditions of migrant workers. (Source: [Formosa TV News](#))

After recognizing that unsanitary living conditions were partially responsible for the severity of recent COVID-19 outbreaks, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC, 衛生福利部疾病管制署) [released new guidelines](#) on June 21 for preventing the disease among factory workers. [The revised guidelines mandated](#) that migrant workers employed by different employers were not allowed to share the same floor, and included instructions for handling quarantine and arranging for workers to have more living space. Employers had two weeks to abide by the [new guidelines](#) or be fined between NTD \$60,000 – NTD \$300,000 (USD \$2,000 – USD \$10,000).

Following these new guidelines, King Yuan Electronics Co. (KYTEC, 京元電子) forcibly relocated migrant workers in Miaoli a day later by packing their belongings into trash bags. The move was described as “chaotic” by both [Gina Lin](#), a former staff member with the Ma-

nila Economic and Culture Office (馬尼拉經濟文化辦事處), and [Miaoli County Councilor Chen Pin-an](#) (陳品安). Even though KYEC abided by the new government restrictions, the lack of furnishings in the new accommodations, and the [ill-handling of the process](#) overall, makes it unclear whether workers' living conditions have improved.

In addition to responses by individual lawmakers and Taiwanese civil society, [government agencies also took action](#). On June 9, the [CECC](#) reminded Miaoli authorities that they could only enforce restrictions in line with the national Level 3 lockdown, and the [Control Yuan](#) (監察院) applied on June 25 to investigate the situation in Miaoli. After three weeks of forced lockdowns, [Miaoli authorities](#) announced that the COVID-19 outbreak had been contained and they decided to lift the ban on June 29—the same day that the MOL stated that [“such arbitrary restrictions would be treated as a ‘criminal offense.’”](#)

Even though the ban has been lifted, there are still doubts that conditions for migrant workers have substantially improved. In July 2021, [Formosa TV English News](#) (民視英語新聞) announced that migrant workers were still being kept under lockdown and continued to live in dormitories with poor living conditions. The news report [stated](#) that many migrant workers also continue to suffer human rights abuse because they are unaware of their rights. Despite the MOL's announcement that illegal lockdowns would be treated as a criminal offense, [no authorities or companies have been punished yet](#). Additionally, as of February 2022, there have seemingly been no updates from the investigation ordered by the Control Yuan.

As Miaoli lawmaker Tseng Wen-hsueh (曾玟學) noted during a [panel on fair recruitment](#) in October 2021, lawmakers are motivated to prioritize the rights of Taiwanese companies and workers because Taiwanese citizens—unlike the migrant workers—are able to express their displeasure by voting legislators out of office. Because of this, [Tseng](#) commended the Taiwanese public for drawing the government's attention to the mistreatment of migrant workers. Closer integration between migrant workers and the Taiwanese public not only reinforces the NSP's aim of deepening cultural ties, but also makes it easier for the public to hold the government accountable for continuing human rights

violations.

The New Southbound Policy and International Pressure

Despite the government's efforts to respond to the situation in Miaoli, the underlying issues have not been adequately addressed by the authorities. While international media attention was focused on vulnerable migrant workers' mistreatment while living in Taiwan, such workers are also vulnerable to discrimination before arriving in Taiwan. Under the [Employment Service Act](#) (就業服務法), those who are defined in Article 46 as working in the low-wage industries of fishing, domestic work, construction, and manufacturing have additional barriers when changing employers—and only receive basic labor rights if their employers are in a business field covered by the [Labor Standards Act](#) (勞動基準法). This leaves domestic workers and caretakers completely unprotected, as they do not come under the scope of the Act.

Unequal treatment between high-wage and low-wage workers is evident in the recruitment process as well. Since the Employment Service Act introduced a licensed broker system in 1992, many companies [have relied solely on private brokers to recruit workers](#). Low-wage workers typically fill jobs that [Taiwanese are unwilling to take](#), helping in vital areas such as manufacturing and domestic work. Yet these workers are disadvantaged by having to pay recruitment fees that [can range from USD \\$1,500 – 6,000 per worker](#), which can amount to [up to 10 months of salary](#). In 2016, the Tsai Administration [amended the Employment Services Act](#) to allow direct hiring and reduce broker fees. Still, this has not deterred [brokers from adding extra charges](#) for various services given to migrant workers.

Even with the unfair treatment of migrant workers, it is difficult to abolish the broker system altogether. Firstly, broker systems are still seen as [a cheap and effective way to export labor](#). Not only do they help companies navigate immigration processes, but they also handle recruitment and create jobs. Additionally, as pointed out by [Lennon Ying-Dah Wong](#) (汪英達)—the director of [Serve the People Association's](#) service center and shelter for migrants in Taoyuan City—if non-governmental organizations (NGOs) replace the broker system, then they face the dilemma of generating enough

money to sustain their operations without exploiting the workers they are trying to protect. Accordingly, initiatives such as [The Five Corridors Project](#), a research project led by London-based human rights NGO [Fair-Square Projects](#), recommend that rather than abolishing the broker system, employers should pay the recruitment fees.

Taipei's inflexibility in updating policies to protect workers who immigrate to Taiwan has the potential to cause friction between Taiwan and other countries, particularly ASEAN nations. President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) New Southbound Policy [differentiates](#) itself from the previous "Go South Policy" (南向政策) in that Tsai's policy appears to focus more strongly on mutual benefits between Taiwan and its partners, touching upon wider people-centered issues such as [immigration, talent cultivation, and tourism](#). Despite its people-centered aim, the NSP [largely focuses on cultivating high-wage talent and inviting professionals to immigrate](#) to Taiwan, while ignoring low-wage workers in crucial industries such as semiconductor chip manufacturing. Considering that as of September 2021 [45 percent](#) of Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan were employed in so-called "3K" industries (i.e., industries that are deemed dirty, dangerous, and strenuous), and [32 percent](#) were employed as domestic workers and caretakers, the NSP's focus on talent cultivation and skilled professionals is not representative of the current workforce.

Beyond leaving blind spots within existing policy, Taiwan has actively opposed changes to agreements that could rectify the issue, which have been proposed by their ASEAN partners. For instance, in 2020 when [Indonesian Minister of Manpower Ida Fauziyaha](#) announced a change in the country's immigration policy that would require Taiwanese employers and the Indonesian government to share the cost of brokerage fees, the Ministry of Labor (MOL, 勞動部) stated that it "[cannot accept](#)" the change. Arguing that Indonesia's unilateral decision violated the agreement both countries made at the [2013 Taiwan-Indonesia Labor Conference](#) (台印勞工會議), the MOL stated that Taiwan might recruit workers from other countries if Indonesia chose to enforce this policy.

Taiwan has had multiple opportunities to update its policies to standards befitting a country concerned

with human rights and to demonstrate its [commitment](#) to people-centered policies that mutually benefit both Taiwan and their NSP partners. By refusing to consider Indonesia's proposed changes, Taipei achieved the short-term goal of protecting Taiwanese companies from incurring recruitment costs—to the detriment of its soft power appeal, and arguably more strategically important long-term goals. This is exemplified also by [the Control Yuan's recent January 2022 report](#) urging the Executive Yuan to review migrant worker policies in order to solve Taiwan's labor shortage issues and to improve Taiwan's competitiveness. Pursuing international-standard best practices is not only important to deepen regional ties, but also for economic ties as well.

Policy Recommendations

There are a number of potential reforms that could be implemented regarding Taiwan's policies for migrant workers, which could improve Taiwan's standing globally and demonstrate Taiwan's commitment to the updated NSP under Tsai Ing-wen. These recommended reforms are:

- *Amend the Employment Service Act and the Labor Standards Act:* Having different protections for low-wage workers reinforces discriminatory divisions between high-wage and low-wage workers, and leaves domestic workers and caregivers particularly vulnerable.
- *Have companies pay broker fees for all migrant workers:* Fees should not be borne by the workers but by their employers—as is standard practice for high-wage workers—as advocated by [the Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment](#), a coalition of key international businesses and organizations.
- *Support local NGOs and encourage the integration of migrant workers into Taiwanese society:* By supporting connections between local Taiwanese society and migrant workers, the government can sooner become aware of, and correct, human rights violations. Such integration would strengthen the NSP's people-centered agenda.
- *Enforce punishment for violating authorities and companies:* Now that the Ministry of Labor has condemned illegal lockdowns as criminal, punishment needs to be enforced. Otherwise, it is likely

that human rights violations will continue to occur, especially if there is no ongoing public backlash.

The main point: Outrage voiced by the Taiwanese public and lawmakers regarding the treatment of Miaoli migrant workers, and timely actions taken by the government, are signs that Taiwan is a healthy and fully-functioning democracy. Yet, underlying issues responsible for migrant workers' mistreatment still need to be addressed—not only for the sake of the workers themselves, but also for the sake of Taiwanese businesses and Taiwan's reputation in the international community.

The author wishes to express special thanks to Dr. Bonny Ling, executive director of Work Better Innovations and research fellow of the Institute for Human Rights and Business, for sharing her time and resources.

Reflections of an American Diplomat: The Legacy for Taiwan of February 28, 1947

By: Stephen M. Young

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It has been 75 years since the tragic events of February, 28, 1947. I want to offer some personal reflections on this incident, and how it has influenced the history of Taiwan since then. As it played out at the time, the harassment of a local Taipei woman selling illegal cigarettes triggered widespread clashes between local people and the small KMT occupying force that had come to Taiwan following the Japanese surrender in 1945.

I was working as a young diplomat in the relatively new unofficial US embassy in Taipei (AIT – the American Institute in Taiwan) in 1981 when an unusual applicant appeared at my visa interview window. He was seeking to follow family members as an immigrant to the United States. My staff did their usual background check, and discovered that he had been arrested in 1947. He was subsequently sentenced by a military tribunal to life imprisonment as a result of his alleged involve-

ment in a plot against the government. As I drew out the story from this elderly man, he described a terrible miscarriage of justice that was all too common back in those days. Allow me to set the scene here.

World War II had recently ended, bringing a halt to an extremely turbulent time in East Asia and the entire world. China had been particularly devastated by the Japanese occupation, following Imperial Japan's invasion of the mainland in the 1930s. The peace of 1945 restored China to home rule, but this was soon followed by civil war and another round of death and destruction. Chiang Kai-shek's regime was granted control of Taiwan (then often referred to by its Portuguese name, Formosa). Chiang dispatched Kuomintang (KMT) troops to take control of the island as the Japanese withdrew.

My immediate task involving this visa applicant, whose life sentence had been commuted in the post-Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) era, was to research his criminal record and determine if he could still qualify for an immigrant visa. I asked the applicant to come back with the court record of his case, so that I could properly adjudicate his visa application.

Though I had lived in Taiwan as a boy in the early sixties, I was then not aware of 2-28, as the events of 1947 were termed. An older colleague of mine working at AIT offered to help. He provided me with a book called "Formosa Betrayed," written by George Kerr. Kerr was a young American diplomat working in the Taiwan office in 1947. The book offered an eye-witness account of the events of 2-28. Needless to say, the book had long been banned in Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian Taiwan. It was only in the 1990s, as Taiwan emerged from the authoritarian rule, that it was finally published there.

Once the man had returned with the documents relating to his trial and imprisonment, I pored over them. According to the trial proceedings, the defendants had met at a local pub and plotted to launch a violent assault on the government. The trial record stated that they had formed a counter-revolutionary group, stashing weapons in Yangmingshan Mountain with the aim of overthrowing the KMT regime. The man and several friends were arrested and charged with plotting to violently overthrow the government. He was sentenced

to life imprisonment, while several of his friends were executed by the KMT government.

But as I queried this modest elderly man, a farmer with limited literary skills, a starkly different story emerged. According to him, he and his friends used to frequent a local bar, where they would drink beer and exchange stories. When I asked about the charges he had faced, he professed total bafflement, denying that there had ever been any conspiracy; no guns, no plot. It seemed this was just a total fabrication by the paranoid KMT government, seized by fantasies of conspiracies and plots to seize power in Taipei.

Following extended consultation with my superiors in Taipei and the State Department in Washington, it gave me great pleasure to issue a visa for this elderly man, allowing him to join his family members in California. I hope he enjoyed his remaining years surrounded by family and friends. I am certain they all made outstanding citizens in the United States. After all, America was founded and sustained over our long history by a steady flow of immigrants and refugees bold enough to risk leaving their homelands for a new life in the United States.

My personal experience with this victim of 2-28-1947 helped me to understand the human cost of Taiwan's struggle to gain control of its own destiny. This sad chapter is now embedded in Taiwan history. The subsequent democratization of the island state and the rejection of rule by the mainland are part of the larger story. Today's democratically elected leaders owe a debt of thanks to those who came before them, who struggled to overcome the threats by mainland China and an authoritarian regime in Taiwan to dictate their way of life.

Later in my career, I was able to witness the opening up of the Taiwan political system, which culminated in the end of one-party rule by the KMT and the emergence of one of the most successful democratic societies in East Asia. Chiang Ching-Kuo (蔣經國), son of Chiang Kai-shek, was one of the heroes of this process. His decision to select Taiwan-born Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) as his successor in the 1980s culminated in the election of a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) President in 2000. Tainan-born Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was elected president in close balloting, with the vote split three

ways. Notably, there are now memorials to the victims of KMT oppression in Taipei and other sites around the island. The Chiang Kai-shek memorial (國立中正紀念堂) in Taipei, originally dedicated to Taiwan's first KMT ruler in 1980, was transformed into the renamed Liberty Square (自由廣場) in 2007, during Chen's presidency.

Friends of Taiwan have been heartened by the emergence of this thriving democracy since its early days in the 1990s. President Lee Teng-hui played a pivotal role in the process, supporting the formation of a multi-party system that has continued to grow and strengthen over the years. Theorists of democracy like to highlight the importance of a peaceful and orderly transition from one leader to another, and perhaps just as important, from one party to another. Taiwan has now been witness to this process over the past 40 years. People from all over Asia and beyond journey there to study both the challenges and successes of Taiwan's democratic system.

Unfortunately, things have evolved differently across the Taiwan Strait. Despite some courageous challenges over the years from idealistic citizens envisioning a more open political system, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has remained a one-party authoritarian state, which pays only lip service to the role of the people in its governance. As I write this in early 2022, Xi Jinping (習近平), the self-appointed leader of China, seems set on extending his rule into an unprecedented third term later this year, on his way to becoming president-for-life.

Beijing's turbulent relationship with Taiwan over the years has certainly been exacerbated by the stark difference in the two regimes' political systems. China continues to insist that Taiwan is an unalienable part of its system, despite the rather total rejection of this idea by the nearly 24 million citizens of the island state. Despite a few attempts to push for a more open political system, particularly during the short-lived spring of democracy that ended up in tragedy on and around Tiananmen Square (天安門廣場) on June 4, 1989, things remain bleak in the "People's" Republic of China. Economic growth there has decidedly not been accompanied by any real signs of political liberalization.

Sadly, Beijing under Xi has also reneged on solemn

pledges to treat the former British colony of Hong Kong as an autonomous and self-ruled entity. All attempts to open the political system to greater popular participation have been viewed as a threat to the authoritarian state Mao Zedong founded in 1949 following a protracted civil war. On the contrary, in recent months, it appears Mr. Xi is determined to crush even the vestiges of open society and free and open elections.

Meanwhile, Taiwan continues to thrive and prosper, both economically and politically. President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is in her second term as Taiwan's democratically elected leader. She will step down at the end of her second four-year term, and another leader will emerge through this vibrant multi-party system. Tourism from the mainland, though down from its earlier highs, still brings millions of visitors to Taiwan each year. These tourists visit the sights, shop, and enjoy some of the best cuisine in greater Asia. At night, when they turn on their televisions, they witness the workings of a thriving young democracy on the multiple competing television news programs. This presents quite a contrast to the monolithic control of all news on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

A word here on Hong Kong, where I served as US Consul General from 2010-13. I first saw Hong Kong in 1982, when it was still a British colony. A thriving business and banking center, Hong Kong was due to return to PRC sovereignty in 1997, when a 99-year lease would expire. Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) negotiated the particulars of the turnover with the formidable British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Deng coined the term "one country, two systems" (一國兩制) as his solution to anxieties both in Hong Kong over this transition. Under that term, Deng pledged to accord Hong Kong, and by inference Taiwan should it ever be reunited with the mainland, "a great deal of autonomy" following reunification with the mainland.

Needless to say, the autocratic Xi Jinping, now conspiring to make himself leader in perpetuity, has so watered down this concept in practice as to largely eradicate any difference between Hong Kong and China proper. The result has been a series of desperate attempts by Hong Kong residents to emigrate abroad, either to the UK, the United States or any other safe harbor from Mr. Xi's authoritarian state. So much for Deng's promises to the British. The people of Taiwan, who were al-

ways skeptical of Beijing's blandishments, have shown in repeated polling to have little or no interest in "one country, two systems." They are counting on American defense to counter any threat to their hard-earned freedoms. With the thuggish Russian leader Vladimir Putin's latest outrage, the assault on Ukraine that is ongoing as I write, people in Taiwan have additional reason to turn aside all attempts by Mr. Xi to entice them into any closer union.

Some of this skepticism is rooted in the tragedy of February 28, 1947 and its aftermath. Taiwan tourists visiting China and Hong Kong have seen up close the vapidity of Beijing's promises of a more liberal regime in either of those places. The concept of "one country, two systems" seems ludicrous under these conditions. Whatever Mr. Xi's blandishments might promise is more than offset by his autocratic actions. The real question to me is how long it will take before the 1.4 billion people suffering under communism in mainland China will rise up and demand a voice in their own affairs. When they do, they can take heart from those long-gone martyrs of the events of February 28, 1947, who laid down an early claim to self-rule and democracy.

The main point: As Taiwan and its friends around the world reflect on the 75th anniversary of February 28, 1947, it is striking to observe how far the island-nation has come. From an authoritarian one-party state, it has emerged as one of the most vibrant democracies in East Asia. Taiwan stands as a living rebuke to the mainland, mired as it is in an archaic political structure that denies the inherent dignity of the individual.