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By: Russell Hsiao

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CCP Amplifies United Front in Taiwan Retrocession Commemorative Events

For the 75th anniversary of the retrocession of Taiwan (台灣光復) that followed the surrender of the Japanese Imperial Army at the end of World War II, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rolled out the political red carpets to commemorate the event that marked the end to Japan's 50 years of colonial rule over Taiwan on October 25, 1945. While the occasion had been commemorated for its symbolic meaning in previous years on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, the scale and profile of this year's events in the People's Republic of China (PRC) were especially remarkable. Amidst a politically charged atmosphere, Chinese government institutions organized multiple high-profile events that were attended by senior CCP leaders.

On October 22, at the Diaoyutai Guesthouse (釣魚台國賓館), a diplomatic facility in Beijing reserved for high-level official gatherings, [Wang Yang](#) (汪洋)—the 4th highest-ranking communist official on the all-powerful CCP Politburo Standing Committee and chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CP-PCC, 中國人民政治協商會議), which controls the Party's United Front system—[spoke at a symposium](#) entitled “Commemorating Taiwan's Retrocession, Advancing the Reunification of the Motherland” (紀念台灣光復, 推進祖國統一). The event was also attended by [Wan Exiang](#) (萬鄂湘), vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) and chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang (中國國民黨革命委員會), a splinter party founded by members of the KMT (which now exists in Taiwan) in 1948. More than 100 people reportedly [participated in the seminar](#), including individuals from the central government, parties and people's organizations, representatives of the Taiwan Provincial National People's Congress, Taiwan-related experts

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and scholars, and people from Taiwan.

While the organizers described the event as an “academic” symposium, it was anything but a scholarly exchange. Organized by the premier Chinese government think tank, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, 中國社會科學院), the event was hosted by the president of CASS and former party secretary for Henan province, Xie Fuzhan (謝伏瞻), and was attended by a raft of political operatives from the CCP’s United Front system. Other speakers at the symposium included Su Hui (蘇輝), vice chairman of the CPPCC and chairman of the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (台灣民主自治同盟)—one of eight CCP sanctioned United Front parties. The event was also attended by [12 members of the New Party](#) (新黨) from Taiwan—which is part of the pan-blue coalition—including its Honorary Chairman Yok Mu-ming (郁慕明), among others.

In his [speech](#), Wang extolled the Chinese people’s victory in the 2nd Sino-Japanese War and hailed the retrocession of Taiwan as a historical achievement that effectively defended national sovereignty and territorial integrity, bringing an end to China’s 100 years of humiliation. He asserted that the return of Taiwan was a great victory for all Chinese people, including the compatriots in Taiwan. The United Front czar further proclaimed that Taiwan’s retrocession is indisputable proof that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory even though the two sides have yet to be completely “reunified.” “As long as there is a glimmer of hope for peace,” [Wang mentioned](#), “Beijing will act benevolently. However, it reserves all necessary means to counter Taiwan independence and will never tolerate Taiwanese secessionist forces.” “Promoting peaceful reunification of the motherland is a shared responsibility of all Chinese sons and daughters, including Taiwanese compatriots,” Wang exclaimed.

Emphasizing the speech’s underlying point on CCP policy, Wang stressed the Party’s continued adherence to the “1992 Consensus” (九二共識)—which embodies the “One-China Principle” (一中原則)—and resolutely opposing “Taiwan independence” forces. Notably, Wang vowed that the CCP would never allow sacred territories that have been lost and regained to be lost again (決不容許失而復得的神聖領土得而復失). Towards that end, he added that it was necessary to promote cross-Strait economic integration and deepen

cross-Strait cultural exchanges. Furthermore, he specifically [highlighted](#) the need to be highly vigilant against Taiwan’s ruling party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), for its so-called “de-Sinicization” efforts; vigorously promote the patriotic education of Taiwan compatriots; strengthen research on the history of cross-Strait non-governmental exchanges; enhance Taiwan compatriots’ national, ethnic, and cultural identity; and cultivate the spiritual bonds between compatriots on both sides of the Strait.

Striking the same tone on October 23 at another high-profile political confab marking the 70th anniversary of CCP’s entry into the 1950-53 Korean War, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (習近平) [proclaimed](#):

“China will never seek hegemony or expansion, and firmly oppose hegemonism and power politics. We will never sit back and watch damages to national sovereignty, security, and development interests, and will never allow anyone or any force to invade and divide the sacred territory of the motherland. Once such a serious situation occurs, the Chinese people will definitely meet it head-on!”

At another commemorative event for Taiwan’s retrocession on October 25, the director of the CCP Central Committee’s Taiwan Affairs Office and State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, Liu Jie-yi (劉結一), attended a [public exhibit](#) entitled “The Unimpaired Territorial Integrity: A Thematic Exhibition Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Taiwan’s Recovery,” organized by the National Museum of China (中国国家博物馆). The exhibit was co-organized with two United Front organizations: the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (台灣民主自治同盟) and the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots (全國台聯會). More than 100 people from both sides of the Strait reportedly [attended the opening ceremony](#), including Zhu Xiaodan (朱小丹), director of the Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan Overseas Chinese Committee of the CPPCC; All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots Chairman Huang Zhi-xian (黃志賢); Vice Chairman of the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League Yang Jian (楊健); and Yok Mu-ming.

The museum’s director, [Wang Chun-fa](#) (王春法)—a member of the CCP and the CPPCC—[stated](#) that the

exhibit was intended to commemorate the historical importance of Taiwan's retrocession and to reflect on the compatriots' historic struggle against Japanese invasion and colonial rule. According to the director, the exhibit is designed to promote Chinese national spirit by celebrating the great victory of compatriots on both sides of the Strait against foreign aggression. Further, he argued that it demonstrates that the mainland and Taiwan are an indivisible community bonded by a shared destiny. By [organizing the exhibit](#), he hopes to encourage compatriots on both sides to remember history, remember the martyrs, jointly defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity, share national justice, promote "reunification" of the motherland, and realize the dream of national rejuvenation.

Since the mid-2000s, the CCP has been engaged in a concerted effort to re-assimilate the Kuomintang into its political narrative. To this end, it has held a series of high-profile "academic" symposiums that invited politicians and scholars from Taiwan to reexamine the Second Sino-Japanese War on a regular basis. These conferences are elements of the CCP's broader United Front efforts to [reframe and redefine](#) the narrative of Chinese history, especially for events involving the Communist and Nationalist parties during the Republican period. Underscoring the nexus between propaganda and United Front activity, another [event on Taiwan's retrocession](#) was also co-organized by the [Nanjing Massacre History and International Peace Research Academy](#) (中國南京大屠殺史與國際和平研究院). This organization, [established in 2016](#), was launched by the Propaganda Departments of the Jiangsu Provincial CCP Party Committee and the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee. The high-profile commemorative event that Wang Yang attended is merely the latest in this long string of efforts, and should be viewed within the broader context of the CCP's growing United Front and propaganda campaign against Taiwan.

The main point: The scale and profile of the PRC's commemorative events for the 75th anniversary of Taiwan's retrocession highlight its United Front objectives.

(The author would like to thank GTI Fall 2020 Intern Emilie Hu for her research assistance.)

Kaga Declaration: Growing Calls for a Japanese Taiwan Relations Act

The [Taiwan-Japan Exchange Summit](#) (台日交流高峰會), which was launched in 2015 and is comprised of local parliamentarians from across Japan and Taiwan, recently held its 6th summit in Kaga City in western Japan. The meeting saw the issuance of the "Kaga Declaration" (加賀宣言), which included a call for the Japanese government to promptly enact a "Taiwan-Japan Exchange Basic Law" (日台交流基本法) to enhance Taiwan-Japan diplomatic and security cooperation in the absence of official ties between the two governments. This is the latest in a series of [growing calls](#) from Japanese supporters of Taiwan who have sought to encourage the Japanese government to enact its own version of the United States' Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) for over a decade.

The [Kaga Declaration](#) has three main points: 1) Japan should formulate the "Taiwan-Japan Exchange Basic Law" as soon as possible to promote Taiwan-Japan diplomatic and security policies; 2) Japan should more actively promote Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organization (WHO); and 3) Japan should support Taiwan's participation in the Comprehensive Progress Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

While noteworthy, the call for the establishment of a law that would serve as the legal basis for authorizing expanded contacts in relations between Japan and Taiwan is not new. As far back as 2006, Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) publicly [called on Japan](#) to formulate a Taiwan Relations Act akin to the [US domestic law](#), which guides security, economic, and other relations between the United States and Taiwan. A Japanese TRA was also raised as a proposal for the government to consider in 2013 by a group of [Taiwan specialists in Japan](#). In 2017 and again in 2019, [Keisuke Suzuki](#), a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who serves in Japan's House of Representatives, suggested that the party is exploring a Japanese version of the TRA.

A joint statement issued as recently as in May 2019 by former senior American, Japanese, and Taiwanese officials called for a similar legislation for Japan. The [joint statement](#) issued by the Research Institute for Japan-US-Taiwan Relations (JUST)—a non-governmental

think tank in Japan composed of former senior Japanese defense officials with an international advisory board—called for the enactment of a “Basic Act on Exchange between Japan and Taiwan.” This Act [was described](#) as the Japanese version of the TRA. According to supporters of the new law, the absence of a legal basis for conducting relations with Taiwan in Japan has hindered Tokyo’s ability to work effectively with Taiwan in responding to the growing threat posed by China. In their view, the Act is necessary in order to provide a legal justification for maintaining and even improving relations with Taiwan in the absence of formal diplomatic ties.

The growing calls for Japan to enact its version of the Taiwan Relations Act are occurring against the backdrop of China’s increasing military aggressiveness towards Taiwan and its neighbors. Additionally, several prominent politicians entering new Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga’s (菅義偉) cabinet are well known for their [pro-Taiwan dispositions](#). Nobuo Kishi (岸信夫), who has been an outspoken supporter of deepening Taiwan-Japan cooperation and is now the defense minister in Suga’s cabinet, once led a group of around 70 lawmakers from the governing LDP as head of the Japan-Taiwan Young Parliamentary Association on Economic Exchange, which supported formulating a law that would help to strengthen economic relations and other exchanges with Taiwan. On one occasion, Kishi reportedly [stated](#), “It [the legislation] doesn’t necessarily impair the position of China. Japan-Taiwan exchanges should be promoted.”

The mayor of Kaga, [Riku Miyamoto](#) (宮元陸)—who participated in the Taiwan-Japan Exchange Summit—has been an active promoter of bilateral relations between Taiwan and Japan. Miyamoto accompanied former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (森喜朗) on his recent visit to Taiwan in order to participate in the farewell ceremony for former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) in September. [Miyamoto added](#): “Sometimes I feel sorry for thinking about how the Japanese treat Taiwanese.” According to Miyamoto, the Taiwan-Japan Exchange Summit is aimed at gathering forces to push the government to be more active in its approach to Taiwan. Miyamoto [emphasized](#) that the formulation of the “Taiwan-Japan Exchange Basic Law” would be of great importance and efforts should be made to en-

courage the central government to formulate the law.

In his speech, Frank Hsieh (謝長廷), Taiwan’s representative to Japan, [maintained](#) that the Taiwan-Japan Exchange Summit has helped to deepen the friendly relations between Taiwan and Japan. In response to media queries about the possibility of Japan enacting its version of the TRA, [the Taiwanese representative said](#) that enacting the basic law for Taiwan-Japan exchanges will be critical. “Why can the United States express support for Taiwan, but Japan can’t do it?” The main reason, according to Hsieh, is that Japan does not have a Taiwan Relations Act similar to the United States. Hsieh [acknowledged](#) that, despite there being many supporters of Taiwan in Japan, it is still very difficult for the country to enact a Taiwan Relations Act (because of Chinese pressure)—but it could start from the local council and the people.

The main point: The recent Taiwan-Japan Exchange Summit issued a declaration that included the call for the Japanese government to enact the “Taiwan-Japan Exchange Basic Law”—a legislation similar to the US Taiwan Relations Act.

Prospects for a Taiwan-India “Milk Tea Alliance” Against China

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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Ahead of Taiwan’s National Day on October 10, the [Chinese Embassy in New Delhi](#) sent a letter to Indian media outlets with directives on how to report on Taiwan. The embassy stressed that Indian media should not refer to Taiwan as a “country” or the “[Republic of China](#)” and that the island’s top leader should not be called “[President](#)” when reporting on Taiwan’s National Day celebrations. In response, India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) [stated](#), “The Indian media is free to report on any issue it deems fit.” [Indian netizens](#) also took to social media to commemorate Taiwan’s Double Ten National Day, while a member of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) put up [posters](#) in New Delhi wishing Taiwan a “Happy National Day,” including outside the Chinese Embassy. Taiwanese President [Tsai Ing-wen](#) (

蔡英文) and Vice President [William Lai](#) (賴清德) both conveyed their gratitude to Indians who expressed congratulations and support for Taiwan's National Day. The outpouring of Indian support for Taiwan against unrelenting Chinese pressure has led some netizens to raise the possibility of India joining the civil society-initiated "[Milk Tea Alliance](#)" (奶茶聯盟) of Asian democracies banding together against China.

Pro-Democracy Milk Tea Alliance

The informal Milk Tea Alliance, which includes netizens from Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, began in April. At the time, Chinese netizens launched attacks against Thai actor [Vachirawit Chivaaree](#) for sharing a Twitter post that questioned whether the coronavirus came from a Wuhan laboratory. They also accused the Thai actor of expressing support for [Hong Kong and Taiwanese independence](#). Taiwan and Hong Kong netizens subsequently offered support for Thais in their Twitter war against Chinese netizens, and [#MilkTeaAlliance](#) began trending on Twitter. Additionally, as [pro-democracy and anti-government protests in Thailand](#) emerged earlier this year in response to the Thai military's dominant role in domestic politics, [Taiwanese and Hong Kong netizens](#) evoked the solidarity for the Milk Tea Alliance, frequently using the hashtag #StandWithThailand. Hong Kong democracy activist [Joshua Wong](#) also lent moral support for the pro-democracy movement in Thailand, protesting outside the Thai consulate in Hong Kong.

The Milk Tea Alliance is nominally comprised of countries that drink sweetened milk tea that are also in opposition to China. Sweetened versions—often the historical legacy of European sugar trade and colonialism—are found in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Indian subcontinent, in contrast to the saltier versions consumed in China's Tibetan and Mongolian regions. More importantly, the Milk Tea Alliance has emerged as a rallying point for pro-democracy movements, anti-military and anti-authoritarian protests, and anti-Chinese sentiment in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indian Support for Taiwan

Online calls for [India](#) to join the Milk Tea Alliance surfaced after a flurry of Indian support for Taiwan on so-

cial media. India has also had to push back against Chinese interference in Indian media regarding Taiwan. The [Chinese Embassy in India](#) objected to an Indian newspaper interview with Taiwan's then-Representative to India Tien Chung-kwang (田中光) in February. When the United States State Department launched #TweetForTaiwan on Twitter on May 1 to help Taiwan attend the annual World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting, Indians constituted [49 percent](#) of a sample size of 449 tweets in favor of Taiwan's participation. [The Chinese Embassy](#) also lambasted Indian media reports on Taiwan's successful handling of the coronavirus as well as Indian support for Taiwan's inclusion into the World Health Organization (WHO). Chinese Ambassador to India [Sun Weidong](#) (孫衛東) expressed concern about Indian media reports calling for a revision of India's "One-China Policy" and stronger relations with Taipei.

The deterioration of Sino-Indian relations following deadly border clashes earlier this year has renewed Indian debates about its policy towards China. An [Indian media article](#) argued that the country's policy of appeasing China has emboldened the Chinese to interfere with press freedom in India. The article also [challenged the "One-China Policy,"](#) claiming that there are "[two Chinas](#)" in existence today. Other articles have called for closer ties with Taiwan, especially boosting [economic and trade cooperation](#). In 2018, India and Taiwan signed a [bilateral investment treaty](#), and bilateral trade between the two economies reached [USD \\$5.79 billion](#) in 2019. Both sides have common interests in decoupling economically from China and could potentially work together to create alternate and secure [supply chains](#). Indeed, a recent [Bloomberg article](#) said that support is growing within the Indian government to start long-awaited talks on a trade deal with Taiwan as Sino-Indian relations hit a new low.

China-India Border Clashes

China-India relations have been dealt a serious blow following a series of clashes in the undemarcated, remote areas of the Himalayas along their disputed, [2,167-mile border](#). In May, confrontations between Indian and Chinese soldiers resulted in brawls and fistfights at [Pangong Tso lake in Ladakh](#) and later at [Nathu La Pass](#) in the Indian state of Sikkim, near Tibet. A deadly clash in the Galwan Valley on June 15 resulted in the deaths of [20 Indian soldiers](#) and an unknown

number of Chinese troops. This marked the [deadliest confrontation](#) along the Sino-Indian border in decades and generated a fresh wave of anti-Chinese sentiment among [Indian elites](#) and the [public](#). Both sides have contributed to rising tensions in the border areas by building infrastructure and amassing thousands of troops along the [Line of Actual Control](#) (LAC), a notional boundary separating Chinese and Indian territory established by the truce ending the Sino-Indian war of 1962. Several [rounds of talks and negotiations](#) have failed to yield progress in resolving competing border claims.

During these clashes along the Sino-Indian border, Taiwan's government and citizens deemed China the aggressor and offered support for India. President Tsai, in her National Day address, stated that the [China-India border conflict](#), along with sovereignty disputes in the East and South China Sea, poses a challenge to democracy, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Taiwanese netizens also expressed support for India in its border clashes with Chinese troops, using the hashtag [#TaiwanStandsWithIndia](#) and sharing [anti-China memes](#) on social media. A *Taipei Times* [editorial](#) linked the Sino-Indian border clashes to "Beijing's increasingly aggressive expansionism in the region," and said that Taipei should strengthen ties with India "to contain Chinese expansionism." However, such portrayals tend to conflate the Chinese government's actions and motivations, which are perceived to all fall under a broader expansionist agenda, while ignoring the underlying dynamics of the Sino-Indian border tensions and the individualized and spontaneous nature of physical altercations that have developed at the frontier.

Prospects for Taiwan-India Cooperation

Taipei appears eager to capitalize on Indian social media support for Taiwan and boost comprehensive ties. "We have to think about the way for democracies, for like-minded countries, to work further together," Taiwan's [Foreign Minister Joseph Wu](#) (吳釗燮) said in an interview earlier this month with India Today TV. Expanding on this, the foreign minister stated, "We have traditional good relations with the United States, with Japan, and we want to develop closer ties with India as well." Wu also raised the idea of [intelligence-sharing](#) with India. This notion has recently gained increased

salience, as New Delhi and Washington signed a landmark defense agreement, the [Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement](#) (BECA) on October 27, granting New Delhi access to US geospatial intelligence to help improve the accuracy of missiles and drones amid concerns about China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region. As India continues to deepen [economic and military ties](#) with like-minded partners, including the United States, Japan, and Australia, there are also opportunities to expand its unofficial relations with Taiwan. There are at least three steps that the two sides would need to take to improve comprehensive relations.

First, the Taiwanese government needs to gain clarity on whether Indian actions towards Taiwan are motivated more by a straightforward appreciation of Taiwan's democratic values and economic system than by an overwhelming desire on the part of Indians to spite China. After all, China and India are adversaries, and Beijing's continued [economic](#) and military assistance to India's archrival Pakistan is not lost among Indian policymakers who want to use the Taiwan issue to hit back at China over the deaths of Indian soldiers at the border. Taipei therefore should be careful to avoid being used as a "[card](#)," or bargaining chip, in the Sino-Indian rivalry while maintaining some level of flexibility in dealing with the two rising powers.

Second, the Indian and Taiwanese governments need to expand their economic focal points to include one another. New Delhi's "[Act East](#)" policy (formerly the "Look East" policy) and Taipei's "New Southbound Policy" (新南向政策) tend to look past each other. For instance, India's "Act East" policy has primarily focused on developing ties with ASEAN countries and obtaining advanced technologies from Japan and South Korea. Indian Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has praised Japan for doing more for India's modernization than any other country. Indeed, [Tokyo](#) has also played a key role in developing India's northeastern region through various infrastructure projects. Similarly, although [India](#) is listed as one of 18 countries targeted by Taipei's "New Southbound Policy," Taiwanese businesses tend to focus their investments in Southeast Asian countries, whereas [India](#) is hardly seen as an attractive alternative to the Chinese market. Furthermore, Taiwanese investment in India remains [limited](#), often as a result

of India's foreign investment restrictions and inadequate infrastructure. Taiwanese businesses are also hampered by their [lack of knowledge](#) of Indian culture, economic conditions, and political institutions.

For Taiwan and India to develop strong comprehensive relations, both governments need to translate the [#HindiTaiwaniBhaiBhai](#) ("India Taiwan brother brother") bonhomie on social media into a substantive working relationship. Their shared antipathy towards China provides an imperative for both sides to work together, such as on trade talks, but it can also be a momentary political diversion until Sino-Indian relations improve. In addition, Taipei should be careful not to oversell the [democratic values and freedoms](#) it shares with the world's largest democracy, particularly as the populist Modi government has instituted a brutal and systematic suppression of the rights and freedoms of residents in [Indian-administered Kashmir](#). Modi's virulent [Hindu nationalism](#) has also led to widespread harassment and violence against religious minorities in the country—practices that Taipei certainly does not espouse but is nonetheless reluctant to criticize. A prospective Taiwan-India "Milk Tea Alliance" should work towards improving each side's understanding of the other's security concerns vis-à-vis China, fostering mutual trust and awareness of each other's intentions, and building a solid economic and trade foundation that can withstand any future geopolitical changes in South Asia.

The main point: Taiwan has sought to capitalize on newfound Indian support on social media arising from Chinese interference in Indian media and deadly clashes at the Sino-Indian border. Taipei should carefully assess Indian intentions and objectives and avoid becoming a card in the Sino-Indian rivalry.

Violent Incidents in Taiwan Linked to Organized Crime, Possible China Links

By: J. Michael Cole

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Two recent incidents have raised worries about a possi-

ble intensification of activities by pro-Beijing organized crime in Taiwan as China continues to intensify its pressure campaign against the democratic island-nation.

The first incident occurred early in the morning of August 28 in Linkou, New Taipei City, when internet celebrity and gym owner Holger Chen (陳之漢) was [shot at](#) three times at close range as he was entering his vehicle. Two of the three bullets hit their target, causing leg and arm injuries. In recent years, Chen has been an outspoken supporter of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and the Taiwanese military, and was also involved in an "anti-red media" (反紅媒) [movement](#) organized by New Power Party (NPP, 時代力量) legislator Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) in 2019 (the movement sought to raise awareness about Taiwan-based media that are unduly influenced by China). His outspoken support for a Taiwanese identity also caused controversy last year, leading Chinese kickboxer Lian Yuxuan (練喻軒) to [challenge him to a fight](#).

Around that time, Chen also [came to the attention](#) of criminal organizations in Taiwan, as well as the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP, 中華統一促進黨)—the political party established by a former triad leader—leading to alleged threats. It was initially [believed](#) that potential disputes over his gym empire or online retail efforts may have led to the attempt on Chen's life. However, it later [emerged](#) that the 23-year-old shooter, Liu Cheng-hao (劉丞浩)—who had been involved in a previous altercation with Chen—was a member of the Bamboo Union (竹聯幫), one of Taiwan's primary "mainlander" triad organizations. More specifically, Liu was affiliated with the Baohe Association (寶和堂), one of eight "churches," or factions, within the Bamboo Union. The investigation also revealed that Liu was associated with a middleman named Shih Jun-ji (施俊吉), 40, who surveilled the location before Chen was shot. Surveillance and communication records also [demonstrate](#) that Shih ordered Liu to carry out the hit on Chen. A total of 10 Bamboo Union members were subsequently taken in for interrogation by the Taipei and New Taipei City Prosecutor's Office.

It has been since been [alleged](#) that a sum of NTD \$10 million (approximately USD \$350,000) was transferred from China to Taiwan via businessmen and organized crime organizations to "buy" Chen's murder.

Ties between the CCP, the CUPP, and the Bamboo Union were established years ago and received greater attention when CUPP founder and former Bamboo Union head, Chang An-le (張安樂)—aka “White Wolf”—[returned to Taiwan in June 2013](#) after being on the run for more than a decade. The CUPP, which promotes unification under the “one country, two systems” (一國兩制) formula, has been involved in threats, [intimidation](#), and [physical assault](#) against members of Taiwan’s civil society. Most of these [incidents](#) have involved Bamboo Union members or hired hands from other local crime syndicates. It has also collaborated with triads in Hong Kong to [threaten](#) pro-democracy activists from Hong Kong during visits to Taiwan (the Four Seas Gang [四海幫], another “mainlander” triad, is [also believed](#) to have been involved in this altercation). In recent years, the CUPP has been the target of [investigations and raids](#) by special prosecutors to determine whether the organization, which is registered as a political party in Taiwan, has been receiving illegal funding from China. It is also [suspected](#) that the CUPP may be recycling money from China via companies owned by Chang and his son, namely the Taolue Group (韜略集團) and its subsidiary, Strategic Sports Ltd. (韜略運動器材).

Although Taiwan has strict gun control laws, crime syndicates are heavily involved in gun trafficking. Consequently, the [overlap of interests](#) between politicized pro-Beijing triads and pro-unification groups like the CUPP, which act as CCP proxies, presents a worrying problem for law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Given the high risks involved with an attempted invasion of Taiwan by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), it is arguably far likelier that the CCP’s strategy will involve attempts to destabilize Taiwan through more insidious strategies, including acts of violence against pro-Taiwan/democracy elements within society. Part of this strategy may also involve the hope that Taiwanese organizations will retaliate violently, potentially sparking a cycle of escalatory violence which could “compel” intervention by the irredentist neighbor, much like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

In 2018, the largest cache of firearms in a decade was [seized in Keelung](#). The weapons, which originated in the Philippines and were transited via Hong Kong before arriving in Taiwan, consisted of 109 firearms, including Bushmaster XM15-E25s, Spike’s Tactical ST-

15s, and a Striker-12 shotgun, as well as 12,378 rounds of ammunition. One officer [said of the arsenal](#), “You could set up an army with those!” Yeh Jiunn-rong (葉俊榮), the Minister of the Interior at the time, said that if the guns had entered the Taiwanese market, “the consequences would have been disastrous.” The individuals arrested in the case were members of the Bamboo Union.

The attempt on Chen’s life is not the only recent instance involving violent elements belonging to pro-Beijing organizations and possible funding from China. In late September 2019, CUPP member Hu Chih-wei (胡志偉) and Dachen Nostalgia Culture Association (大陳島鄉情文化促進會) member Chen Yu-ta (陳友達) were arrested following an [incident](#) in which Hong Kong democracy activist Denise Ho (何韻詩) was splattered with red paint at a rally in Taipei. Prosecutors [determined](#) that a total of nine individuals were involved in the plot. (While anti-independence and pro-Kuomintang, the Dachen Nostalgia Culture Association, which was established as a [hometown association](#) for people that trace their ancestry to a region in Zhejiang, is not known to be directly affiliated with the CCP.)

Then, in April 2020, Causeway Bay Books manager and CCP critic Lam Wing-kei (林榮基)—who relocated to Taiwan after his bookstore was closed in Hong Kong—was the [victim](#) of a similar paint attack on his store in Taipei. Two individuals, one surnamed Tseng (曾) and another surnamed Cheng (鄭), were subsequently arrested in Kaohsiung in connection with the case. [Two other suspects](#) were also involved as lookouts and were seen fleeing with the two assailants in a taxi (a third suspect was eventually detained). A few days after the incident, an individual posted a comment on the Mainland Affairs Council’s (MAC, 大陸委員會) official Facebook page [warning](#) Lam: “This was only a first warning to you. We have many brothers in Taipei” (“這只是我們對你的第一次警告，我們在台北的兄弟很多”). The [Facebook profile](#) of the individual, one “Jonathan Gao,” showed that he was a member of the Republic of China Patriots Association (中華愛國同心會), the CUPP, and the Hongmen 21 Sea Friendship Association (洪門二一海聯誼總會員工). Also known as the “Heaven and Earth Society” (天地會), Hongmen is a secret organization created during the Qing Dynasty. It later developed various underground organizations

and spread throughout Asia.

Subsequently, in October 2020, a suspect was apprehended following an [attack on the Aegis restaurant](#) (保護傘) in Taipei, in which an individual threw a bucket of fecal matter at the cashier counter and kitchen. One employee, of Hong Kong origin, was also splashed with the substance. Opened in April and founded by Hong Kong lawyer Daniel Wong Kwok-tung (黃國桐), Aegis seeks to provide employment for residents of Hong Kong who have fled the Special Administrative Region following the 2019 anti-extradition law protests. The [suspect](#), surnamed Mo (莫), told police that he had received NTD \$15,000 from three individuals to perpetrate the attack. [Two other suspects](#), both in their 20s, were subsequently detained, including a 24-year-old man surnamed Lee (李), who has [emerged as the main suspect](#) in the case. Lee, a member of the Bei Lien (“North Union”) gang (北聯幫), is said to have been given NTD \$30,000 by “the puppet master” (藏鏡人) to orchestrate the attack. In November 2019, the leaders of various triads from Taiwan and Hong Kong—including the head of the Bei Lien gang—[attended the 70th anniversary party](#) in Taipei of Bamboo Union boss Huang Shao-tsen (黃少岑), aka “Mo Mo” (么么). The CUPP’s Chang An-le was also present at the event. While circumstantial, this nevertheless demonstrates the potential for collaboration between the main pro-CCP triads and more local gangs, which the former has employed over the years to conduct low-level operations such as security and intimidation.

This series of incidents suggests intent by organized crime and their contacts within the CCP to escalate their operations against pro-independence elements in Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong democracy supporters, refugees, and others. The potential for major acts of violence, such as the attempted murder of Holger Chen, will require particular attention by Taiwan’s law enforcement and intelligence agencies, which will have to collaborate in instances where criminal activity coincides and overlaps with political work.

The main point: The Chinese Communist Party, by and through its proxies in Taiwan, appears to be escalating its efforts involving organized crime to intimidate and assault pro-independence and pro-Hong Kong democracy elements within Taiwan. Such activities represent a threat to social stability in Taiwan and pose a chal-

lenge to its law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Why Defending Taiwan is an American Political Consensus

By: Michael Mazza

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In the event that China uses force against Taiwan, will the United States come to Taiwan’s defense? It’s a perennial question at think tank events in Washington, DC—and presumably in the halls of Taiwan’s presidential palace and Zhongnanhai—and it was asked again earlier this month at an Atlantic Council [webinar](#) in which I participated. Randy Schriver, former assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific affairs, put his answer plainly: “I think it’s unthinkable that the US would do nothing.” Schriver stopped short of endorsing a large-scale US intervention, but there are reasons to believe such an intervention would be forthcoming. Most crucially, defending Taiwan accords with the three major foreign policy philosophies most prevalent among leaders, politicians, and policymakers on both sides of the political aisle.

The Role of Sentiment

The “soft” aspects of US-Taiwan relations will play some role in how Washington responds to a crisis. Although the US-Republic of China (ROC) mutual defense treaty is no longer operative, the alliance was a central feature of American strategy in Asia for 25 years. ROC Air Force pilots flew [secret missions](#) on behalf of the Americans and South Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. Later, Taiwanese Air Force pilots and maintainers [deployed](#) to North Yemen for a decade, starting in 1979, in support of American and Saudi foreign policy objectives. Institutional memories of those efforts persist in the American national security apparatus.

People-to-people ties are important as well. According to the *de facto* US embassy in the country, the [American Institute in Taiwan](#), “there are now 153 sister cities between the United States and Taiwan” and “Taiwan

is the United States' seventh largest source of international students." Familial and business ties (Taiwan is a top US trade partner) likewise contribute to a bilateral web of interpersonal relationships.

In the event of a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, many Americans may feel they have a personal stake in its outcome—because they have family or friends there, because they have fond memories of studying abroad there, or because they remember Taiwan as a dependable Cold War ally. But while vocal supporters of intervention might be able to affect decisions in Washington, that is largely because they would be pushing on an open door.

US Foreign Policy Philosophies and the Intervention Question

Despite the lack of a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan—indeed, despite the intentional ambiguity Washington has adopted regarding its commitment to defend Taiwan—intervention on behalf of the island nation seems likely in the event China decides to use force. This is because intervention would appeal to three of the more prominent strands of American foreign policy thinking. Importantly, adherents of all three strands can be found among both Democrats and Republicans.

First, an American defense of Taiwan would appeal to those that see the preservation and proliferation of liberal polities as a key US interest. A world that is safe for the United States is a world that is safe for democracy, so the thinking goes, and a world that is safe for democracy is one populated by democracies. A contraction in the number of democracies worldwide, then, is disadvantageous to US interests.

Chinese annexation of Taiwan would eliminate an important democratic partner for the United States—one engaged in its own human rights and democracy promotion efforts. Taiwan's absorption would likewise neutralize a source of hope and inspiration for would-be liberal reformers in Hong Kong and in China proper, perhaps pushing ultimate Chinese liberalization—what some would consider the grand strategic prize in Asia—even further out of sight. China's successful unification with Taiwan in the absence of US intervention, moreover, might lead other authoritarian powers to more confidently cast ravenous eyes on their own

democratic neighbors.

If the survival and proliferation of democracies is, indeed, a key US interest, ensuring Taiwan's continued existence as a *de facto* free and independent state is a central purpose of US foreign policy.

Second, there would likely be support for defending Taiwan among leaders, lawmakers, and policymakers subscribing to the view that preservation of the existing liberal international order is necessary to ensure a world conducive to US interests. As Mira Rapp-Hooper et al. noted in a [2019 policy brief](#) for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the 2015 [US-Japan Joint Vision Statement](#) includes a clear and concise explanation of that order: "Together we have helped to build a strong rules-based international order, based on a commitment to rules, norms, and institutions that are the foundation of global affairs and our way of life." This broad definition accords with those used by American allies, as Rapp-Hooper et al. describe:

"The [purpose](#) of a regional order (according to the allies) is to "effectively promote peace, security, stability, and economic prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region." Other [key characteristics](#) include "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity," "adherence to international law and their shared commitment to upholding freedom of navigation and overflight," and a commitment to having "disputes [...] resolved peacefully and free of coercion." Such an [order](#) means, as former US president Barack Obama put it, "large countries, small countries, all have to abide by what [are] considered just and fair" rules, essentially the opposite of a regional order based primarily on power."

Although the application of international law to Chinese use of force against Taiwan would not be straightforward, given the nation's complicated standing under said law, the norm regarding peaceful resolution of disputes would be demolished. China, having annexed Taiwan absent meaningful US resistance, would be in a far better position to rewrite the rules of the regional order to its liking. America's alliance system in the Indo-Pacific—a central pillar of the regional order—could be severely weakened, with allies questioning American reliability.

The precise nature of a post-annexation regional order is difficult to predict, but today's presiding order might well be torn asunder. Those who believe such an eventuality would seriously harm US interests are likely to support taking steps to prevent it—in this case, by intervening on Taiwan's behalf in a cross-Strait crisis.

Third, a decision to defend Taiwan would likely receive support from those believing that the United States cannot abide an Asia dominated by a hostile hegemon with open access to the Pacific Ocean. Adherents to this line of thinking do not see Taiwan's democracy as a *primary* reason for its importance to the United States, nor are they overly concerned with the contours of global order.

Elbridge Colby, principal at The Marathon Initiative, gave voice to this view at this year's Global Taiwan Institute [Annual Symposium](#):

"If you listen to the arguments for why I, for one, think that it's worth defending Taiwan, they are essentially strategic. They are Taiwan's military value and Taiwan's value to our credibility [...]. [T]he United States is likely to defend Taiwan, in essence, whether all Taiwanese want it to be defended or not [...] because it's actually in our interests."

In annexing Taiwan, the People's Republic of China (PRC) would further aggrandize its own power and, for the first time, have open access to the Pacific Ocean, allowing it to more easily threaten US territories in the Pacific, Hawaii, and the continental United States. American national security professionals have, understandably, been uncomfortable with such a state of affairs since 1941. For realist-minded strategists, ensuring that Taiwan remains the "cork" in the first island chain—ensuring the integrity of the forward defense perimeter—would likely necessitate US armed intervention in a war over Taiwan's fate.

Popular Opinion

At the Atlantic Council [event](#) noted above, I warned that, despite likely support among the national security community for intervention on behalf of Taiwan, publican opinion might significantly restrain Washington's ability to so act. Senior American leaders do not talk to the American people about Taiwan's impor-

tance or about the US-Taiwan relationship. Americans do not see news reports about their president hosting his Taiwanese counterpart at the White House or visiting Taipei, because such meetings do not happen. With inexpensive "Made in Taiwan" products far less ubiquitous than they once were, Taiwan occupies less space in the American public imagination (Taiwan has moved up the value chain, but its inputs to high-tech goods are less obvious to consumers).

There has, however, been some recent good news in this regard. This past summer, the Center for Strategic and International Studies polled the American public and American "thought leaders" on US defense commitments in the Asia-Pacific. Bonnie Glaser and Matthew Funaiole wrote up their [results](#) for *The Diplomat*:

"The results show that Americans are, in fact, prepared to take a substantial risk to defend Taiwan. With a mean score of 6.69 out of 10, respondents from among the US public gave stronger backing for defending Taiwan than Australia (6.38) and comparable to Japan (6.88), South Korea (6.92), as well as an unnamed ally or partner in the South China Sea (6.97)."

This high level of support—despite the esoteric "One-China Policy," strategic ambiguity, and lack of an effort from Washington to further educate the public on these issues—is reassuring. Expressing surprise at these findings, Glaser and Funaiole [posit](#) that "Taiwan's precarious position as a small, vibrant democracy on the doorstep of China is more visible than ever," thanks in large part to Chinese belligerence. Furthermore, they suggest that Taiwan's exemplary response to COVID-19 has won it international plaudits with potential attendant effects on public opinion.

There are three additional, complementary explanations as well. First, not only did Taiwan handle COVID-19 well at home, but it has also [donated millions of masks](#) to the United States during the last half-year. Americans may be taking note. Second, Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), has appeared with greater frequency on American cable news programs since the beginning of 2020, ensuring that Taiwan is taking its message to American living rooms in a way it has never done before. Third, China's expulsion of numerous western journalists this year has led a [growing number](#)

of international correspondents to set up shop in Taiwan. That, perhaps, has led to more and better coverage of Taiwan and of cross-Straits relations in America's major newspapers, raising awareness of Taiwan in the United States.

The task now is for American leaders, including those in the most senior ranks of government, to reinforce this support. Laying the groundwork among the public for intervention now will ensure Washington will need to spend less time doing so once a crisis is in the offing. Robust public support for defending Taiwan, meanwhile, will contribute to deterring China from acting precipitously, making such a crisis less likely to come about.

The main point: Defending Taiwan accords with the three major foreign policy philosophies most prevalent among leaders, politicians, and policymakers in both the Republican and Democratic parties.

The Renewed China-Vatican Deal: A Worrisome Development for Taiwan

By: Marshall Reid

Marshall Reid is a research assistant at the Global Taiwan Institute.

In late October, the Vatican announced that it has [renewed a secretive deal](#) with the People's Republic of China (PRC) allowing Chinese Catholics to contribute to the selection of bishops. The agreement—mired in [controversy](#) since its initial signing in 2018—has been [interpreted](#) as a sign of warming relations between the communist country and the Holy See. This development has [raised alarms](#) in Taiwan, which counts the Vatican as one of its few remaining diplomatic allies. While the Taiwan-Holy See alliance brings few [material benefits](#) to either partner, its symbolic and moral importance have grown in recent years. As Taiwan faces an increasingly aggressive China, the possibility of losing its only diplomatic partner in Europe is again raising concerns in Taipei.

Over the past two decades, Taiwan has watched as China has systematically [peeled away ally after ally](#). Once recognized as the sole representative of China, the

Republic of China (ROC) has found itself increasingly marginalized diplomatically. Among its shrinking list of remaining allies, the Vatican is something of an outlier. While the rest of Europe [switched its recognition](#) to the PRC in the 1970s, the Holy See has remained steadfastly in Taiwan's camp. The Vatican's status as an outlier on this issue has only grown more pronounced in recent years, as Italy—which wholly surrounds the city-state—has emerged as one of [China's most reliable partners](#) on the continent. In recent years, as the PRC has worked to [establish its influence in Rome](#), the Vatican has increasingly found itself the target of political and diplomatic [pressure from Beijing](#). In turn, this pressure is part of larger Chinese efforts to [build ties with Southern Europe](#) and further diminish Taiwan's diplomatic space. Now, the renewal of the PRC-Vatican deal threatens to upset the idiosyncratic relationship between Taiwan and the Holy See, casting doubt on the durability of Taiwan's last foothold in Europe. If the island democracy is to maintain its final bastion of support on the continent, it must be proactive diplomatically, strengthening its relations with the Holy See while demonstrating its credentials as a model of religious freedom.

Taiwan-Vatican Relations

In many regards, Taiwan's relationship with the Vatican is unique among the island democracy's dwindling diplomatic relations. Since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two in 1942, the association has weathered a wide array of ecclesiastical and diplomatic challenges, primarily imposed by the PRC.

Initially, the Vatican approached the ROC as it would any other normal diplomatic partner, establishing a mission and appointing a nuncio, or Papal diplomat, in 1942. [1] However, this state of affairs was thrown into disarray following the conclusion of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, when the ROC government relocated to Taiwan. The Holy See, despite its efforts to establish relations with the new, communist regime, soon found itself a target of suspicion by Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and his government. Unable to make in-roads in Beijing, the Vatican [relocated its mission](#) to Taipei in 1952, beginning decades of tension between the PRC and the Pope. [2]

Unlike Taipei's [other diplomatic partners](#), such as Nicaragua or the Marshall Islands, the Holy See's recognition of Taiwan is not necessarily wholly motivated by moralistic rejections of Chinese authoritarianism or long-standing economic relations. Instead, it is primarily a function of the Vatican's chilly [relationship with the PRC](#). Unable to maintain an official embassy in Beijing due to Chinese [distrust of religious institutions](#)—particularly those originating in the West—the Vatican was effectively forced into continuing its relations with the ROC in Taiwan. In several regards, the Holy See's modern relationship with Taiwan reflects this unorthodox arrangement, as the Papacy has continually demonstrated a [reluctance](#) to fully engage with its distant partner. Rather than [appointing a nuncio](#) to run its mission in Taipei, the Vatican has instead given its representative the lesser title of chargé d'affaires. Furthermore, the Holy See has steadfastly avoided sending [high-level delegations](#) to Taiwan, as no Pope has ever set foot on the island democracy.

Despite this uneasy dynamic, relations between Taiwan and the Vatican remain strong. Determined to preserve its foothold on the European continent, Taipei has frequently demonstrated its commitment to the city-state. To this end, Taiwan has maintained a [fully-staffed embassy](#) to the Holy See in Rome. Additionally, two Taiwanese presidents have [visited the Holy See](#) for official events, where they continue to act as formal representatives of China. In 2018, then-Vice President Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁) [visited the Vatican](#) to shore up diplomatic relations following the announcement of the initial agreement. More recently, Taipei and the Vatican have [partnered to dispatch aid](#) to regions devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Holy See helping to distribute Taiwan-manufactured medical supplies.

PRC-Vatican Relations

By contrast, relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Vatican have long been defined by distrust and uncertainty. Following its seizure of power in 1949, the Communist Party swiftly set about eliminating undue Western influence. Following the execution in 1951 of an Italian citizen for allegedly conspiring to assassinate the Chinese leader, the Vatican's representative office in Beijing was shuttered and all Papal officials were forced to leave the country. [3] This

incident marred the relationship between the two for decades to come.

In keeping with its long-held distrust of religion and religious institutions—particularly those originating in the West—the PRC has [kept the Holy See at arm's length](#) for much of the past 70 years. Fearful of the destabilizing effects of outside influence, Beijing has generally worked to [limit the spread of Catholicism](#) within its borders while simultaneously keeping a watchful eye over existing Catholics. To this end, the PRC established the [Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association](#) (CPCA, 中國天主教愛國會), a government-run religious body overseen by the United Front Work Department. Unrecognized by the Catholic Church, the CPCA is [widely seen](#) as yet another tool employed by the PRC to control, mobilize, and suppress dissent within its population.

Despite Beijing's efforts to consolidate its control over the Church in China, many Chinese Catholics have chosen to practice their religion in secret. Indeed, millions of Catholics have opted to [worship in private](#), operating small, unsanctioned churches. These “underground churches” (地下教會) generally [look to the Vatican for guidance](#), viewing the CPCA as fundamentally illegitimate and even heretical. In recent years, as the Xi Jinping (習近平) regime has ratcheted up its suppression of religious minorities, these churches have been [increasingly targeted by Chinese authorities](#).

The 2018 Bishop Agreement

In spite of China's general intolerance of religion and poor treatment of its Catholic minority, the Vatican has continued to seek stronger relations with the PRC. Ostensibly driven by a desire to protect China's Catholics, the Holy See has repeatedly [attempted to broker deals](#) with the communist regime. The 2018 China-Vatican deal was ultimately the [product of these efforts](#). Initially hailed as a “landmark achievement in advancing religious freedom within China,” the [agreement](#) allowed Beijing to nominate bishops for the Pope to approve. While seemingly benign, this arrangement nevertheless allows the PRC to [control the process](#), exclusively recommending party loyalists for crucial religious posts. Consequently, the agreement effectively strengthens Beijing's efforts to consolidate its hold on the Church.

In addition to these domestic benefits, the deal also represents a foreign policy victory for Beijing. As Raymond Tai Rui-ming (戴瑞明), Taipei's ambassador to the Holy See from 1996-2004, has [claimed](#), the PRC has long insisted on two preconditions for establishing diplomatic ties with the Vatican: "the Holy See should cut relations with Taiwan and the Holy See should not interfere with China's internal affairs." While the agreement does not expressly state that the Vatican will switch its recognition from Taiwan to the PRC, it will nonetheless likely be seen by Beijing as a step in the right direction.

Despite Pope Francis' intentions, the deal with China has been [widely criticized](#) as naïve, counterproductive, and ultimately dangerous. Though the agreement appears on its surface to be mutually beneficial, it is a far greater boon for Beijing, conferring prestige and legitimacy to a regime which has earned neither. According to Sean King, a policy expert who wrote about this issue in the [Global Taiwan Brief](#) soon after the signing of the original agreement, the Pope's myopic focus on gaining access to China's vast population will likely only alienate the underground Catholics he is seeking to protect. [4] This view has even been echoed by prominent individuals associated with the Church, such as former Bishop of Hong Kong [Joseph Zen](#), who framed the deal as a misguided act of appeasement. Over the two years since the original agreement was signed, the PRC has only grown bolder in its [repression of religious minorities](#), as demonstrated by its treatment of [Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang](#). By renewing the Vatican's deal with such a regime, Pope Francis has demonstrated a continued willingness to place political considerations ahead of moral judgements. For the millions of Chinese Catholics operating in the shadows, it is nothing less than a stab in the back, according to Zen.

Implications for Taiwan

Aside from its clear implications for Chinese Catholics, the China-Vatican deal could potentially have a number of negative consequences for Taiwan. As King pointed out in his [2018 article](#), the Holy See is "by far the most high-profile of Taipei's [...] diplomatic allies." Despite its tiny size, the city-state is Taiwan's last remaining bastion in Europe, an island of support surrounded on all sides by one of China's staunchest partners. For this reason alone, the China-Vatican deal should concern

Taipei deeply.

Following the signing of the original deal, [numerous commentators—including King](#)—opined that it was the beginning of the end for Taiwan's alliance with the Holy See. While the past two years have demonstrated that these concerns were somewhat exaggerated, Taipei should not grow complacent. As this month's renewal of the deal makes clear, Pope Francis fully intends to continue to pursue expanded ties with Beijing. Given the PRC's preconditions for true diplomatic engagement, it is hard not to view the deal as a worrying step towards a switch in recognition. Though such a momentous shift is unlikely in the near-term—as King argues—the likelihood will only grow as PRC-Holy See ties expand. [5]

For Taiwan, the renewal of the China-Vatican deal should be deeply worrisome. Though Taipei's partnership with the Holy See may have limited economic value, its symbolic resonance cannot be ignored. As Beijing continues its campaign to peel away Taiwan's last remaining allies, the island-democracy should not stand still. Instead, Taipei should work to strengthen its relationship with the Holy See by expanding cooperative efforts on COVID-19 relief and continuing to maintain an active diplomatic presence in Rome. Furthermore, Taiwan should work to draw a contrast between itself and the PRC, framing the matter as a choice between democratic tolerance and authoritarian repression. Taiwan is a model of religious pluralism in the shadow of China, a monolithic autocracy bent on stamping out dissent of any kind. While Taipei can do little to change Pope Francis' mind if it is already made up, it should take whatever measures necessary to ensure that the Holy See is aware of the sacrifice it would be making.

(The author would like to thank Sean King for his comments.)

The main point: The renewal of the secretive 2018 China-Vatican agreement may be a prelude to the end of the Taiwan-Holy See alliance. While a diplomatic shift may remain distant, Taipei should proactively work to improve its crucial relationship with the Papacy.

[1] Leung, Beatrice (2009). *Sino-Vatican Relations: Problems in Conflicting Authority, 1976-1986*. Cambridge University Press.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Conversation with Sean King on October 26, 2020.

[5] Ibid.