

# **Taiwan as an Indo-Pacific Partner: Envisioning a Coalition of Shared Values and Interests**

Kei Hakata

Professor at Seikei University, Tokyo, Japan

## **I. Introduction**

Driven by President Xi Jinping, the hegemonic posture of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has caused concern in many capitals. Xi's third term was confirmed by the 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held in October 2022, where Xi again announced his immutable ambition for the annexation of Taiwan. Turbulent times are ahead, providing little respite for China's neighbors. As a reaction to China's assertiveness and increasing bellicosity, democratic countries have begun to develop multifaceted measures to counter Beijing, many of which reference the term Indo-Pacific. Acting as a pseudonym for their China policies and strategies, this term graphically illustrates the shift in global geopolitical gravity to the emerging but contested region.

Despite the tensions across the Taiwan Strait, the place of Taiwan in various Indo-Pacific initiatives remains unclear. As a frontline state resisting China, the Republic of China (ROC) or Taiwan should be central to the rules-based international order. Taiwan, however, remains segregated from the declared tenets of the Indo-Pacific. This contrast is stark, indeed, if Taiwan is compared to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is accorded a privileged place in coalition building efforts. Even if policymakers and analysts

acknowledge Taiwan's relevance, it has not been articulated as such in many of Indo-Pacific narratives. Yet, as the insecurity around Taiwan increases to the point of a regional conflict, this ambiguity in the Indo-Pacific initiatives is less-than-desirable for the maintenance of peace.

Based on this assessment, this article investigates the meaning of coalitions, during peace and war, for a state devoid of a wide, official diplomatic recognition. From this perspective, it first briefly examines the Indo-Pacific concept and contextualizes the place of Taiwan in ongoing Indo-Pacific policies and strategies. It then depicts Taiwan's increased international outreach and reviews the defense policies of democratic partners, such as Japan and the United States (US), in light of Taiwan's challenges. The article concludes with a conflict situation confronting Taiwan, emphasizing the importance of creating a solid coalition of like-minded states and Taiwan.

## **II. The Indo-Pacific concept**

The term *Indo-Pacific* has come to describe the foreign policies of democracies towards China. Rather than merely being a geographic term, it is a “geography of strategies” that conveys the geopolitical aspirations of like-minded states.<sup>1</sup> It provides a valuable geopolitical frame with which to portray a grand strategy.

The Quadrilateral or Quad of Australia, India, Japan, and the US, for example, voluntarily specifies the Indo-Pacific in both normative and policy terms. While attempting to counter China, the Quad has advanced the Indo-Pacific idea via policies to preserve the free and open, rules-

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<sup>1</sup> Kei Hakata & Brendon J. Cannon, “The Indo-Pacific as an emerging geography of strategies,” in Brendon J. Cannon & Kei Hakata, eds., *Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Age* (Routledge, 2021).

based international order in an increasingly multipolar world. After several years of common efforts, the Indo-Pacific or “free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” as proposed by the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, is now the common language employed to safeguard broadly accepted international legal values and norms. These Indo-Pacific grand strategies demonstrate a shared wish to constrain China and build a “principled regionalism.”<sup>2</sup> To attain this objective, the Quad states—constituting the Indo-Pacific lynchpins—have worked diligently to build a coalition of like-minded partners.

Various initiatives have already been undertaken to build a rules-based Indo-Pacific order. Infrastructure projects to improve connectivity, joint naval exercises, and free-trade-oriented economic partnerships are part of such efforts. Partner states, especially those from Southeast Asia, have been identified and given great attention. Increasingly, Taiwan is considered a partner, too. The US has specified Taiwan as one of its “leading regional partners” in its Indo-Pacific strategy along with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands.<sup>3</sup> Canada also includes Taiwan in its Indo-Pacific strategy which states Ottawa’s intention to “continue [its] multifaceted engagement with Taiwan, which includes collaborating on trade, technology, health, democratic governance and countering disinformation.”<sup>4</sup> The European Union (EU) considers Taiwan as a partner in strengthening its engagement in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup> The Czech

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<sup>2</sup> Kei Hakata & Brendon J. Cannon, “The Indo-Pacific as an emerging geography of strategies,” pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (D.C.: The White House, 2022), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> The Government of Canada, *Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy* (CA.: The Government of Canada, 2022), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> The European Commission/The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 2021), p. 6.

Republic, too, takes a similar stance with Taiwan.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, in reality, Taiwan has been marginalized in the efforts to form an Indo-Pacific regionalism. For instance, Australia, India, and Japan<sup>7</sup> fail to mention Taiwan in their discourses, contrasting the enthusiastic attitude of other partners. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a dedicated FOIP website with various documents,<sup>8</sup> yet there is no trace of Taiwan to be found. Taiwan was not included in the new, US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The Quad also generally fails to mention Taiwan in its statements. Neither the "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," issued on May 24, 2022, nor the "Joint Readout of Quad Ministerial Meeting," issued on September 23, 2022, refers to Taiwan or even the Taiwan Strait. This absence may reflect the perceptions of individual Quad members on the issue of Taiwan, which may be considered too sensitive. Almost certainly, Beijing's insistence on its "One China" principle as well as other considerations have weighed heavily on such stances.

### **Taiwan as an Indo-Pacific partner**

Taiwan ROC is a maritime democracy possessing a strong affinity with and interest in the ideals of the free and open Indo-Pacific. The current government of President Tsai Ing-wen eagerly approaches the Indo-Pacific's liberal democracies so as to participate as much as possible in the rule-based international order. The ROC's government has firmly embraced the Indo-Pacific concept and "pivoted" towards the fledging

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<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, *The Czech Republic's Strategy For Cooperation With The Indo-Pacific: Closer Than We Think* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2022), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, these three proponent states have not yet published an "Indo-Pacific strategy" paper as such.

<sup>8</sup> "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, May 16, 2022. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e\\_000278.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html)

regionalism of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>9</sup> For example, President Tsai's administration has promoted its New Southbound Policy (NSP) with a renewed focus on Southeast and South Asia. While the NSP serves as a practical policy tool for Taipei's Indo-Pacific,<sup>10</sup> the government also actively references the term *Indo-Pacific* in its official statements and aims to communicate its affinity for the shared values enshrined in this term. In doing so, Taipei is conducting parliamentary and public diplomacy to exert its soft power internationally, notwithstanding its diplomatic marginalization.

The Indo-Pacific proponent states should favorably respond to these signals even though cooperation efforts tend to obscure Taiwan. Its value as a democratic state and a geopolitical cornerstone is beyond doubt. Taiwan is at once “a global public good”<sup>11</sup> and “the key to containing China in the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>12</sup> The ROC Taiwan epitomizes what a free, Chinese-speaking society can achieve. It is the antithesis of an authoritarian, undemocratic China, and attests to the island's legitimacy and relevance in the unfolding great power competition between the US and the PRC.

On par with Switzerland in terms of gross national product (GDP), Taiwan is also an advanced industrial state taking the lead in the global supply of semiconductors, as demonstrated by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), among others. It is also of utmost

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<sup>9</sup> David Scott, “Taiwan's Pivot to the Indo-Pacific,” *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 26, Iss. 1, 2019, pp. 29-57.

<sup>10</sup> According to President Tsai, “[t]he New Southbound Policy is at the center of Taiwan's own Indo-Pacific strategy.” The Office of the President, “President Tsai addresses opening of 2022 Yushan Forum” (News & Activities), October 2022, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6346>.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Nagy, “Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific: Defending a Global Public Good [Commentary],” *Macdonald-Laurier Institute*, October 6, 2022, <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/taiwan-and-the-indo-pacific-defending-a-global-public-good/>.

<sup>12</sup> John B. Barranco, *Taiwan: The Key to Containing China in the Indo-Pacific* (Atlantic Council, 2022).

military and strategic importance. For democratic states such as Japan and the US, the so-called First Island Chain of China, where Taiwan lies, is not only their defensive frontline, but also indispensable in containing China. Taiwan is both a buffer and a guardian, a cork in the bottle that, once corked (i.e., the loss of Taiwan) would have enormous strategic and normative consequences. China's power would be unleashed across the Western Pacific with deleterious effects, let alone on the freedom of navigation around the island. Taiwan's fall would have immeasurable economic and strategic impacts on Japan—all of them negative. US grand strategy would need to be redrawn completely, as well.

It is, therefore, in the interests of the concerned states to treat Taiwan as an Indo-Pacific partner at this stage. Threats to Taiwan are increasing, and they are clear more than ever as General Secretary Xi Jinping reiterated his determination to “reunify” Taiwan at the CCP's 20th Congress.<sup>13</sup> Of course, Taiwan remains a sovereign state, despite the CCP's claims and what it considers as one of its “core interests” (*hexin liyi*). Time and again, the ROC has demonstrated, through various diplomatic initiatives, its “capacity to enter into relations with the other states,” to use the phrase of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. Even if Taiwan has been denied official statehood, state practice considers it an “entity sui generis” having a special status in inter-state relations. As such, it is a beneficiary of the principles of international law that prohibit the threat or use of force. Preserving the existence of Taiwan means not only guarding against Chinese revisionism but also protecting the rules-based international

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<sup>13</sup> To be specific, Xi declared, “We will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary.” Xi Jinping, “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects,” *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, October 16, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20221025/8eb6f5239f984f01a2bc45b5b5db0c51/c.html>.

order, in general. The Taiwan question thus goes to the very heart of a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

### III. Taipei's international outreach

Taiwan has attracted increased attention from multiple capitals in recent years. Frequent visits by foreign parliamentarians to the Presidential Office Building occur, as exemplified by the much-debated visit of the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August 2022. Taiwan has received more attention in foreign and security policy documents, as well. Japan's National Security Strategy, adopted in December 2022, devotes many lines to Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the military preparedness of Japan and the US appears to anticipate the possibility of an armed conflict around Taiwan.

As the Covid-19 crisis further exposed the CCP's malignity, Taiwan consolidated its position both as a threatened friend and a proactive actor in the global arena. With a resilient economy backed by TSMC and other leading semiconductor and high-tech companies, Taiwan has autonomously pursued its diplomacy with fellow democracies from a solid position. But the island is woefully vulnerable to pressures from mainland China, which boasts truly global diplomatic clout. Indeed, Beijing's fierce anti-Taiwan campaign has led to a decrease in the number of Taipei's so-called "diplomatic allies" who recognize it from 29 in the early 1990s to 14 today.<sup>15</sup>

To "soften its international isolation" and "pursue its foreign policy goals," the ROC government has consciously explored parliamentary

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<sup>14</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan* [Provisional translation] (The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, 2022), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> As of January 2023. This number increases to 15 if we include the *de facto* independent but diplomatically unrecognized Republic of Somaliland.

diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> For what some may call an “unrecognized state,” parliamentary diplomacy is an invaluable “international lifeline.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas the visit of presidents, prime ministers, or ministers is not feasible, foreign legislators, and sometimes governors, frequently visit ROC’s capital. Albeit disrupted by Covid-19, the trend remained in place in 2022.

The visit of European parliamentarians, especially from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to Taiwan is mutually meaningful. Taiwan holds a special place in the CEE countries, which, except for Hungary, are enthusiastic pro-Taiwan supporters. Lithuania, for instance, is well-known for its pro-Taipei stance (and its distance from Beijing). In the Czech Republic, “Taiwan is seen as a symbol that reflects [its] own historical experience and the democratic values its society is built on.”<sup>18</sup> This reasoning seems to apply to Poland and other former communist CEE states, who all suffered from the Soviet oppression in the past. The visits from and stances in the CEE hint at who may form a coalition of eager supporters of Taiwan in case of armed aggression on the part of China.

In spite of increasing support, it is, nonetheless, unclear whether such diplomatic efforts will lead to change, to include the building of administrative-level relations, in the way states deal with Taipei. This is a critical point to consider when it comes to a crisis response, in particular among Taiwan, Japan, and the US. Other questions also arise when

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<sup>16</sup> Zlatko Šabič & David W.F. Huang, “Introduction,” *Parliamentary Diplomacy of Taiwan in Comparative Perspective: Against Isolation and Under-representation* (Bristol University Press, 2021), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Rup Narayan Das, “An International Lifeline: Taiwan’s Parliamentary Outreach,” *ChinaBrief*, Vol. 22, Iss. 23, December 2022, pp. 18-22.

<sup>18</sup> Filip Šebok, “Why Taiwan Matters for the Czech Republic,” *The Diplomat*, June 27, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/why-taiwan-matters-for-the-czech-republic/>.



envisaging an enlarged coalition in support of Taipei. Will the solidarity for Taiwan seen in the US, Canada, the EU (particularly the CEE), the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand extend to ASEAN states, for example, or those elsewhere? The current trend does not bode well for such a development.

### **Japan and the US's defense policies and Taiwan's challenges**

Coupled with the prospect of future military superiority over the US, China's provocative actions in the East China Sea area have made it a necessity to prepare for the worst-case scenario. As the forefront actors of an eventual crisis, Japan and the US have been particularly sensitive to the situation of Taiwan, whereas the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—still a potential actor—has not yet shown an equal level of concern.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting a shared understanding about a potential crisis in the region, Tokyo and Washington have accordingly taken measures, separately and together, which are aimed at increasing the operational capabilities and interoperability of their armed forces. Arguably, the peace-time Indo-Pacific strategies on display in Tokyo and Washington attempted to enhance security alignment with other like-minded partners, yet their renewed defense policies seem more concrete, offsetting to some extent what Taiwan lacks in terms of security guarantees.

Both the Japanese and US governments appear to have acted with a view to armed conflicts in the East China Sea theater, where Taiwan and Japan's Okinawa are located. Such concerns were addressed, for instance, by Japan's National Security Strategy (NSS), adopted together with the

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<sup>19</sup> NATO's Strategic Concept, issued in June 2022, states "the systemic challenges posed by the PRC to Euro-Atlantic security," yet it does not mention Taiwan or the Taiwan Strait. Nonetheless, the former Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who visited Taipei in January 2023, made a strongly supportive statement for Taiwan.

National Defense Strategy and Defense Buildup Program in December 2022. In addition to increased defense spending for a military build-up, the 2022 NSS announced a pivotal plan to possess “counterstrike capabilities” to deter armed attacks and “to mount effective counterstrikes against the opponent’s territory.”<sup>20</sup> The National Defence Strategy has shown Japan’s intention to bolster its “mobile deployment capabilities” while fundamentally reinforcing its defense capabilities.<sup>21</sup> The Defense Buildup Program details such plans along with other robust measures.

Importantly, Japan’s 2022 NSS, especially when compared to the 2013 edition, gives much more place to Taiwan, which it describes as “an extremely important partner and a precious friend of Japan.”<sup>22</sup> It also voices strong concerns about Chinese unilateralism and its negative impact on Indo-Pacific security, stating that “[p]eace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is an indispensable element for the security and prosperity of the international community.”<sup>23</sup> The 2022 National Security Strategy of the US, which regards China to be “America’s most consequential geopolitical challenge,”<sup>24</sup> likewise voices concern about Chinese aggression and its support for Taiwan. While supporting the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, the document states that the US “will uphold [its] commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act to support Taiwan’s self-defense and to maintain [its] capacity to resist any resort to force or coercion against Taiwan.”<sup>25</sup>

The US has long been the backer of Taiwan’s de facto independence

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<sup>20</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> The Ministry of Defense of Japan, *National Defense Strategy* [Provisional translation] (The Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2022), p. 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> The Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan*, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy* (D.C.: The White House, 2022), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy*, p. 24

and acts as the island's hard security provider under the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances. Strong support was expressed by the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) of 2018 and the recent annual National Defence Authorization Acts (NDAA), which clearly aim at deterring China and more robustly protecting Taiwan. In line with the Force Design 2030 program, the US will also restructure the 12th Marine Regiment, deployed in Okinawa, into the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR).<sup>26</sup> As planned by the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), a US Congressional initiative, operational efforts to regain Washington's strategic advantage over China in the Western Pacific are being implemented with full force.

Together, Japan and the US have deepened and strengthened their security ties in recent years. Their message to China became clearer. The "2+2" Security Consultative Committee, composed of foreign and defense ministers, held in Washington, D.C. in January 2023, decided "to accelerate work on evolving Alliance roles and missions and to employ interoperable and advanced capabilities, to address current and future security challenges."<sup>27</sup> At a Japan-US Summit Meeting, held immediately after this consultation, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Joe Biden confirmed that "the Alliance remains the cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific."<sup>28</sup>

## **IV. The world and a Taiwan conflict**

Whether China will invade Taiwan by 2027 or not has become a

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<sup>26</sup> "Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee (2+2) [Statement]," *The US Embassy in Japan*, January 11, 2023, <https://jp.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-security-consultative-committee-2plus2/>.

<sup>27</sup> "Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee (2+2) [Statement]," *The US Embassy in Japan*.

<sup>28</sup> "Joint Statement of the United States and Japan [Statement]," *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, January 13, 2023, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e\\_001320.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_001320.html).

burning question for analysts since the prescient remarks of Admiral Philip Davidson, the then-Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) in March 2021.<sup>29</sup> The year 2027 is emblematic as it marks the centennial anniversary of the founding of the PLA and the end of Xi Jinping's third term as the CCP's General Secretary. As the pressures on Taiwan rise, it now seems to be a question of timing. Yet, Taiwan's impregnability is an element of deterrence, which has made the CCP regime opt for a "winning without fighting" war à la Sun Tzu. For Beijing, a full-scale war should be viewed as being so risky that it would not be worth carrying out. While the China policy of Taiwan's next government after 2024 and Beijing's reaction to it are unknown, what is certain is that the annexation of Taiwan has been the unchanging goal of the CCP and that the conquest of Taiwan, whatever form it takes, is a critical agenda for President Xi.

Even though it would be feasible for the PRC to conduct cyber-attacks, aerial bombardments, and missile attacks onto the island, it would be extremely difficult to send a large fleet of warships across the 130 km-wide Taiwan Strait,<sup>30</sup> conduct a blockade and an amphibious landing, fend off Taiwanese counterattacks, and occupy the mountainous island all successfully.<sup>31</sup> Taiwan possesses robust defense capabilities and places of refuge, including underground facilities. The resilience of

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<sup>29</sup> Among many discussions, see Michèle Flournoy & Michael Brown, "Time Is Running Out to Defend Taiwan: Why the Pentagon Must Focus on Near-Term Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/time-running-out-defend-taiwan>; Kiyofumi Iwata et al., *Kimitachi, Chūgoku ni katerunoka: Jieitai saikō kanbu ga kataru Nichibeidōmei vs. Chūgoku [Can You Guys Beat China? JSDF's Top Officers Talk About the Japan-US Alliance vs. China]* (Sankei Shimbun Shuppan, 2023). This Japanese book emulates a remark made by the then-Prime Minister Abe at a closed, official meeting to revise Japan's defense program in 2018. Thanks in part to Abe, the "Taiwan emergency" (*Taiwan yūji*), a clear reference to a major crisis and/or conflict in and around Taiwan, has become a point of discussion in Japan.

<sup>30</sup> The Strait's largest distance is about 180 km.

<sup>31</sup> The author thanks Taiwanese security scholars for their insights on this point.

the 215,000-strong ROC forces<sup>32</sup> and the wartime mobilization, planned and spontaneous, must not be under-evaluated. Wargaming simulations show it is not easy for Beijing to win the war swiftly.<sup>33</sup> Even if PLA Air Force destroyed Taiwan's bases and radar network to gain air superiority, the ROC Army would likely retreat dispersedly and engage in guerrilla-type warfare against the invading troops. If the situation takes the shape of "asymmetric warfare," as advocated by Admiral Lee Hsi-ming,<sup>34</sup> the situation would turn to stalemate and work to China's disadvantage.

Taiwan cannot successfully fight alone, however, and the question of a military coalition necessarily arises. The current Indo-Pacific strategies are useful in forging partnerships, yet they do not directly lead to a wartime coalition that possesses a strong sense of shared values and interests. While condemnation of Chinese attacks may be broad and swift, without an Asian NATO, Taiwan would need to fight a lonely war.

Provided that Taiwan helps itself during the initial invasion, the US may form an ad hoc military coalition with Taiwan, eventually joined by Japan—if the armed conflict spills onto Japanese soil such as if PRC targeted US military assets in Okinawa or invaded Japan's Senkaku Islands. In this eventuality, a wartime Japan-US-Taiwan (JUST) trilateral alliance may take shape. The military coalition may include Australia and the UK, thus operationalizing the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance, but their participation is neither automatic nor a given. Moreover, the

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<sup>32</sup> The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China, *ROC National Defense Report 2021* (The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China, 2021), p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan* (CSIS, 2023).

<sup>34</sup> Aware of China's superiority in conventional weapons, Admiral Lee, the former Chief of the General Staff of the ROC Armed Forces, has emphasized Taiwan's prioritization of the in-situ defense capabilities. Lee explains his idea in his book, *Taiwan te Shengsuan: Yixiaozhida te buduichen zhanlue, Quan Taiwanren douying liaojie te zhengti fangwei gouxiang [The Overall Defense Concept: An Asymmetric Approach to Taiwan's Defense]* (Taipei: Lianching, 2022).

JUST triangle would likely be challenged by North Korea and Russia which would side with China, likely in word rather than in deed, in order to exploit the situation. India, a Quad member, may choose to remain timid in its support of Taiwan, exposing a “Quad Minus” circumstance. Although the Philippines may ultimately accommodate the US efforts, the Republic of Korea may take an equivocal approach to military involvement despite its recent pro-US posture. Similarly, it is difficult to foresee how NATO, whose majority of members are European states not under direct threat of PRC, would react.<sup>35</sup>

Despite President Biden’s strong statements in favor of Taiwan’s defense, the question remains whether Washington, or more precisely Capitol Hill, would be inclined to involve itself in combat operations. A similar question applies to other democratic capitals, such as Tokyo, Canberra, or London. It is currently impossible, for example, to think that the Japanese Self-Defence Forces would be deployed to Taiwan for its defense. In the meantime, Beijing will continue to selectively weaponize the presence of foreign citizens and business interests in China, limiting the coalition’s margin of maneuver. Even if the democratic partners get involved, Beijing may resort to using the threat of nuclear strikes, further complicating armed involvement.

### **A pro-Taiwan coalition?**

Backed by a growing soft power, Taiwan has kept its visibility in inter-state relations and succeeded in building a circle of friends in a fragmented, multipolar world. So, what kind of coalition could this

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<sup>35</sup> The CSIS wargame also excludes NATO’s military involvement, stating that “it is likely that most European countries would limit themselves to economic sanctions on China.” See Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan*, p. 62.

generate during a war with China? In the event of Chinese aggression against Taiwan, forming a coalition of Taiwan supporters at the diplomatic level, in addition to any military coalition, will be crucial to sustaining its resistance. One can envisage a layered circle of supporting countries, ranging from combat participants, logistical providers, non-combatant material and financial supporters to moral or passive supporters. Taiwan's chance of success depends on how far it can benefit from these layers of support.

The international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 provides a practical hint. Ukraine's core support came from the Group of Seven (G7) countries as well as the CEE countries which, excepting Hungary, have taken a clear stance in defense of Ukraine. For example, Poland exceeds Germany in terms of military assistance to Ukraine. The international sanctions against Russia, led by the US and the G7, were joined by more than 40 countries, including Taiwan, which Moscow called "unfriendly."<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the Emergency Special Sessions of the General Assembly were held at the United Nations, leading to resolutions on Russian military operations. The number of countries that voted for Resolution ES-11/1 on March 2, 2022, condemning Russia reached 141. Whereas not all these governments are taking part in economic sanctions, and the support for Ukraine was far from unanimous, the resolution still expressed a critical view prevailing of Russia and unprovoked invasions.

Indeed, prudence is necessary when making a comparison between Ukraine and Taiwan. The island's geographical advantage is balanced out by its diplomatic disadvantage. Ukraine is almost unanimously

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<sup>36</sup> "Russian government approves list of unfriendly countries and territories," *TASS*, March 7, 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1418197>.

recognized as a sovereign state. It is a UN member, which the ROC is not. Many states have also expressed their official recognition or understanding of China's "One China" claim. Moreover, China is a diplomatic powerhouse compared to Russia. On top of being a UN Security Council member, PRC remains influential in multilateral diplomacy. The Belt and Road Initiative has showcased China's leading role in infrastructure and connectivity projects in the eyes of much of the world. Although suffering from a post-pandemic economic slowdown, China is a global trade hub, and is the top trading partner of more than 120 countries, including Australia and Japan. Amid the strategic competition between the US and China, many countries have accordingly decided not to take sides. Countries in the middle have sought to benefit by adopting a comfortable, equidistant position. It is far from clear whether such "hedging middles,"<sup>37</sup> many of whom, nonetheless, endorsed the aforementioned UN resolution, will support Taiwan in the face of China's armed invasion.

Despite or due to this less-than-optimal situation, Taiwan has made conscious efforts to preserve its sovereignty and positive image by building a circle of friends. In particular, the ROC government has been successful in consolidating relationships with the CEE countries, which may end up holding a central role in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific—in spite of their distance. Ironically, the true partners of FOIP may lie not in Southeast Asia—the Indo-Pacific's geographic heart—but on the western periphery of Eurasia. Taipei has been right in pursuing an enlarged Indo-Pacific agenda, going beyond the conventions of Indo-Pacific geography.

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<sup>37</sup> Michael J. Mazarr et al., *Understanding Influence in the Strategic Competition with China* (RAND Corporation, 2021).



## V. Conclusion

“A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency,” said Shinzo Abe famously. It is also an emergency for the world. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the free world depends on the fate of Taiwan. In a sense, a Taiwan crisis is already underway as Beijing has normalized a variety of hybrid pressures on the island. Xi Jinping and the CCP regime have continuously exhibited their obsession to annex Taiwan by any means. For them, this objective is ultimate and supposed to achieve Xi’s “Chinese Dream.” Even though delusional to the eyes of outsiders, their zeal must not be underestimated. Japan, the US, and Taiwan must enhance their deterrence and continue to demonstrate the high cost of military adventurism by Xi and his military. Only a clear determination to deter China will prevent its aggression against Taiwan’s integrity and sovereignty.

The crisis scenario confronting East Asia is another bleak result of China’s rise. Although some may decry the resultant, divisive environment, the great power competition only highlights what is an entirely appropriate US reaction: America has finally come to grips with China’s hegemonic nature and destructive ambitions. The fact that Washington must now compete with Beijing is, in this regard, rather a welcome development for the region. In particular, Taipei as well as Tokyo would do well to take advantage of this strategic environment so as to enhance their own deterrence and coping capabilities. Clarifying and strengthening practical relations between Washington, Tokyo, and Taipei should be a crucial next step.

The Indo-Pacific strategies, developed and conducted by the Indo-Pacific lynchpins, represent the most powerful means available to

reaffirm the vitality and necessity of a rules-based international order. This is beneficial for the ROC Taiwan, where experience has shown both resilience and intelligence. Yet, no single country can defeat the PRC alone. A war can be won only if a coalition of partners with shared values and interests is formed. While Indo-Pacific and Taiwanese efforts, to date, have demonstrated the difficulties of coalition building, they have also provided a useful hint for envisioning what a coalition should look like in the event of a conflict. Bearing this in mind, Taiwan and its friends across the globe must be prepared to combat the near-term, existential, security challenges posed by China.

About the author: Dr. Kei Hakata is a professor at Seikei University in Tokyo, Japan. He specializes in international politics and security affairs focusing on the Indo-Pacific. Formerly an administrator at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hakata was also a visiting scholar at National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, ROC. His latest book, co-edited with Brendon J. Cannon, is *Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Age* (Routledge, 2021). The Japanese edition was published by Chuokoron Shinsha in 2022.

# Taiwan as an Indo-Pacific Partner: Envisioning a Coalition of Shared Values and Interests

*Kei Hakata*

*Professor at Seikei University, Tokyo, Japan*

## Abstract

The People's Republic of China under President Xi Jinping continues to pursue hegemonic ambitions, yet its ultimate objective to annex Taiwan remains unachieved. The 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party confirmed Xi's third term and reiterated the regime's immutable ambition, signaling turbulent times ahead. On the other hand, democratic states have developed grand strategies to counter China and embraced the Indo-Pacific, a symbolic term for safeguarding the rules-based international order. Given the current geopolitical setting, this article investigates the meaning of a coalition, in peacetime and wartime, for the Republic of China, a sovereign yet isolated state. It first contextualizes the place of Taiwan in ongoing Indo-Pacific initiatives; it then depicts Taiwan's increased international outreach and reviews the defense policies of Japan and the United States in light of the challenges Taiwan faces. The article concludes by examining a conflict scenario, highlighting the importance of building a coalition based on shared values and interests.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, United States (US), Japan, Indo-Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Coalition, Wartime