SUPPORTING TAIWAN: A CALLING FOR GLOBAL BRITAIN

BY GRAY SERGEANT
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DR YAO-YUAN YEH AND DR I-CHUNG LAI

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About the Author

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Prior to joining HJS, Gray held various positions including campaign roles for the Labour Party, as well as working in the UK Parliament. In addition, he spent several years in human right advocacy, with a specific focus on Tibet. In 2017 he co-founded Hong Kong Watch, which monitors freedoms and the rule of law in Hong Kong, and is currently the organisation’s Chair.

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SUPPORTING TAIWAN: A CALLING FOR GLOBAL BRITAIN

About Us

The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

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About The Asia Studies Centre

The Asia Studies Centre is a research centre within the Henry Jackson Society that aims to educate the public about the structural shifts, regional complexities and historic tensions that exist alongside the economic and social growth that constitutes the “rise of Asia”. It also advocates a British role in the broader Indo-Pacific region, commensurate with Britain’s role as a custodian of the rules-based international system.
1. Introduction

Despite China’s best efforts, Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen was comfortably re-elected in January 2020. During her first term in office, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) had carried out a relentless campaign to further isolate Taiwan on the world stage. Following her second election victory, China’s pressure on Taiwan looked set to mount.

Yet the most immediate challenge from across the Strait facing the Tsai Administration was not the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) but COVID-19. This put Taiwan in the spotlight once more, again for reasons that no doubt displeased Beijing. While other countries floundered in the early months of the outbreak, Taiwan handled the situation deftly, managing to contain the virus without seriously curtailing civil liberties. Taiwan proved itself a model for the rest of the liberal democratic world to follow and used its position to assist other countries in need.

The PRC also sent protective equipment abroad, but its repressive domestic politics continued as usual. For Hongkongers, this meant a continued, unrelenting assault by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on their freedoms, typified by the passing of the Hong Kong national security law. It left many wondering: when will the CCP seek to settle its claim to Taiwan?

Over the course of 2020, the PLA repeatedly flew military aircraft into Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), reaching levels not seen since 1996 and compounding the concerns of the outside world. Moreover, Taiwan has garnered even more attention from its continued exclusion from the World Health Assembly (WHA). The severity of the global pandemic contrasted with Taiwan’s successes and exposed the recklessness of Beijing’s politicking. The international community called for additional support for Taiwan. But what exactly would – and could – this involve?

1.1 Report Overview

This report seeks to answer this question by providing a series of actions that Britain can take to strengthen Taiwan’s resilience in the face of the challenges posed to it by China.

First, however, it will assess the current state of UK–Taiwan ties, clarify Britain’s “One China” policy and highlight how a fear of upsetting China has constrained the deepening of ties over the past 30 years. The report will then proceed to highlight how this approach is inadequate against the current challenges faced by Taiwan, namely the increasingly medium-term military threat China poses to the future of Taiwan, as a de facto independent sovereign state, and the current pressure that has seen Taiwan isolated on the world stage. Prominent examples of the latter include China’s poaching of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies and Taiwan’s exclusion from international organisations.

Before turning to solutions, the report will explain why Britain should care, starting with the fact that Taiwan is a vibrant liberal democracy that is being intimidated and existentially threatened by an authoritarian neighbour. This is reason enough for others to rally behind it. Yet other, more tangible reasons exist too. Taiwan’s economic and geo-strategic significance makes the country’s future important to the rest of the liberal democratic world, especially those concerned about maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Taiwan’s ability and readiness to contribute to solving major global challenges, most notably in the area of global public health, should be an incentive to ensure it can properly participate as a member of the international community.

Part Two of the report will explore ways in which these challenges can be confronted. Currently, too much of the discussion around supporting Taiwan is US-centric, which means that conversation typically turns to how Washington should strengthen its deterrence. While
the report will touch on how smaller liberal democracies can help bolster this deterrence, through threats of sanctions and non-recognition, there are other steps that could be taken to ease Taiwan’s current problems. These include enhanced dialogue and official visits by Cabinet-level ministers to ensure Taiwan is treated with the dignity owed to any other liberal democracy, inclusion in international organisations to break Taiwan’s isolation and to ensure its government and people can more effectively contribute to global problems, and increased trade to make Taiwan’s economy more resilient and less reliant on China.

While this report is geared towards a British audience, its content could, in large part, apply to politicians and policymakers in other middle-power liberal democracies. UK-Taiwan relations, while having their own quirks, are not atypical of relationships pursued by allies in Europe or in the Five Eyes. Moreover, many of the reasons why Britain should care about Taiwan are applicable to any liberal democracy with an internationalist outlook. Indeed, many of the policy recommendations in this report would be more effective if they were carried out in concert by a coalition of liberal democracies.
PART ONE

2. Britain and Taiwan

Britain has a long and complex history with Taiwan. The UK government’s early recognition of the PRC and subsequent adoption of its own “One China” policy set the foundation for this relationship. As a result of long-standing fears of upsetting Beijing, the UK has only slowly and cautiously built unofficial ties with Taiwan since the 1990s.

2.1 The UK’s “One China” Policy

In January 1950, the United Kingdom was the first leading liberal democracy to switch recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) to the People’s Republic of China. The United States would wait until 1979 to take the same decision. After the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, Britain was keen to secure its commercial interests in the country. However, this friendly overture was not reciprocated by Mao Zedong. Chiang Kai-shek, on the other hand, was more generous to his former wartime ally. Typically, Taipei would quickly sever ties with countries who recognised the PRC, yet, believing it made sense to keep Britain on side, he allowed the UK to maintain a consulate in Tamsui.

In 1972, the UK and the PRC upgraded diplomatic ties by exchanging ambassadors. This would have implications for what remained of the relationship between the UK and the ROC. The move would also lay out, in a signed communiqué, Britain’s “One China” policy. The text for the communiqué was shared in the House of Commons by then-Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home:

The Government of the United Kingdom, acknowledging the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the People’s Republic of China, have decided to remove their official representation in Taiwan on 13th March, 1972. 1

It is important to note that Britain’s own “One China” policy is significantly different from the PRC’s “One China” principle. Britain did not recognise the PRC’s claim to Taiwan; rather it acknowledged it. This position, although deliberately vague, was not unique. In the early 1970s, Australia also adopted the word “acknowledges” to state its view of the PRC’s position that Taiwan is part of China, while Canada used “takes note” and Japan settled on “understands and respects”. 2 France originally concluded its establishment of diplomatic ties with the PRC in 1964, without any reference to Taiwan. However, in the 1990s, this policy was revised to fall in line with Beijing’s “One China” principle. The United Kingdom’s position of merely “acknowledging” the position of the Chinese government, however, remains unchanged.

2.2 Developing Unofficial Relations with Taiwan

Despite having a flexible “One China” policy, Britain did not take a radically different approach to Taiwan compared to its allies with less-flexible “One China” policies. While France’s “One China” policy change limited its “room to manoeuvre” on cross-Strait policy, it did not inhibit the maturing of economic and cultural exchange between both countries or people-to-people ties. 3 The functional relationship France has developed with Taiwan over the past few decades

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mirrors the relationships established by other European countries, regardless of their own individual “One China” policies. This includes the UK. The Foreign Office stated, as part of written evidence to the House of Common’s Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 2000, “We do not deal with the Taiwan authorities on a government to government basis, and we avoid any act which could be taken to imply recognition.” The submission went on to explain:

[Her Majesty’s Government’s (HMG)] principal objectives in relation to Taiwan are economic. We seek to develop UK exports and commercial involvement with Taiwan, including inward investment. We also seek to develop a wide range of unofficial links, particularly in the educational and cultural fields. We support the further economic development of Taiwan ... In developing our relations with Taiwan we act within the restraints imposed by our formal position on the status of Taiwan and bear in mind Chinese sensitivities in order to ensure that unnecessary damage to that relationship is avoided. We also make it clear that we consider the Taiwan issue is one to be settled by the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan strait. We are strongly opposed to any use of military force and urge both sides to engage in constructive dialogue on the issue. 4

The biggest change in UK–Taiwan relations since the closure of the Tamsui consulate in 1972 came in 1993 with the opening of the British Trade and Cultural Office (BTCO). The BTCO, headed by a senior Diplomatic Service officer on secondment, was tasked with unofficially representing Britain’s commercial and other interests. Prior to this, help for British companies seeking to export to Taiwan was provided by a private body, the Anglo-Taiwan Trade Committee (ATTC). Funding and administrative support was supplied by the British Overseas Trade Board in London. However, this was done secretly, in order to give the impression that the ATTC had no government links and thus stave off complaints from China. 5 Fear of Beijing, and downgrading of Sino–UK relations, also explains the UK’s lethargy in setting up the BTCO in the first place. 6 By the time the UK’s representative office was set up in 1993, a number of European nations had already established offices in Taiwan and had even sent over ministers. 7

The renaming of the BTCO to the British Office Taipei in 2015 was a positive step towards a more normal relationship with Taiwan, although, at the time, the British representative in Taipei insisted that the move was simply “rebranding”. 8 This followed similar moves by the French in 2011 and the Australians in 2012. The new name symbolically gave the representative office greater status to better reflect its status as the UK’s de facto embassy, as did the change in title given to the office’s head from ‘Director’ to ‘Representative’. Since the UK’s decision, other countries have made similar moves. In response to Japan’s decision, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, stated China’s opposition to “any attempts at creating the frameworks of ‘one China, one Taiwan’ or ‘two Chinas’” and warned Japan to “refrain from sending false signals to Taiwan and the international community”. 9

Given this strong opposition by China to the most minor of changes, it is no wonder that the UK, like so many other liberal democracies concerned by Beijing’s sensitivities, has approached Taiwan with caution. Notable advancements in UK-Taiwan relations have come

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6 Ibid, p.79.
about slowly and often not on the initiative of the UK government. Moreover, despite these deals acknowledging Taiwan’s de facto independence, efforts have been made to pretend otherwise.

Following pressure from the British business community in Taiwan, the UK decided to sign a double taxation agreement with Taiwan in 2003. This followed in the path of other countries including Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands. Like these countries, British officials avoided diplomatic treaty language and the agreement was signed by representatives of each country’s trade office rather than a government minister. Additionally, the move required a change to the Taxes Act 1988 which saw the line “made with the government of any territory” altered to “made in relation to any territory”.

A similar picture emerges around the UK’s 2016 deal with Taiwan over the transfer of prisoners. This took the form of an ‘agreement’ signed by a UK prison service official, following a similar scheme agreed between Germany and Taiwan three years before. The initiative has also been credited to efforts by Lord Steel. Following the UK’s agreement, both Poland and Denmark signed prisoner transfer deals with Taiwan in 2019, as did Switzerland in 2020.

The decision to lift visa requirements for short-term visitors from Taiwan is one case when Britain was not late to the game. While Japan had already made this move, the UK proved to be a western leader by taking this step in 2009, prompting the rest of the European Union (EU) to do similarly. Nevertheless, Michael Reilly, who pushed for the change while serving as the British representative in Taiwan, notes that the decision still took three years to reach after internal opposition warned that the move “would upset China”. Despite these concerns, Reilly argues that this decision brought about both economic benefits for the UK and “a major boost in confidence and self-esteem” for Taiwan.

These shifts are important. UK–Taiwan relations have matured over the last 30 years with stronger economic, cultural and people-to-people ties. Today, both countries regularly boast of their collaboration in areas ranging from science and technology to educational exchange. The fact that Britain has gone from being behind its European neighbours when it came to setting up a representative office in Taiwan in the early 1990s to leading the removal of visas for Taiwanese visitors in 2009 should be praised. Moreover, these changes should be judged in context: only four other European countries have prisoner transfer agreements with Taiwan and the name of Canada’s representative office in Taiwan remains the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei. Nevertheless, the relationship can, and must, go deeper if Britain is to rebuff China’s challenge to Taiwan – a challenge that has repercussions for both the region and the international community.

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10 Reilly, The Great Free Trade Myth, p.92.
13 Roundtable discussion, January 2021.
14 Reilly, The Great Free Trade Myth, pp.99, 100.
3. Cross-Strait Tensions

“As long as the Beijing authorities are willing to resolve antagonisms and improve cross-strait relations, while parity and dignity are maintained, we are willing to work together to facilitate meaningful dialogue.” 15 These were the words of President Tsai Ing-wen’s address to the people of Taiwan on the country’s national day in October 2020. Also on this day, China’s air, navy and ground forces simulated a large-scale amphibious invasion of Taiwan, with the fiery footage plastered over Chinese state media. 16

The contrast is emblematic of the differences between China’s and Taiwan’s leadership. The constructive approach taken by Tsai in her speech was in keeping with her long-standing approach to cross-Strait relations. Her previous national day remarks, and both of her inaugural addresses, stressed the need to maintain peace and establish constructive lines of communication across the Strait. 17 Likewise, the exercise carried out by China’s military was symbolic of its increasingly bellicose attitude towards Taiwan.

3.1 An Increasingly Medium-term Threat?

China’s growing assertiveness on the world stage under Xi Jinping and its crackdown in Hong Kong has raised concerns about Taiwan’s future. China’s long-standing refusal to rule out the use of force to secure Taiwan is well known. The passing of the Anti-Secession Law in 2005 by the National People’s Congress formalised China’s policy of using “non-peaceful” means to respond to “Taiwan’s secession from China”. 18 What is new, however, is Xi’s warning that the Taiwan issue “should not be passed down generation after generation” and his tying of unification to his own goal of carrying out the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. 19 While not an explicit timeframe, this does suggest that there will be some attempt by China to gain control of Taiwan in the coming decades.

Concurrently, China has been building the capacity to deliver on this threat. During the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995–96), the US responded to China firing missiles towards Taiwan by deploying aircraft carriers to the region. Since then, China has focused on modernising the PLA to prevent a repeat of these episodes by ensuring that its forces can deter both Taiwanese independence and a potential third-party intervention. According to a 2020 US Department of Defense (DOD) report, China currently has “a range of options for military campaigns against Taiwan”. 20 This includes air and maritime blockades and full-scale amphibious invasions to seize and occupy some or all of Taiwan or its offshore islands. The Chinese military has also developed sophisticated plans for these operations. 21 While the DOD’s report claims that the PLA’s capabilities currently fall short of a full-scale invasion, it nonetheless notes the ongoing

erosion of Taiwan’s traditional military advantages and modest but concrete gains in the PLA’s amphibious warfare capabilities.  

The most visible sign of increasing hostilities in recent years has been China’s escalation of “grey zone” tactics against Taiwan. According to Taiwan’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research, between the beginning of January and the end of November 2020, Chinese military aircraft entered the country’s ADIZ more than at any other point since 1996. This has been accompanied by increased Chinese naval operations around Taiwan, particularly off its East coast, and sand dredging around Taiwan’s Matsu Islands. Additionally, in a show of force, China has sailed its aircraft carriers through the Strait, the latest example being in December 2020 when the PLA Navy’s newest carrier, the Shandong, sailed through the waterway. Such exercises serve a number of different functions, including intimidation, forcing Taiwan’s military to respond and thus expend resources and intelligence gathering. While worrying, they are not a sign of imminent invasion.

While the general consensus is that invasion is not an immediate threat, timelines for a future invasion vary among analysts. This is understandable given the various factors to consider. Most recently, US Indo-Pacific Commander Philip Davidson warned of China potentially taking action against Taiwan in the next six years. Others, however, continue to note the unlikelihood of China starting a conflict with the US over Taiwan given the significant risks and costs of such a move. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that China has both the motivation and increasing capability to invade Taiwan and, as such, the case for Washington and its allies to strengthen their deterrence remains strong. Furthermore, discussions of possible outcomes in five or ten years’ time should not distract from the here and now. PLA “grey zone” tactics are not the only way in which China is currently trying to coerce the Taiwanese people.

3.2 The Current Squeeze

In intensifying its campaign to isolate and intimidate Taiwan, Beijing was attempting to punish Tsai for not adopting the 1992 Consensus of her Kuomintang (KMT) predecessor Ma Ying-jeou, which in principle agreed to the idea of “One China”, although from Ma’s perspective the consensus also acknowledged the different understandings of “One China” on either side of the Strait. The overarching goal of these efforts is to undermine the Taiwanese people’s confidence in their own government and to demoralise them into accepting unification with China as a fait accompli.

One of the first signs that Beijing was tightening the screws came in 2016 when it tied Taiwan’s participation in the World Health Assembly (WHA), the governing body of the World Health Organization (WHO), to acceptance of its “One China” principle. Previously, under President

23 Dowse, A. and Bachmann, S-D., ‘Explainer: what is “hybrid warfare” and what is meant by the “grey zone”?’ The Conversation, 17 June 2019, available at: https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-hybrid-warfare-and-what-is-meant-by-the-grey-zone-118841. Political warfare, that is the use of power to achieve national objectives in a way that falls short of physical conflict, is conducted in a ‘grey zone’. Tactics associated with this approach may not cross the threshold of war owing to their ambiguity or the ambiguity of international law.
SUPPORTING TAIWAN: A CALLING FOR GLOBAL BRITAIN

Ma, Taiwan obtained observer status from 2009 to 2015 in exchange for relieving cross-Strait tensions. However, since 2016 Beijing has managed to block Taiwan’s meaningful participation at the WHA. Similarly, Taiwan’s involvement in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which it attended as a guest in 2013, was fleeting. Today, Taiwan remains shut out of both the WHO and the ICAO, as it is from a number of international organisations, including INTERPOL. As a result, not only is Taiwan’s voice marginalised internationally, but its government and people are also denied access to information important to their safety and security.

The shift from the Ma to the Tsai presidency also saw Beijing renew efforts to encourage Taiwan’s few remaining formal diplomatic allies to switch recognition. While Gambia broke ties with Taipei in 2013, it was not until after Tsai’s election victory that the country formally recognised the PRC. Throughout Tsai’s first term, a further seven countries switched recognition to Beijing, leaving the current number of diplomatic allies at 15. Typically, the switching of diplomatic relations has been accompanied by economic incentives from Beijing. Following Costa Rica’s decision to abandon Taiwan, China financed a US$100 million sports stadium in the country. Similarly, prior to his country’s move towards Beijing, Burkina Faso’s Foreign Minister spoke openly about the billions Beijing offered his government for switching.

More recently, Taiwan has accused Beijing of offering US$3 billion in investments and loans to the Dominican Republic to sever ties. While the importance of these diplomatic allies should not be overstated (after all, some of Taiwan’s most important relations are unofficial), it is nevertheless a symbolic blow to Taiwan’s de facto sovereignty. It also denies Taiwan’s top representatives opportunities to travel abroad on official visits and diminishes the number of allies who can speak up for Taiwan inside international organisations.

Beijing has also leveraged Taiwan’s economic dependency to punish the Tsai Administration. Following the 2016 election, Beijing initially targeted Taiwan’s tourism industry by restricting the number of PRC citizens travelling to Taiwan. This resulted in a 16.1% decrease in Chinese visitors that year. Beijing’s squeeze would continue, and in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election a harsher ban was put in place, which prohibited all travel to Taiwan apart from organised tours. More recently, Beijing banned imports of Taiwanese pineapples, ostensibly on biosecurity grounds. This was particularly consequential as 90% of Taiwan’s exports of this fruit went to China.

Taiwan has successfully mitigated the impacts of Beijing’s economic coercion by attracting tourists from elsewhere, especially Southeast Asia, and, in the case of its pineapples, by encouraging domestic consumption. Nevertheless, given Taiwan’s reliance on trade with China, such moves understandably foster fears that Beijing will continue to use its economic might to punish Taiwan for deviating further from its own “One China” principle.

Lastly, while more nebulous, Beijing’s attempts to impose its “One China” principle on foreign companies and institutions is nevertheless pernicious. This has involved forcing companies to change names from “Taiwan” to “Taiwan, China”, as seen in the case of a number of airlines in

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31 Ibid.
2018, including British Airways, \(^{35}\) as well as efforts to block Taiwanese participation in events. The effect of this was seen in the UK in 2019 when the City of London Corporation decided to block Taiwan from parading a float at the Lord Mayor’s Show. \(^{36}\) The decision, according to one Corporation councillor, was based on purely mercantile concerns, namely that “Taipei doesn’t have anywhere near the investment power that Beijing does”. Other private companies around the world have also bent to Beijing’s will, as have some public institutions.

There are also concerns that pressure from Beijing on foreign universities, particularly those with Confucius Institutes, could dampen or distort discussions on Taiwan. An especially direct manifestation of this was seen in July 2014 when pages from the European Association of Chinese Studies conference materials were removed beforehand as they contained information on Taiwan’s Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and a book exhibition by Taiwan’s National Central Library. \(^{37}\) Efforts such as these attempt to erase Taiwan and normalise Beijing’s claim to the country. They are particularly problematic, given the importance of public diplomacy to Taiwan, in the absence of official ties, to projecting the country’s substantial soft power.

These issues look set to continue in the years ahead. In January 2020, President Tsai was elected with 57% of the popular vote and her party maintained its majority in the Legislative Yuan. They will govern until at least 2024. While Beijing may ease its pressure on Taiwan in some of these areas, if a non-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leader were to come to power its long-standing threat nevertheless remains in place. Moreover, long-term trends in public attitudes in Taiwan mean that – regardless of who is in power – Taipei’s reconciliation with Beijing remains an unlikely prospect. Public opinion polling shows that since democratisation in the 1990s the number of people in Taiwan self-identifying as Taiwanese has consistently grown while the percentage of people identifying themselves as Chinese has slumped into single digits. \(^{38}\)

Correspondingly, there has been a gradual decline in support for both immediate and eventual unification with China, even if China were to reform politically. The reverse has been true for support for independence, although support for preserving the status quo remains by far the most popular option. The findings of a 2020 survey from the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University showed the percentage of people advocating Taiwanese independence, if pressed to choose that or unification, had increased from 15.1% in 2018 to 27.7%. \(^{39}\) Those seeking unification accounted for 0.7%. The same poll found a record 67% of the population identifying as Taiwanese compared to 2.4% who considered themselves to be Chinese. This makes the chances of Beijing realising its ultimate goal through the ballot box, winning over Taiwanese ‘hearts and minds’, virtually nil. As such, the international community cannot sit by and hope that tensions in the Strait will simply disappear.

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4. Why Taiwan Matters

As worrying as developments in the Taiwan Straits are, and as dim as the prospects for a long-term peaceful reconciliation may be, it would nevertheless be understandable for politicians and policymakers sitting in London to ask, “Why should Britain care?” After all, is this not, as Neville Chamberlain said of the Sudeten dispute, a “quarrel in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing”? 40

This is emphatically not the case, as both Beijing’s ultimate threat against Taiwan and its current pressure tactics have serious implications beyond the immediate vicinity. Taiwan’s geographic position in the Indo-Pacific means its future is important for maintaining stability in the region. Moreover, Taiwan’s pre-eminence in semiconductor manufacturing makes its economy crucial to global supply. Additionally, Taiwan is a liberal democracy, one that has a lot more to offer the rest of the world if allowed to properly participate on the global stage.

All of the above should give any liberal democracy ample reason to care. However, Britain should be particularly concerned about Taiwan’s future, given the UK government’s ambitions, as outlined in the Integrated Review, to shape the open international order of the future and further engage in the Indo-Pacific region. 41 While the Integrated Review makes no reference to Taiwan, many of the global challenges, from global public health and supply chains to international competition between values and systems of government, pertain to Taiwan. Under the banner of “Global Britain”, the UK government promises to play an active role in addressing these issues, especially in the Indo-Pacific. The Review highlights the importance of the region to the future of Britain’s prosperity and security, specifically noting the maritime choke points that exist there. It also identifies the centrality of the region to geopolitical competition and thus argues that Britain needs to deepen and expand its partnerships there to help promote open societies and uphold international rules and norms that underpin free trade, security and stability.

4.1 A Partner in the Indo-Pacific

Promoting open societies and upholding the international rules and norms in the Indo-Pacific will only be possible with support from fellow liberal democracies who share these goals, including the US, Japan, India and Australia. It should be remembered too that Taiwan not only shares these goals but also acts to realise them.

President Tsai has stated her country’s willingness to cooperate “with other nations in consolidating freedom and inclusiveness throughout the Indo-Pacific”. 42 In order to carry out this mission and guarantee its own security and interests, Taiwan has continued Track 1.5 Taiwan–US–Japan Trilateral Security Dialogues, and established new mechanisms including the 2016 Maritime Affairs Cooperation Dialogue with Japan, and since 2019 the Taiwan–US Indo-Pacific Democratic Governance Consultations. 43 It has also been argued that Tsai’s New Southbound Policy, primarily designed to strengthen Taiwan’s economic ties with Southeast
Asia, further a free and open Indo-Pacific agenda by building a sense of community and promoting values like good governance through regional exchanges and collaboration. 44 Finally, Taiwan has, with the US and Japan, developed the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (see 6.2) to enhance multilateral cooperation in the region.

This is all to say that the UK and other liberal democracies should not just be concerned about Taiwan as a potential problem, which it is commonly presented as, but ought to see the country as a partner who can help promote common goals in the Indo-Pacific.

4.2 “Taiwan Can Help”

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Integrated Review recognises the need to learn lessons from the pandemic, to reform the global health system and to strengthen global pandemic preparedness. Again, Taiwan is a potential partner from which the UK could learn a great deal.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Taiwanese government, having contained the virus, used its privileged position to provide advice and donate personal protective equipment and medical supplies to those countries hit hardest by the pandemic. This included the UK and its European neighbours. As well as protective gowns, forehead thermometers, infrared thermal imaging cameras, ventilators and isolation gowns, Taiwan provided Europe with 10 million masks between April and October 2020. 45 In April 2020, the UK’s representative office in Taipei thanked Taiwan for the million masks it donated to Britain’s National Health Service. 46 This in itself is a testament to what Taiwan can offer the world.

Moreover, if Taiwan had more of a voice on the international stage, it could have contributed even more to prevent the spread of the virus. Taiwan managed to contain the spread of the virus, without excessive curbs on civil liberties, by responding to the warning signs early with health screenings for incoming flights from Wuhan at the end of December 2019. Subsequently, Taiwan successfully implemented measures such as contact-tracing quarantining. Had the rest of the world followed suit, things may have been different. Yet the real problem is not that Taiwan was not listened to but the fact that it was denied the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the WHO.

This point remains valid despite Taiwan’s rise in cases since Spring 2021. Furthermore, it goes beyond COVID and public health. Taiwan has ideas, expertise and resources in a range of areas from which other countries could benefit more if it were given the voice it deserves within international organisations and on the world stage.

4.3 A Fellow Liberal Democracy

Global Britain has promised to be a force for good in the world. As the government’s Integrated Review notes, “a world in which democratic societies flourish and fundamental human rights are protected is one that is more conducive to [the United Kingdom’s] sovereignty, security and prosperity”. 47 As such, Britain should care about the future of Taiwan’s democratic success story.

Taiwan’s first direct presidential elections were held in 1996 and since then six further presidential elections have taken place, one every four years. Not only has the process been free and fair

46 UK in Taiwan, @UKinTaiwan, “Thank you #Taiwan for the one million masks donated to UK #NHS staff!”, Twitter, 15 April 2020, available at: https://twitter.com/UKinTaiwan/status/1250351437206315008?s=20, last visited: 23 April 2021.
but, crucially, it has also seen the peaceful transfer of power, back and forth, between the KMT and the DPP. These liberal democratic credentials have been recognised internationally too. Taiwan is consistently ranked as “Free” by Freedom House. Furthermore, the Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2020 Democracy Index, which measures the state of democracy worldwide, singled out Taiwan as a “star performer” and a “beacon of democracy in Asia”. The report ranked Taiwan as 11th in the world for democracy and 1st in Asia. This performance is all the more remarkable given the difficult balancing act the government faces in ensuring that Taiwanese society remains both open and shielded from pernicious PRC interference.

The annexation of Taiwan by the PRC, via military invasion or economic coercion, would be a direct assault on the values championed by Britain and the liberal democratic world. The authoritarian nature of the PRC is well documented, as too are the grotesque human rights abuses carried out against the people who live within its borders. If the CCP were to extend its control over Taiwan, the hard-won freedoms of the Taiwanese would, in all likelihood, dissipate and any autonomy granted would, as Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” model has shown, be little more than superficial. It is also worth considering that such an outcome would not go uncontested by the Taiwanese public (see Box 1.0). A survey conducted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy in 2018 found 68% of the Taiwanese public would be willing to defend themselves from a Chinese invasion. Such resistance could be met with brutal levels of repression, as seen in other areas that the CCP has tried to subjugate, such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Ultimately, however events unfold, annexation would be a tragedy for the Taiwanese people, which would place great moral pressure on other liberal democracies to respond.

Box 1. Testing the Taiwanese Resolve, by Dr Yao-Yuan Yeh

Facing Chinese aggressive behaviour or even a possible cross-Strait war between Taiwan and China, Taiwanese citizens are nonetheless more prepared than ever. Public opinion research has shown that the Taiwanese are willing to defend themselves in the event of war. Several factors determine how strong such a self-defence willingness would be. If it is perceived by Taiwanese citizens that the United States would intervene in a cross-Strait conflict then their willingness to defend themselves significantly increases. Other factors, such as Taiwanese national identity and a pro-independence attitude toward cross-Strait relations, also contribute to their defence determination.

Therefore, continuous support from the United States, even under its long-standing strategic ambiguity policy, contributes to such a deterrent signal from the Taiwanese public to China. Along with the growing Taiwanese national identity (currently, more than 60% of the public self-identify as Taiwanese across various national representative surveys), Taiwanese people undoubtedly perceive the importance of standing tough against China and its intent of war. Moreover, from an operational perspective of the cross-Strait war, the Chinese invasion of Taiwan would meet tremendous difficulties, and the cost of such a
4.4 A Democratic Model

Taiwan’s democracy also has strategic value for fellow liberal democracies as its continued success serves as a model for others. This is not a new point. In 2004 President George W. Bush delivered a speech urging China to democratise, in which he argued that “by embracing freedom at all levels, Taiwan has delivered prosperity to its people and created a free and democratic Chinese society”. 53 Today, in an era of systemic competition between democratic and authoritarian values and systems of government, the point is even more pressing.

Indeed, it has been argued that Taiwan’s continued success story may help to undermine Beijing’s repressive regime, like the existence of a free and thriving West Berlin did to East German communism. 54 However, while the contrast with China is useful, the broader potential of Taiwan’s democratic success story should be realised. Taiwanese society today gives the lie to the claim that democracy and human rights are western ideals and therefore incompatible with Eastern cultures. Furthermore, Taiwan’s successful transition to democracy can serve as a model and an inspiration throughout the Indo-Pacific, and across the world, not just on the other side of the Strait.

4.5 Order in the Indo-Pacific

The Taiwan Strait remains a flashpoint for conflict in the Indo-Pacific. This should be a matter of concern to the UK, given the critical importance the government has placed on the region for the country’s economic and security objectives. More concerning still is the potential for a conflict to draw in Britain’s key allies, including the US, Japan and possibly even Australia.

In addition to its destabilising effect, an attempted invasion of Taiwan by China, if successful, would be a direct assault on the rules-based international order which Britain, alongside its liberal democratic allies, helped to found and sustain. Crucial to this order is the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty. Regardless of Beijing’s claims, Taiwan possesses all the qualifications for statehood, including a permanent population, a defined territory, government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. 55

Therefore, the annexation of Taiwan would undermine this principle and could embolden other dictatorships to make similarly revisionist moves. As the former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt
argued, if China were to favour a military solution, “the implications for western democracies would be extraordinarily dangerous, potentially upending the global order that has given us peace and prosperity since 1945”. Moreover, Taiwan’s position between Japan and the South China Sea along the first island chain makes its future of particular importance to all politicians and policymakers who are concerned about both the future balance of power in and the openness of the Indo-Pacific, particularly those sitting in Tokyo.

In December 2020, Japan’s deputy defence minister, Yasuhide Nakayama, called Taiwan’s safety a “red line”, and urged the incoming Biden Administration to take a strong stance. More recently, the country’s deputy prime minister, Taro Aso, warned “if a major problem took place in Taiwan, it would not be too much to say that it could relate to a survival-threatening situation [for Japan]”. While there are many reasons for Japan to be concerned about the future of Taiwan, one of the most frequently cited reasons is concerns over the control of sea lanes. Given that a significant proportion of the country’s energy imports are shipped through waters around Taiwan, it is feared that if China were to control Taiwan it could choke off supplies to Japan. In addition, justified or not, an annexation of Taiwan would likely raise fears over China’s intentions with regard to the disputed Senkaku Islands. Some scholars have gone further by arguing that Japan would see the move as even greater threat to its interests and move towards remilitarisation.

There also exist long-standing concerns that China’s control over Taiwan would give Beijing the ability to project its naval and air power further into the Pacific. While American analysts debate the extent of the main island’s geostrategic importance, it is clear that this is a consideration for Beijing. As Alan M. Wachman’s Why Taiwan? highlights, for PRC policy elites, Taiwan’s geography and its implications for China’s security and power projection are just as important as nationalistic aspirations. It has, Wachman writes, become a prominent view in the PRC that only by controlling Taiwan can the country succeed in denying access to rival forces adjacent to its coast and ensure its forces safe passage in waters east of Taiwan, although he argues that no uniform conclusion about Beijing’s intentions can be formed. Andrew S. Erickson has also highlighted both how Taiwan is seen as a key part of the first island chain and how views differ on the main island’s utility. While some PRC analysts see it as a potential springboard for an attack on China, which needs to be neutralised, others express aspirations to place military facilities there, particularly ports on Taiwan’s east coast, which would allow China to “conclusively break out of the confines of the first island chain once and for all”. If used for the latter, it would prove a serious challenge to the current balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and those countries seeking to maintain the region’s openness.

62 Wachman, A. M., Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China’s Territorial Integrity (Stanford University Press, 2007), pp.118-152.
64 Ibid.
4.6 Semiconductor Supply Chains

Taiwan's geography is not the only factor that makes it strategically significant to the rest of the world – its position as a world-leading producer of semiconductors is also relevant. The UK is not the only country to acknowledge the importance of science and technology to national security and competitiveness. Recently, tech has become key to the tussle for supremacy between the US and China.

Semiconductors are sacrosanct to technological innovation and competition over the coming decades. These chips already feature in everything from smartphones to electronic vehicles and will be critical to future advances in areas including artificial intelligence and 5G. In recent years there has been a flurry of media interest in these chips, described as the oil of the 21st century, and, critically, in Taiwan's role in their production.

The importance of semiconductors was made apparent in 2020 when the automotive industry was hit by a shortage of chips. This shortage was in part a result of premature cancellations of chip orders early in the year, a consequence of the disruption caused by COVID-19, but the situation was compounded by stockpiling, a result of the US–China tech rivalry and unrelated supply chain problems. The result was global cutbacks in production. The UK was not immune to the effects of this, with Honda announcing a four-day halt to production at its Swindon plant in January 2021. The previous year, for similar reasons, Honda, alongside Toyota and Jaguar Land Rover, closed its plant early for Christmas.

It is notable that during this crisis, countries like Germany turned to Taiwan to help ease the shortage in semiconductors. This is owing to the leading role Taiwan plays in this industry. Taiwan accounts for one-fifth of global chip manufacturing and, it is estimated, half of all cutting-edge capacity. At the heart of this success is the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which provides chips for global organisations including Apple, Tesla and the American military (notably in its F-35 fighter jets). TSMC not only leads the field in manufacturing chips but, more importantly, also produces the most advanced – that is, the smallest – chips. Given this dependency, it is no surprise that the US has urged TSMC to build a chip manufacturing foundry in Arizona, although it should be noted that the company’s foundries in Taiwan are likely to maintain their advantage well into the future.

Taiwan is currently and will continue to be a critical player in the global production of semiconductors. Reducing this dependency will be costly and will take time. Therefore, the world should be concerned by any action taken by Beijing that may impact Taiwan’s production and as a result disrupt global supply chains.

PART TWO

Given Taiwan's importance to the rest of the liberal democratic world, including Britain, and the challenge posed by China, the question turns to what can be done. More specifically, what can be done by middle-sized powers, who, unlike the US, would be unable to credibly guarantee Taiwan's security in the event of an attack from Beijing. As the previous section has demonstrated, there are a number of areas in which Taiwan currently needs greater support, whether in reducing its dependency on China for trade or in participating in international organisations. The following section identifies a number of bilateral and multilateral ways in which other liberal democracies could strengthen Taiwan's resilience and ease its isolation.

5. Enhancing Dialogue and Visits

In order to address Taiwan's isolation, liberal democratic governments should follow the lead of the US and Japan and push against the boundaries of what is and is not permissible within “One China” policies.

Dialogue and visits give Taiwan the opportunity to communicate with the rest of world as any other liberal, democratic country does. This is an increasingly important issue as China whittles down the number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic allies. The US has attempted to respond to this by using both incentives and the threat of punitive measures to prevent remaining allies from switching their recognition. Other liberal democracies could follow suit. For example, Britain could draw on its Commonwealth ties with seven of Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies. ⁷⁰ Yet not only is the effectiveness of such an approach questionable, it is also rather hypocritical of more-powerful countries to ask others to do something that they themselves do not, an irony that does not escape the Taiwanese public. Instead, it is incumbent on these liberal democracies themselves to stretch the scope of their own unofficial relations.

Currently, meaningful communication is constrained by an internalised, in some cases misplaced, fear among policymakers in liberal democracies who believe that any step towards Taiwan will provoke a backlash from Beijing. This fear is compounded by misunderstandings about what “One China” policies entail. Through his interactions with government officials from a variety of countries, Michael Cole has noted a lack of awareness of what is and is not permissible under their respective “One China” policies. ⁷¹ He argues that this blind spot has “misled government officials and encouraged risk-avoidance”. A report from the Macdonald-Laurier Institute highlights how this ignorance and Canada’s long-standing narrow view of its “One China” policy has led to Canadian officials avoiding conferences where Taiwanese officials are also in attendance. ⁷² This mindset may also explain the unfortunate situation that faced the Canadian foreign minister in May 2020 when, despite being repeatedly asked to thank Taiwan for its mask donations, he dodged mentioning the country by name. ⁷³ Actions like this further isolate Taiwan on the world stage and sideline its contribution to the international community.

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⁷⁰ Commonwealth members who have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan include Belize, Eswatini, Nauru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tuvalu.
⁷¹ Cole, Cross-Strait Relations Since 2016, p.41.
Canada is far from unique in this respect. Aside from some notable exceptions, most countries appear unwilling to push back against the unnecessary, self-imposed restrictions on talking to and about Taiwan.

5.1 Loosening Self-Imposed Restrictions

Any self-imposed restrictions limiting who can interact with Taiwanese officials should be loosened to ensure that Taiwan is treated more like a fellow liberal democracy and not a pariah. While the government may wish to restrict dialogue at the very top, small public gestures of friendship, such as congratulating Taiwan for an achievement or sending commiserations for a loss, should nevertheless be encouraged. At the moment those at the top of the UK government only reinforce Taiwan’s isolation.

There is little to speak of in terms of dialogue between the leaders of Taiwan and the UK. In August 1992, the UK’s former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited Taiwan and expressed admiration for the country’s economic miracle and her hopes for greater cultural and educational exchanges. 74 Eight years later, Taiwan’s former President Lee Teng-hui would meet Thatcher in the Houses of Parliament on a private visit to the UK. 75 As welcome as these initiatives are, they occurred a long time ago and, crucially, between leaders after they had left office.

Britain is not unique in this respect. Leaders of liberal democracies are unlikely to talk about Taiwan, let alone talk with its leaders. This changed slightly during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis when Taiwan received thanks and praise from across the world. In April 2020, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen thanked Taiwan, in a tweet, for its donation of 5.6 million face masks. 76 In November 2020, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison highlighted Taiwan as a place for which Australia could offer special travel arrangements, given its success in keeping COVID-19 levels low. 77 Going forward, leaders and governments should not be afraid to talk about Taiwan and should subtly normalise public communication with Taiwan.

Although Japan’s geographic proximity and colonial history have driven its especially close relations with Taiwan (see Box 2.0) others could still turn to Tokyo for inspiration. During his tenure, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a particular point of reaching out to both Taiwan and President Tsai Ing-wen. Following Tsai’s election victory in 2016, Abe took the unprecedented move of sending his congratulations to Taiwan’s president-elect. 78 Abe also publicly sent a letter to President Tsai following the 2018 Hualien earthquake, in which a Japanese team assisted with the search-and-rescue, and posted on Facebook a photo of himself holding up a calligraphed plaque reading, “Taiwan, good luck”. 79 The Japanese minister of foreign affairs also expressed his concern and condolences with his Taiwanese counterpart over a phone call.

Similar taboos were broken during the Trump Administration. Famously, while still president-elect, Trump took a phone call from President Tsai in which they exchanged pleasantries and

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75 Reilly, The Great Free Trade Myth, p.92.
76 von der Leyen, U., @vonderleyen, “The European Union thanks Taiwan for its donation of 5.6 million masks to help fight the coronavirus. We really appreciate this gesture of solidarity. This global virus outbreak requires international solidarity & cooperation. Acts like this show that we are #StrongerTogether”, Twitter, 1 April 2020, available at: https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1245399247232684034?lang=en, last visited: 23 April 2021.
discussed policy.\(^{80}\) Similarly, in February 2020, Taiwan’s vice president-elect, William Lai, visited Washington to meet with lawmakers and officials.\(^{81}\) In addition, he joined a National Prayer Breakfast at which senior US officials and the president were in attendance. During this period, Mike Pompeo made history by being the first US Secretary of State to send an official congratulatory message to the President of Taiwan.\(^{82}\) His message of congratulations on Twitter a few months before also stood out, especially compared to the UK Foreign Secretary’s reaction, which was limited to a short statement on the Foreign Office’s website.\(^{83}\) Before leaving office, Pompeo announced the lifting of all self-imposed restrictions on officials’ interactions with their Taiwanese counterparts. His successor, Antony Blinken, has followed through on continuing to make contact. By early 2021, Taiwanese representatives in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan had publicly met their American counterparts.\(^{84}\) The Biden team broke taboos of their own too by inviting Taiwan’s representative to the US, Hsiao Bi-khim, to the presidential inauguration.

Even if the UK continues to restrict official contact between both countries at the highest levels of government, dialogue at all levels below this should be allowed and encouraged. Even then, this should not stop leaders from using other channels to send messages of support to another. Both Japan and the US have shown that unofficial relations need not be so restrictive and have provided a roadmap for changing the status quo.

**Box 2. The Strengthening of Japan-Taiwan Ties, by I-Ching Lai**

Taiwan was a colony governed by Japan until 1945 and was officially ceased in April 1952 when the San Francisco Treaty came into force. Unlike the UK, Japan stuck with the KMT government during the early Cold War. However, in 1972, the year US President Richard Nixon visited China, Tokyo finally decided to switch recognition to Beijing. Relations between Taiwan and Japan remained politically cool from then onwards, despite extensive economic ties, until Taiwan began to democratise under the leadership of President Lee Teng-Hui in the 1990s. The emergence of a democratic neighbour was particularly important for Japan at this time given the uncertainty around the US alliance, the nuclearisation of North Korea, and China’s actions during the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis as these all indicated future instability in the region.

It is worth pointing out that robust people-to-people ties, and positive views of one another, formed the bedrock for strengthening relations. In part this came from historic colonial ties. In the modern era this has been expressed by reciprocal donations to help each other in the aftermath of natural disasters. Broader interests are also at play. Taiwan’s position along sea lanes and in the first island chain means the future of the main island matters to Japan’s security (see 4.5) while, more recently, Taiwan’s production of semiconductors makes it economically important (see 4.6).

Nevertheless, relations have remained unofficial. Like other nations, upon recognising Beijing, Tokyo drew up internal guidelines which regulated official interactions with Taiwan.

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5.2 Cabinet-level and Ministerial Visits

The UK should begin sending Cabinet-level ministers to visit Taiwan, signalling increased interest in and desire to enhance dialogue between both countries.

Since the early 1990s the UK has sent government ministers to Taiwan. Between 1993 and 2019, UK ministers have officially visited Taiwan on 24 occasions (see Appendix). These visits have consisted of Ministers of State, Parliament Under-Secretary of State and, on one occasion in 2001, Scotland’s First Minister. In October 2020, the Department for International Trade’s Greg Hands, owing to COVID-19, made a “virtual visit” and co-hosted the 23rd UK–Taiwan trade talks. Hands visited Taiwan on two previous occasions in a ministerial capacity and met with President Tsai in September 2016. 85 In general, recent visits to Taiwan by UK officials have been opportunities for meetings with ministerial counters, regional and local representatives and industry experts.

However, a Cabinet-level visit to Taiwan by a British Secretary of State is yet to happen. The UK government has ruled out ministers, of any level, from the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence visiting Taiwan as it argues it would violate its policy of non-recognition. 86 This is broadly in line with the model adopted by the EU which proscribes visits to or reception of Taiwan for top officials, including foreign and defence ministers. Nevertheless, this still leaves ample scope for engagement across a number of government areas, including health, education and culture. As well as providing opportunities to learn from Taiwan, negating, in part, the country’s exclusion from international organisations, high-level visits such as these would be an important symbolic pushback against Beijing’s efforts to isolate Taiwan.

The US, following a Taiwan Policy Review in 1994, has on a case-by-case basis permitted Cabinet-level visits to Taiwan, subject to White House approval. 87 Prior to this, Carla Hill, then covering everything from the character of Japan’s representative office in Taiwan to the management of contact between Japanese bureaucrats and officials from Taiwan’s representative office in Japan. Collectively these guidelines have been dubbed the “72 system” and in recent years there have been attempts by Japanese lawyers and policy makers to amend them and establish the country’s own Taiwan Relations Act.

In addition, some guidelines have been liberally interpreted. This is due to the flexibility granted by Japan’s parliamentary system. Unlike their counterparts in the US, Japanese ministers and vice-ministers are also members of the Diet. Therefore, they are able to invite officials from Taiwan to their parliamentary offices, as opposed to their ministerial ones. This manoeuvre blurs the line of what is and is not official contact as ministers can argue that such meetings are taking place in a parliamentary capacity. This provides some cover in the face of complaints from Chinese officials.

Japanese officials also use international gatherings, such as APEC and the WTO, to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts too. For example, Prime Minister Abe met with Taiwanese special envoys at every APEC conference despite persistent opposition from Beijing.

serving as US Trade Representative, was in 1992 the first Cabinet-level official to visit Taiwan since Washington switched recognition. Since then, six Cabinet-level officials have visited Taiwan. The most recent of these visits saw US Secretary of Health and Human services, Alex Azar, praise Taiwan’s response to COVID-19 as being “among the most successful in the world”. 88 Azar also met with Taiwan’s Health and Welfare Minister, Chen Shih-chung, and members of Taiwan’s Centers for Disease Control. The UK should follow suit after the pandemic has passed by sending the Secretary of State for Health to Taiwan to hear first-hand about the country’s early successes in combatting COVID-19 through, among other measures, effective contact tracing and quarantines. Going forward, Cabinet-level visits should continue on a regular basis, with little fanfare.

5.3 Calling Out “Orwellian Nonsense”

The UK government should also use its voice to push back against Beijing’s attempts to coerce public and private institutions into adopting its “One China” principle. This should be done by calling out name changes that imply that Taiwan is a province of China, and efforts to block Taiwanese participation in events, both of which were seen during incidents involving British Airways and the Lord Mayor’s Show.

While private bodies have the right to make these sorts of decisions for themselves, governments should nevertheless offer guidance and support in the face of PRC pressure. The Foreign Office deserved the plaudits it received for stating clearly, in response to airline name changes, that it “refers to Taiwan as simply ‘Taiwan’”. 89 Similarly, it is reassuring that, when asked, the UK government stated that Taiwan should be included in the Lord Mayor’s Show. 90 Even so, a more proactive approach should be adopted going forward.

During the Trump Administration, the US famously branded China’s tactics as “Orwellian nonsense”. 91 While not especially diplomatic, it was a useful corrective, as this type of coercion against private companies by Beijing had become commonplace. Washington’s leadership also spurred the American Airlines’ CEO, who did not change Taiwan’s name on its company website, to state, “We’re following the direction of the U.S. government.” 92 Going forward, other liberal democracies should be as forthright and not wait for pressure from the media or their own national parliaments to respond to similar incidents. After all, if these governments’ own “One China” policies and positions on interacting with Taiwan remain unclear, it is no wonder companies crumble at the first sign of pressure from China.

92 Kaye, B., ”Qantas plans to change Taiwan website reference, but says needs time’, Reuters, 4 June 2018, available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-airlines-iata-qantas-idUSKCN1J00QM, last visited: 23 April 2021.
6. Ensuring Participation in International Organisations

In order to ensure that Taiwan’s voice is heard on the world stage, the UK must work with its allies to challenge China’s grip over existing institutions to enable Taiwan’s meaningful participation. Moreover, it should be creative in developing new platforms and forums to which Taiwan can contribute.

Ever since Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations in 1971, the country has remained locked out of this international body and its sub-organisations, despite efforts to gain some form of representation at the UN by both the Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian Administrations from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. Nevertheless, throughout this same period, Taiwan was able to join a number of international organisations, often by sidestepping the issue of sovereignty by instead focusing on areas of practical importance and on occasion settling for observer status. Modest advances were made during the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou but, as already noted, this has been reversed by Beijing since the election of President Tsai.

Liberal democracies have pushed back against this. The United Kingdom’s position on Taiwan’s participation in international organisations was succinctly put by the then Minister of State for Asia, Mark Field, during a 2017 Westminster Hall Debate on UK relations with Taiwan:

The UK Government continue [sic] to support, and will continue to speak up for, Taiwan’s participation in international organisations where there is precedent for its involvement, where it can contribute to the global good, and where there is no prerequisite of nationhood for participation. 93

This, or near identical, wording has been used by UK ministers in response to inquiries about Taiwan’s participation in the WHO, the ICAO and INTERPOL in recent years. This position is similar to the USA’s perspective which, since the Clinton Administration’s 1994 Taiwan Policy Review, has supported both Taiwan’s “membership in organizations where statehood is not a prerequisite” and “opportunities for Taiwan’s voice to be heard in organizations where its membership is not possible”. 94 Other liberal democracies take a similar stance, although when it comes to specific cases, this has not meant identical and coordinated demands. For example, following the 2003 SARS crisis, the US and Japan supported WHA observer status for Taiwan, while the EU and Canada only called for flexible mechanisms that would allow Taiwan to participate. 95

It is clear from Taiwan’s continued exclusion from a number of international bodies that current efforts are not sufficient. Therefore, the UK, alongside the US and its allies, should take the following steps:

6.1 A Coordinated Pushback

There needs to be a more coordinated challenge to China’s current grip of the key international organisations. This grip is extensive, with Beijing actively wooing other countries to advance its interests, including by securing top positions for its preferred candidates in the UN’s specialised agencies. A recent report entitled ‘A Long March Through the Institutions’ noted

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93 “UK Relations with Taiwan: Volume 630: debated on Tuesday 24 October 2017”, Hansard, UK Parliament, available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-10-24/debates/C35392B3-7225-4928-9E29-04161D5DB90E/
that senior CCP officials now head four of the 15 specialised agencies. 96 It also documents the support given by Beijing to Dr Tedros Adhanom, his successful bid to become the WHO Director-General and the allegations that Beijing had undue influence over him during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis. 97 A multilateral approach by liberal democracies should be taken to undermine and reverse China’s control of these bodies, particularly in relation to its successful efforts to exclude Taiwan.

Quarterly meetings initiated by the Trump Administration, specifically designed to coordinate policies supporting Taiwan’s participation in international organisations, should continue. Participants have so far included the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Australia, the EU and individual EU members Germany, France and Italy. 98

This coalition should be proactive in producing joint statements publicly supporting Taiwan’s participation in international organisations. Until recently, efforts have been found wanting. For example, in April 2019, G7 Foreign Ministers released a statement which, among much else, addressed Taiwan’s exclusion from the ICAO without explicitly naming Taiwan. Rather, the communiqué expressed support for “the substantive participation of all active members of the international aviation community in ICAO forums”, adding that the exclusion of members for political purposes compromised aviation safety and security. 99 or many months, the response to Taiwan’s exclusion from the WHA during the COVID-19 crisis lacked a joint response, with some leading democracies opting to communicate their objections in separate letters and actions. 100 Indeed, statements from British ministers supporting Taiwan’s participation only came about primarily because of parliamentary questions rather than proactive public assertions. Nevertheless, in May 2021 G7 foreign ministers released a joint statement which included a section expressing support for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in WHO forums and the WHA. 101 Going forward, recent joint statements advocated by the G7 and members of the Five Eyes condemning China’s actions in Hong Kong should serve as a model. Like the recent G7 statement not only has their language has been clear and direct but they have been issued quickly in response to events. Leading liberal democracies should not wait until summits to raise, amongst much else, Taiwan’s ongoing exclusion from international organisations. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic joint statements calling for the reinstatement of Taiwan’s observer status at the WHA should be made every time efforts to achieve this are thwarted.

Liberal democracies could also undermine China’s efforts to exclude Taiwan through increased interactions with Taiwanese officials and experts. A 2020 Center for Strategic Studies report recommended that American delegations attending major meetings of international organisations from which Taiwan is excluded should publicly meet with representatives from Taipei before and after. 102 If adopted by the US, other liberal democracies, including the UK, should enhance these efforts by joining these side meetings and, during the main meetings also, where appropriate, echo Taiwan’s views.

97 Ibid, pp.23-24
100 Glaser, Bush and Green, ‘Toward a Stronger U.S.-Taiwan Relationship’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 21 October 2020, p.27.
Lastly, substantive efforts within these organisations are also necessary. In November 2020, the UK’s Minister for Asia, Nigel Adams, assured parliamentarians that “the UK recently worked alongside likeminded countries to lobby the WHO at official level to issue an invitation to Taiwan to observe this month’s World Health Assembly”. 103 Such efforts appear to have borne fruit, with increased invitations to Taiwanese health authorities to participate in several technical meetings. 104 However, it should be acknowledged that substantive success in this area will also depend on the liberal democratic world’s ability to reverse China’s capture of many international organisations, including the United Nations and its specialised agencies. For example, this would include ensuring that Beijing’s preferred candidate is not elected as the next Director-General of the WHO.

6.2 The Global Cooperation and Training Framework

Loosening China’s current grip on existing international organisations may take time. Therefore, other new and creative routes to ensure Taiwan’s participation on the world stage ought to be explored. Britain should build on its limited engagement with the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) to compensate for Taiwan’s exclusion from existing international organisations and to advance both countries’ shared visions for the Indo-Pacific.

Established in 2015, the GCTF’s stated mission is “to establish a platform to utilize Taiwan’s strengths and expertise to address global issues”. 105 To achieve this, it brings together participants from governments, the private sector and civil society at 29 international workshops to discuss a variety of issues, including public health, energy efficiency and cybersecurity.

In March 2019, Japan became an official partner of the GCTF and has since co-hosted workshops. Although it has taken a less-prominent role, Australia sent its Deputy Representative in Taiwan to a COVID-19-related workshop in June 2020 and went on to co-host a workshop on the same subject later that year with its Taiwanese representative in attendance.

While many of the issues covered by the GCTF and many of the participants are drawn from Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific Islands, other countries from outside the region are not excluded from participating. In September 2019, Sweden co-hosted a workshop focusing on the effect of disinformation on democratic elections and assessing the effectiveness of a media literacy campaign. Similarly, in November 2020 the Netherlands co-hosted a workshop entitled ‘Sustainable Material Management – Solution to Marine Debris’.

In March 2021, the UK co-hosted a GCTF workshop entitled ‘Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster’. 106 It was an opportunity to exchange Britain’s expertise in this area and promote its global initiatives which have sought to build resilience to the threats and disasters associated with climate change. This was followed, in May, by a UK co-hosted event on the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations. 107

The American Institute in Taiwan has announced plans to expand the “frequency, size, and scope of the GCTF workshops” and the “depth and breadth of participation from like-minded...”

countries” in the years ahead. The United Kingdom, now involved, should become a more active participant in this platform, and encourage like-minded countries to also co-host events, given its shared interest in many of the issues explored at GCTF workshops, its commitment to Taiwan contributing to the global good, and its desire to play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific.

6.3 The D10+1

Britain should support Taiwan’s participation in international organisations that are composed of liberal democracies, such as the G7 and, if it comes to fruition, the Democratic 10 (D10).

It had been rumoured that the UK government was set to propose the expansion of the G7 into a D10, which would include Australia, India and South Korea. This new coalition would recognise not only the importance of cooperation between like-minded countries but also the growing significance of the Indo-Pacific region. As such, Taiwan had a strong claim for participating, given its status as an advanced economy and a leading liberal democracy in the region. Nevertheless, Taipei was excluded.

In June 2021, under the presidency of the UK, the G7 summit in Cornwall brought together leaders, ministers and officials from the D10 plus South Africa and the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. This was despite the fact that the summit and its ministerial Track meetings covered a number of issues particularly pertinent to Taiwan, especially the Health Track which covered global health security and promised to provide an opportunity to learn lessons from the current COVID-19 pandemic. Taiwan would also have had something useful to add to discussions around defending open societies and the resilience of global supply chains in critical sectors.

Of course, Taiwan’s lack of official relations with the UK and other participating countries would preclude it from formal participation. However, creative ways to get Taiwan’s input could have been found. The Prime Minister should have appointed a special envoy to reach out to relevant officials in Taiwan and feed these conversations to relevant UK ministers prior to the summit.

Future host nations should adopt this approach. In addition, Taiwanese academics, civil society groups and industry leaders should be included in any non-ministerial advisory and engagement groups for the G7 and its potential successors. If a more permanent D10 was to emerge then efforts should be made to include Taiwan, even if as an observer, in what could be the D10+1. It should be noted that the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has expressed his commitment to working on Taiwan’s inclusion in the Biden Administration’s planned Summit for Democracies, an endeavour that closely mirrors the D10.

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109 Forsyth, J., ‘We’re starting to see a new foreign policy for Brexit Britain’, The Spectator, 16 January 2021, available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/were-starting-to-see-a-new-foreign-policy-for-brexit-britain, last visited: 12 July 2021.


7. Securing Taiwan’s Prosperity

In order to protect Taiwan from Beijing’s economic coercion, liberal democracies should work to increase their own trade with Taiwan, support Taiwan’s participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and work together to establish a fund that could be deployed to alleviate the impact of punitive Chinese trade measures.

Currently, Taiwan is in an uncomfortable position. Taiwan’s cross-Strait trade has reached an all-time high, with China, including Hong Kong, now representing 34% of Taiwan’s overall trade; this is more than with both the US and Japan, at 13% and 11% respectively. This is despite efforts by the Tsai Administration to reduce the country’s dependence on China via schemes such as the New Southbound Policy which reaches out to Southeast Asian economies. This dependency is of great concern as it is feared that Beijing could leverage this to punish Taiwan into making political concessions. However, as a 2007 RAND Corporation report makes clear, such moves would not be unproblematic for Beijing who, if it squeezes too hard, could end up hurting itself too. Nevertheless, Beijing’s recent efforts to hit Taiwan economically, by cutting off Chinese tourists and Taiwanese pineapple imports, have demonstrated its willingness to use limited economic actions to coerce.

Fortunately, there are major liberal democracies who, despite not recognising Taiwan, are still willing to pursue stronger economic relations with the country. Britain is a case in point. UK–Taiwan trade talks have taken place almost annually since 1991 and, more recently, a special trade envoy, appointed by the Prime Minister, has been dedicated to Taiwan. While the extent to which trade has increased between both countries in recent decades is contested, the British government, nevertheless, can boast of advances in relations, including a 2018 deal that allowed UK pork imports into Taiwan.

Moreover, in the past, other leading liberal democracies have been critical in helping Taiwan join international economic organisations, albeit under the name “Chinese Taipei”. Both the US and Australia supported Taiwan’s participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which at the time conveniently did not include China. Moreover, US public backing and behind-the-scenes lobbying helped Taiwan join the World Trade Organization in the early 2000s. Within these bodies, Taiwan has been able to participate as a full member and advance its interests.

With Taiwan’s economic prosperity so tightly linked with its trade, Britain should explore ways to enhance bilateral trade and help safeguard Taiwan from potential Chinese economic coercion and improve its economy’s competitiveness.

7.1 A Free Trade Agreement

The UK should formally agree to exploratory talks for a free trade agreement (FTA) with Taiwan. As well as the potential economic benefits associated with an FTA, Taiwan would welcome such a deal as a way to demonstrate its de facto independence. Given this, it should be no surprise that in the past China has put in place obstacles to deter other countries from...
doing this, despite stating that it has no problem with countries having trading relations with Taiwan. Since 2003, aside from deals made with its official diplomatic allies and China, Taiwan has signed FTAs with just Singapore and New Zealand, both of whom had agreed prior FTAs with China. Both countries also benefited from benign relations with Beijing, an important but not critical factor in explaining why the deals went ahead (see Box 3.0). In recent years, judging from Australia’s experience, Beijing’s position has hardened. It was reported in 2018 that Canberra backed out from pursuing an FTA with Taiwan after threats from China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi. 115

Since Britain announced its intention to leave the EU in 2016, senior Taiwanese government officials have been optimistic about a future deal between the UK and Taiwan. 116 In January 2021, during a meeting with Britain’s new representative to Taiwan, President Tsai reiterated her hopes for the UK to enter into negotiations over an FTA. 117 The UK government, despite championing trade between both countries, has not stated its desire to sign an FTA with Taiwan. However, it has been argued that one would, in theory, be straightforward to negotiate, given a number of factors. 118 These include the fact that bilateral trade is almost completely tariff free already and the likelihood of Taiwan being flexible in its negotiation position, given the symbolic value it places on such deals. Yet such flexibility is not guaranteed, particularly in regard to beef imports, owing to the UK’s history of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and areas such as the automotive industry and financial services. 119 Naturally, the UK will have its own economic objectives in any negotiations, although a deal would have symbolic value in reaffirming the government’s commitment to Global Britain and its tilt towards the Indo-Pacific.

An FTA with the UK would be a major symbolic win for Taiwan. Second to this, an agreement to talks would affirm Taiwan’s de facto independence and challenge China’s attempt to restrict such discussions. It may even encourage other liberal democracies to explore the possibility of an FTA with Taiwan.

Box 3. A Favourable Environment for Deepening Ties?, By Dr Yao-Yuan Yeh

For Taiwan to develop further diplomatic and economic relations with states without formal diplomatic establishment, it is necessary to consider the existing US–China relationship, as both the United States and China would sway whether Taiwan can establish a solid advancement in diplomacy with these states. According to Yeh and Chen (2017), the Agreement between Singapore and the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu on Economic Partnership (ASTEP) was formalised in 2014 because Singapore has maintained a benign relationship with China while cross-Strait relations were warmer under the Ma Ying-jeou Administration. 120 This environment allowed China to agree, or to let such an agreement through implicitly, as a gesture to Taiwan. In addition, the Agreement between New Zealand and the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu on Economic Cooperation (ANZTEC) materialised

119 Ibid, pp.166.
in 2013, and is largely attributed to New Zealand's neutral stance in the increasing Sino-US confrontation and its warming bilateral relationship with Taiwan. For now, the US-China relationship has been deteriorating continuously to a new low point even under the Biden Administration, and some scholars coin it as the emergence of a new Cold War. Paradoxically, this environment may provide opportunities for the United Kingdom and Taiwan to achieve more diplomatic progress, including trade talks, as London aligns itself ever closer to Washington and liberal democracies become less concerned about reprisals from Beijing.

7.2 Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

Enabling Taiwan to join the CPTPP would increase the country's economic competitiveness and integrate it further in the Indo-Pacific region. Both of these objectives are especially important, given China's success in excluding Taiwan from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), of which it is a member. As it stands, the CPTPP is the world's third largest free-trade area, whose members' combined economies represent around 13% of global gross domestic product and include two members of the G7 – Japan and Canada.

During his presidency, Ma Ying-jeou expressed his wish to join the agreement's predecessor, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, by 2020, and set about challenging the protectionist measure that would prevent this from happening. President Tsai has continued with this effort. In December 2020 Taiwan notified CPTPP member economies of its intention to join. Once initial consultations are completed, Taiwan will submit a formal application.

So far there have been some positive indicators for Taiwan. While the Japanese government has not yet formally expressed an opinion, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has highlighted support among parliamentarians and government officials. Additionally, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has come out in support of Taiwan's bid. However, Taiwan's success will depend both on its ability to make internal adjustments to reduce barriers to trade and on the China factor. While the fact that China is not a member of the CPTPP works in Taiwan's favour, as it cannot assert a veto, it may nevertheless pressurise existing members to do so. However, it has been argued that, given the multilateral nature of the accession process, it may be more difficult for Beijing to pressurise individual members.

On 1 February 2021, the UK formally applied to join the CPTPP. Going forward, the UK should support Taiwan's bid to join the CPTPP and, if successful with its own application, should advocate for Taiwan's inclusion from within. While an FTA may provide both countries with a symbolic victory, by including Taiwan in the CPTPP Britain would do much more to strengthen Taiwan's economy.

121 Glaser, ‘Taiwan’s Quest for Greater Participation in the International Community’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 21 November 2013, p.27.
124 ‘Tai makes pitch for Taiwan to join CPTPP at forum with ex-world leaders’, Focus Taiwan, 8 October 2020, available at: https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202010080012, last visited: 23 April 2021.
7.3 Buying “Freedom Pineapples”

In the short term, Taiwan will also have to deal with attempts by China to punish it economically, as seen with the decision to restrict Chinese tourists following Tsai’s election and most recently with Beijing’s Taiwanese pineapple ban. These sanctions are not unique. In 2020, Australia was subject to economic coercion by Beijing. Following Canberra’s calls for an independent inquiry into the origins of coronavirus, China imposed bans and sanctions on a string of imports, including barley, beef and wine. 127

In response, a group of British parliamentarians, led by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), led a campaign for individuals to buy Australia’s freedom wine, an effort to which Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed. 128 In order to be effective, a similar effort will need to be broader in scope and implemented by governments, in addition to any longer-term efforts to challenge China at the WTO. Therefore, a coalition of liberal democracies, including the UK, should pool their resources into a fund that can support countries hit by Chinese import restrictions – essentially, a fund to buy the goods that China has banned. Given the threat it faces and its dependency on the Chinese economy, Taiwan must be included. This would not only soften the impact of China’s actions but also, if effectively implemented, could deter future threats of this kind.

In addition, as suggested by Bonnie Glaser, such action could be accompanied by statements condemning Chinese economic coercion, challenges at the World Trade Organisation and retaliatory economic measures against Beijing by a counter-coercion coalition. 129

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8. Deterring China’s Aggression

While Britain and other middle-power liberal democracies alone cannot credibly commit to coming to Taiwan’s defence should China attack, their increased presence in the region nevertheless enhances Taiwan’s security. In the future, Britain and its allies should make Beijing aware that any acts of aggression will not go unchallenged.

Aside from Taiwan itself, the principal guarantor of Taiwan’s security is the US. Through the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), Washington promises to make available to Taiwan defence articles and services “in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defence capability”. 130 However, while the TRA does commit the US to maintaining Taiwan’s capacity to resist the use of force, via arms sales, it is does not commit the US to Taiwan’s defence. Instead, Washington has pursued a policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ to deter both Chinese aggression and a formal declaration of independence by Taiwan, which would cause a cross-Strait crisis. More ambiguous still is the position of other liberal democracies in the region. It has been argued that Japan’s revisions to Guidelines to the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation, adopted in September 1997, would permit it to respond to an attack on Taiwan by China, 131 while the possibly of the ANZUS treaty drawing Canberra into a US–China war over Taiwan has been openly discussed in Australia. 132

The role of other leading liberal democracies from outside the region has been discussed even less, but there is a role for them to play. Some academics have spoken about EU and European nations mediating cross-Strait relations, while others have suggested they should contribute to the deterrence against China. 133 It is the latter of these suggestions that seems most appropriate, given Beijing’s current bellicosity. Moreover, it should be remembered that such a move would not be unprecedented. During the 1996 Strait Crisis, both Britain and France quietly promised support to the US if the situation were to worsen. 134

In late 2020, in response to questions regarding China’s current aggressive actions towards Taiwan, Foreign Office minister Lord Ahmad reaffirmed the UK’s long-standing position towards Taiwan and told his fellow peers, “The United Kingdom is concerned by any activity that risks destabilising the cross-strait status quo. All sides should refrain from taking provocative actions and resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue.” 135 While the UK takes a neutral position on cross-Strait relations, its increased presence in the Indo-Pacific is, unwittingly or not, conducive to Taiwan’s security. As Corey Lee Bell and Andrew Yang have argued, both Britain’s freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and closer UK–Japan defence cooperation signal to China that there is growing opposition to its challenge to the rules-based order in the region. 136

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133 Hu, S., Foreign Policies Toward Taiwan (Routledge, 2019), p.91.
Britain’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific should continue, and Britain should without qualification condemn China’s cross-Strait coercion and work with other leading democracies to pursue non-military methods to deter Beijing from using force against Taiwan.

8.1 Calling Out China

The UK must specifically call out China for both its intransigence to renounce the use of force against Taiwan and its current “grey zone” tactics. The use of phrases like “any activity” and “all sides” by Foreign Office officials are too general and give the impression that both governments are equally culpable for current cross-Strait tensions. In the 2000s, when President Chen Shui-bian’s rhetoric antagonised Beijing, such an even-handed response may have been justifiable. Today, with Taiwan led by the pragmatic President Tsai, it is not. Instead, a lead should be taken from US Secretary of State Blinken who, on his first official trip to Asia, criticised China’s use of “coercion and aggression … to undercut democracy in Taiwan”. 137

Accordingly, it is also appropriate for British officials, if they are not already doing so, to privately urge their Chinese counterparts to end the current campaign of coercion. It should be noted that during the Chen presidency Britain attempted to use its influence with the Administration to urge restraint. 138

In addition, efforts to encourage Beijing to show restraint should be done in concert with fellow liberal democracies. As has already started to occur with G7 communiques and bilateral statements between the US and Japan, and the US and South Korea all of which underline the signatories desire to see peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait maintained. 139 In May 2021, a similar line was also taken in a joint statement between Japan and the EU.

8.2 Punishing Aggression

Britain and other liberal democracies should not allow China to annex Taiwan with impunity. While the major factor determining Beijing’s calculus will be the possibility of a US intervention on behalf of Taiwan, a coalition of other liberal democracies promising, unambiguously, to punish Chinese aggression would add to the existing deterrence.

At the very least, measures taken by Britain and its allies should mirror those taken against Russia after its annexation of Crimea. 140 This included sanctions against individuals, firms and entities and the freezing of credit to certain banks and companies. In addition, the UK should make it clear that, as it did in regard to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, it will not accept or recognise China’s annexation of Taiwan. Former British diplomat Charles Parton, writing for the China Research Group, has argued that countermeasures should include “the breaking of diplomatic and trade relations”. He contends that this would make the CCP take note, given that the fallout could potentially lead to unrest and a challenge to its rule. 141

The UK should begin to explore possible courses of action among other leading liberal democracies, rally a coalition together and quietly inform China of its intentions.


138 Roundtable discussion, January 2021.


9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Above all else, this report has outlined a number of ways in which the international community could support Taiwan. It is important to reiterate that Britain and many of its liberal democratic allies have their own “One China” policies, which do not accept Beijing’s claim to Taiwan. While these policies do prevent formal diplomatic relations, it does not mean that relations with Taiwan are non-existent, nor do they have to remain static. Developments since the 1990s show that change is possible. Yet this deepening of relations has been incremental and constantly held up by fears of upsetting China. This mindset needs to change and a serious rethink of Britain’s engagement with Taiwan is required.

The current tensions across the Taiwan Strait demand that liberal democracies step up their support for Taiwan. China’s steady build-up of military capabilities, designed with annexing Taiwan in mind, only increases the possibility of conflict. Furthermore, Xi Jinping has tied Taiwan’s future to his own personal mission to rejuvenate the great Chinese nation, further exacerbating the fears of outside observers. These trends, alongside the current “grey zone” tactics used by China’s navy and air force, should reinforce the need to deter Beijing from using force. As already argued, the annexation of Taiwan by China would be a fundamental assault on the liberal international order established by Britain and its allies. It would also have serious implications for the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, and for attempts to keep the region free and open.

However, as this report also makes clear, China’s current actions towards Taiwan cannot go unchallenged either. This includes efforts to isolate and weaken Taiwan by poaching the country’s diplomatic allies, coercing private bodies into conforming to its own “One China” principle, and using trade and tourism to punish Taiwan, as well as continued efforts to keep Taiwan out of international organisations. All of these measures should be of equal concern to Britain and its allies. Not only do these actions undermine a fellow liberal democracy, but they also deny the rest of the world the benefits of Taiwan’s full participation. Sadly, it takes crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, and the WHO’s response, to remind the world of this fact.

Most importantly, it is in these areas that middle-sized powers can make a difference. Through an array of bilateral and multilateral efforts, Britain could do more to push back against Beijing’s campaigns against Taiwan. This report recommends that the British government and its allies, if they are not already, do the following:

1. Follow the lead of the US and Japan by loosening self-imposed restrictions on contact between UK officials and their Taiwanese counterparts and the communications of top national representatives.

2. Send the Secretary of State for Health to Taiwan, once the immediate COVID-19 pandemic has passed, to learn from Taiwan’s experience of successfully handling the virus. Furthermore, ensure that future Cabinet-level visits occur on a frequent basis.

3. Proactively and forthrightly push back against Beijing’s attempts to coerce public and private institutions into adopting its “One China” principle.

4. Improve coordination with allies to challenge China’s grip on international organisations and ensure Taiwanese participation. This would include more frequent and more direct joint statements and publicly engaging with Taiwanese representatives before and after key meetings of international organisations which Taiwan is excluded from.

5. Enhance involvement in the Global Cooperation and Training Framework as a way of playing a greater role in the Indo-Pacific and enhancing Taiwan’s global participation.
6. Seek Taiwan’s input into future G7 summits and ensure Taiwan has a role in any future grouping of leading democracies, such as the D10.

7. Encourage more trade with Taiwan and agree to exploratory talks regarding a free trade agreement.

8. Champion Taiwan’s inclusion in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership to ensure Taiwan’s economy remains competitive and its dependency on trade with China is reduced.

9. Explore mechanisms for blunting China’s ability to coerce others using trade, for example by pooling resources to buy sanctioned products, and ensure that Taiwan is included in such a grouping.

10. Call out China for threatening peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and for its use of “grey zone” tactics by dropping vague language that suggests that both Taipei and Beijing are equally culpable for current tensions. Government officials must also urge their Chinese counterparts to end their campaign of coercion against Taiwan.

11. Coordinate with other liberal democracies sanctions against China in the event it takes military action against Taiwan, and refuse to recognise Beijing’s control of Taiwan if achieved using force.
### Appendix: UK ministerial visits to Taiwan since 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minister[s]:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020 (October)</td>
<td>Greg Hands, Minister of State for Trade (virtual visit owing to COVID-19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 (September)</td>
<td>George Hollingbery, Minister of Trade Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 (April)</td>
<td>Graham Stuart, DIT Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Investment).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016 (September)</td>
<td>Greg Hands, Minister of State (DIT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 (May)</td>
<td>Greg Hands, Minister of State (DIT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (January)</td>
<td>Baroness Kramer, Minister of State for Transport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (January)</td>
<td>Grant Shapps, Minister without Portfolio in the Cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (March)</td>
<td>Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (April)</td>
<td>Mike Penning, Minister of State for Transport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 (November)</td>
<td>Lord Green, Minister for Trade and Investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Gareth Thomas, Minister of State at BERR and DFID and Minister responsible for UKTI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Lord Adonis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Minister of State for Education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Alan Johnson, Minister of Employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 (March–April)</td>
<td>Nigel Griffiths, DTI Minister for small business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 (February)</td>
<td>David Jamieson, PUS Shipping, DTLR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Alan Johnson, Minister for Competitiveness, DTI; Henry McLeish, First Minister, Scotland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Richard Caborn, Minister for Trade, DTI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Brian Wilson, Minister for Trade, DTI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Ian McCartney, Minister of State, DTI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Christopher Roberts, Under Secretary, DTI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Anthony Nelson, Minister of State, DTI; Gerald Malone, Minister of State, Department of Health; Mr Jones, Minister for Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>George Kynoch, Parliamentary Under Secretary, Scottish Office; Robert Jones, Minister of State for Construction, Department for the Environment; Gerald Malone, Minister of State, Department of Health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Lord Strathclyde, Minister of State, DTI; Anthony Nelson, Economic Secretary, HMT; Richard Needham, Minister of State, DTI; Charles Wardle, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, DTI; Baroness Denton, Department of Environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Tony Baldry, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department of Environment; Richard Needham, Minister of State, DTI; Sir Wyn Roberts, Minister of State, Welsh Office.</td>
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