

## TAIWAN'S DIPLOMATIC ALLIES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR GLOBAL INCLUSION

*Yi-Chieh Chen and Kurt Abalos*



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*Considering the importance of multilateral institutions in global governance in the liberal world order, global stakeholders highly regard their memberships in international organizations so as to address various challenges and threats. Different actors cooperate through international organizations on transnational crime, environment, industry, global health, and many others. However, Taiwan continues to be sidelined in major organizations due to political considerations in favor of China. Stemming from its diplomatic history, Taiwan has a unique setup when interacting with and participating in international institutions. Moreover, dynamic political factors within Taiwan have been influencing the self-governing island's international portfolio. This issue brief aims to provide an overview of Taiwan's global footprint for readers to better understand the island's international cooperation amid its unique situation.*

### Introduction

Two days after Lai Ching-te's victory in Taiwan's 2024 presidential elections, Nauru derecognized Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China (ROC), to reestablish ties with China as it was "in the best interests" of the country.<sup>1</sup> Such diplomatic loss is part of a trend since 2016 as China, officially known as the People's Republic of China (PRC), has been increasing its pressure against a 'real threat' to cross-strait peace.<sup>2</sup> Beijing seeks to limit Taiwan's international profile by increasing pressure on its remaining diplomatic allies and lobbying for

its removal or continued exclusion from international organizations as it emphasizes its authority over the self-governing island as the legitimate representative of China.

Amid this geopolitical context, this issue brief seeks to map out Taiwan's international engagement. It first tackles the context of the diplomatic situation between Taiwan and China, followed by its foreign policies from its past and current administrations. It also showcases

the trend of Taiwan's number of allies throughout the decades and current membership in international organizations. Likewise, it touches on some unique cases of Taiwan's global engagement. At the end, it outlines contemporary instances of how the self-governing island continues to interact with multilateral institutions.

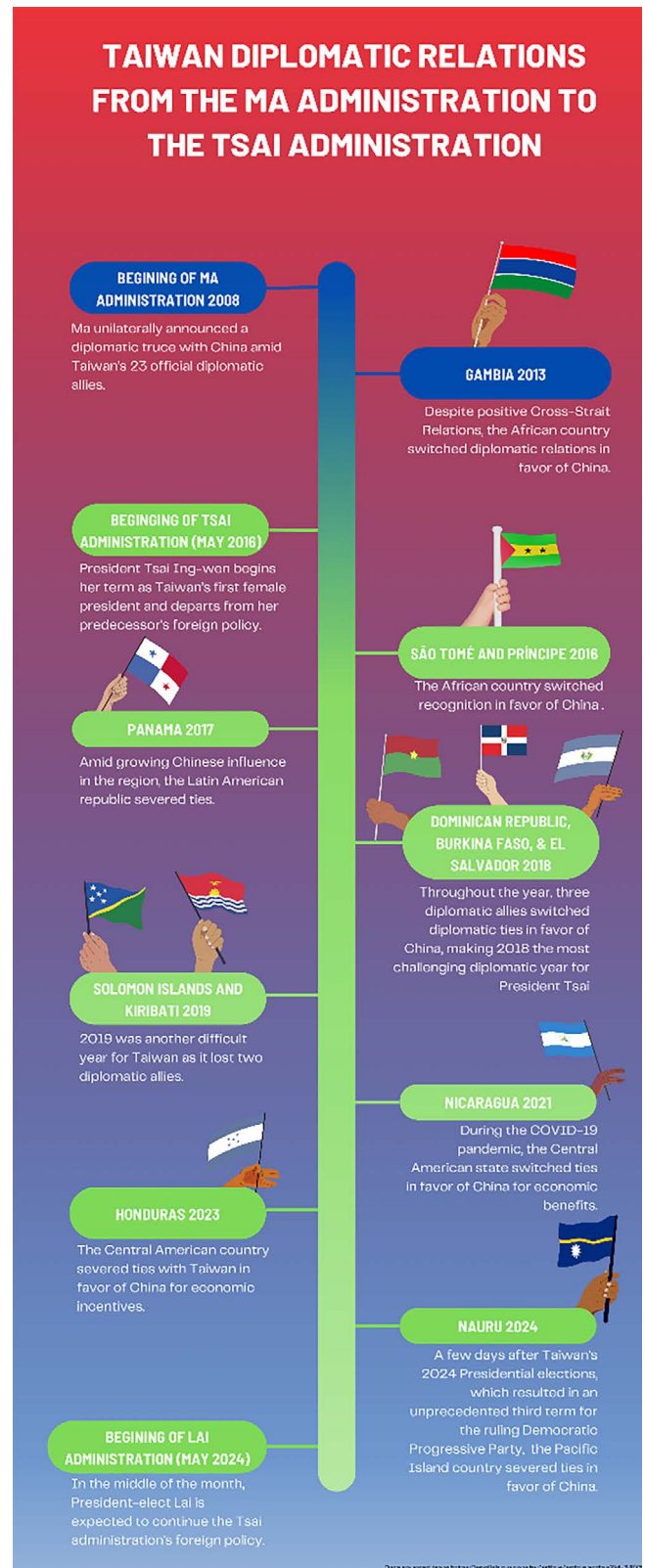
### A Unique Diplomatic Context

The current diplomatic context between Taiwan and China dates back to the ROC-PRC rivalry for legitimacy over China post-1949. Despite losing to Mao's forces and retreating to the island of Taiwan and some outlying islands, many countries recognized the ROC as the legitimate representative of China until the 1970s. On October 25, 1971, the United Nations (UN) adopted UN Resolution 2758, which recognized the PRC as the legitimate representative of China in the UN and removed the ROC officials for misrepresenting China.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, countries followed the UN resolution by switching their recognition to the PRC, beginning the ROC's decreasing trend of international presence.<sup>4</sup>

In response, the ROC, under the Lee Teng-hui administration (1988-2000), employed 'pragmatic diplomacy' to maintain its formal ties and international presence for national interests, such as establishing official and unofficial relations with states, financing economic development, producing global goods, and actively participating in international organizations.<sup>5</sup>

The continued rise of China has become a significant factor in Taiwan's engagement with the world.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the self-governing island has acknowledged China's influence whenever it participates in global initiatives or engages with countries. For instance, during the Ma Ying-jeou administration (2008-2016), Taiwan fostered positive cross-strait relations to maintain and expand its international engagement.<sup>7</sup> As a result, Taiwan only lost one of its official allies but gained more access to international organizations.

On the other hand, President Tsai Ing-wen opted to participate directly with the world through public diplomacy and soft diplomacy, regardless of China's position.<sup>8</sup> Throughout her term, Taiwan lost 10



Graphic 1: There is a major difference when comparing the diplomatic performance of Taiwan's different party administrations.<sup>28</sup>

diplomatic allies and was no longer invited to several international organizations.

## Global Taiwan

In the age of globalization, multilateral institutions have grown in importance for global governance. Although Taiwan is only recognized by 12 sovereign states as of 2024, the self-governing island continues to have memberships in more than 70 international organizations.<sup>9</sup> Its interest to engage the world is enshrined in its constitution, which is reflected in its commitment to be active on the global stage.<sup>10</sup> Most of its global institutional memberships revolve around economy and industry-related organizations and science and environment-related institutions. Prominent organizations include the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), among others.

Regardless of its membership status, Taiwan's seat is represented under various names, most of which use "Chinese Taipei (TPE)" or "Taiwan". Others continue to use the official name "Republic of China", "Republic of China (Taiwan)", and even "Taipei, China", such as in the case of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO), the African-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO), and the ADB, respectively. In special cases, Taiwan is represented under the name of "The fishing entity of Taiwan" in the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna and "The Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu (TPKM)" in the WTO.

Even the International Olympic Committee crafted new procedures for Taiwan's continued inclusion in Olympic and international sports events after the United Nations (UN) recognized China, by designating Taiwan as "Chinese Taipei (TPE)" under a new flag and anthem. In retrospect, Taiwan continues to do what it can to be visible on the international stage.

Despite its current membership in dozens of international organizations, Taiwan continues to

further its participation in other important multilateral institutions in contrast to China's opposition. Over the past years, Taiwan has been active and vocal for its membership in these institutions as they are in line with the government's interests.<sup>11</sup> Four current instances of Taiwan's engagement with international organizations and their developments are illustrated here.

### *World Health Assembly*

After the UN was established, some members sought to create an agency to spearhead global health efforts in 1948. In recent history, the World Health Organization (WHO) was most known for its role during the COVID-19 pandemic, through its coordination of pandemic response and prevention strategies. Although the WHO is the premier organization for coordinating global health efforts among its member-states, its decision-making body and secretariat is the World Health Assembly (WHA), consisting of representatives from WHO member-states.<sup>12</sup>

It has been almost a decade since Taiwan's last participation in the WHA, as China has been disapproving of its presence in the global health body. Taiwan was a full member until the UN acknowledged China as its representative in 1971.<sup>13</sup> After which, the self-governing island was kept from the latest information, medical data, and practices that the WHO had to offer and vice versa. After the disastrous 2003 SARS epidemic, Taiwan had a limited opportunity to participate in global health efforts through the 2005 revisions of the WHO's International Health Regulations. Under Ma's administration (2008-2016), Taiwan was invited as an observer state under the name of "Chinese Taipei" amid positive cross-strait relations.<sup>14</sup>

However, the WHA stopped its invitation to Taiwan throughout President Tsai's term as China strongly opposed her government's rejection of the 1992 consensus.<sup>15</sup> Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHA did not allow Taiwan's participation amid China's continued opposition.<sup>16</sup> In response, Taiwan has sent delegations and asked its diplomatic allies and other like-minded countries to lobby for its re-inclusion into the organization.<sup>17</sup>

### *International Civil Aviation Organization*

When commercial air travel became more popular post-WWII, UN member-states crafted an organization to regulate the emerging industry. In 1947, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) was created to support and coordinate countries to realize a fast and resilient global network of air mobility. In essence, the ICAO is an avenue for member-states to improve the quality and practices in commercial air travel by creating international standards that would deepen the interconnectivity of the globalized world.

Taiwan was initially a full-fledged member of the ICAO until the UN recognized China in 1971. In 2013, China welcomed its participation in the organization as an observer state under positive cross-strait relations during the Ma administration.<sup>18</sup> However, the self-governing island has been excluded since 2016 as its participation continues to be blocked by China in protest of President Tsai's government. In response, Taiwan, its allies, and like-minded partners have called for its inclusion in the ICAO.<sup>19</sup> Although Taiwan tries its best to abide by its standards, it is limited in access to the organization's publications instead of real-time developments.<sup>20</sup>

### *Interpol*

Interpol is the premier global organization for police agencies around the world. Its beginnings can be traced back even before the creation of the UN in 1923. Initially, the organization was created to provide mutual assistance between police agencies from different countries. A few decades later, the organization expanded its mandate and modernized its structure into Interpol, which creates a conducive and cooperative environment for different law enforcement agencies around the world.

China continues to hinder Taiwan's participation in Interpol, which has been affecting the self-governing island's law enforcement efforts. As a full-fledged member in 1961, Taiwan had access to the latest information and communication channels for its law enforcement activities and could contribute directly to Interpol's efforts.<sup>21</sup> Taiwan's seat was replaced when Interpol recognized China in 1984. As Taiwan continues to be kept from Interpol, its policing efforts are kept

from Interpol's latest resources.<sup>22</sup> Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has been campaigning for its reinclusion, resulting in growing support from dozens of countries.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, Taiwan has established bilateral police relations with some countries, such as the U.S., Thailand, and the Philippines.<sup>24</sup>

### *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*

Since 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has acted as a platform for countries to interact with one another in climate change efforts and supports other treaties and international bodies related to the field. Moreover, the UNFCCC provides technical support and expertise in analyzing the latest trends in climate change for the world to understand the problem better and formulate appropriate solutions. In retrospect, the UNFCCC is the premier organization for global efforts addressing climate change, with almost 200 participants today.

Although the organization was created after Taiwan's departure from the UN, the self-governing island was allowed to participate as an observer under the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) since 1995.<sup>25</sup> Despite its status, Taiwan and its allies continue to advocate for direct participation in the organization. Moreover, it has abided by global environmental standards as it understands its precarious position amid the worsening effect of climate change, making Taiwan a vocal actor in global climate governance.<sup>26</sup> In the 2023 UNFCCC meeting, Taiwan's delegation conducted more than dozens of bilateral exchanges.<sup>27</sup> Taiwan also announced a USD 10 million contribution to the Climate Transition Fund that would help its Pacific allies with their respective climate change adaptation efforts.

## **Conclusion**

Decades after Taiwan's loss of recognition from most parts of the world, the self-governing island strives to maintain and advance its presence on the global stage. Despite becoming a pariah state in the 1970s, Taiwan re-engaged with the world pragmatically. However, as developments unfold in the context of a dynamic global



environment and a growing China, Taiwan has been experiencing challenges and opportunities in maintaining and deepening its international participation. In the current world order, international organizations continue to be influential avenues for global participation and cooperation.

Despite China's pushback, Taiwan has been coordinating with its allies and like-minded partners to lobby for its substantive international presence. Moreover, the self-governing island adopts innovative ways of engaging with international organizations to avoid being completely excluded, regardless of its official participation. Altogether, Taiwan strives to maintain its global participation in international organizations as it is aligned with its national interest.

## Authors –

**Yi-Chieh Chen** is a Junior Research Fellow at the Institute for Security and Development Policy's Stockholm Taiwan Center.

**Kurt Abalos** is a 2024 Spring semester intern at ISDP's Stockholm Taiwan Center. He is also a senior master's student at the Taipei School of Economics and Political Science, specializing in global political economy.

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