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TAIWAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN US-CHINA COMPETITION

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Abstract

Taiwan (the Republic of China, ROC) has become a focal point of international security in the ongoing US–China competition. China (the People's Republic of China, PRC) has increasingly sought to isolate the Taipei administration from the global community by restricting its access to international organizations and reducing the number of its diplomatic allies. This article explores the effectiveness of the United States in counterbalancing China's coercive actions against Taiwan in international organizations. It further examines the historical evolution and future prospects of Taiwan's international presence—particularly the role of diplomatic language and interpretive maneuvering surrounding UN General Assembly Resolution 2758, as well as Beijing's promotion of its "One China Principle" in contrast to the more ambiguous "One China Policy" adopted by many countries. Drawing on a close examination of historical and contemporary government documents from China, Taiwan, the United States, and the United Nations, this study investigates the international political and economic narratives advanced by these governments and UN bodies. Ultimately, it assesses the strategies of the United States and the ROC in seeking "meaningful participation" for Taiwan within the UN system and beyond.

Keywords

China, Taiwan, the United States, the United Nations, meaningful participation, international organizations.

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Resumo

Taiwan (República da China) tornou-se um ponto focal da segurança internacional na competição em curso entre os EUA e a China. A China (República Popular da China, RPC) tem procurado cada vez mais isolar a administração de Taipé em relação à comunidade global, restringindo o seu acesso a organizações internacionais e reduzindo o número de seus aliados diplomáticos. Este artigo explora a eficácia dos Estados Unidos em contrabalançar as ações coercivas da China contra Taiwan nas organizações internacionais. Além disso, examina a evolução histórica e as perspetivas futuras da presença internacional de Taiwan particularmente o papel da linguagem diplomática e das manobras interpretativas em torno da Resolução 2758 da Assembleia Geral da ONU, bem como a promoção de Pequim do seu «Princípio de Uma Só China», em contraste com a mais ambígua «Política de Uma Só China» adotada por muitos países. Com base numa análise aprofundada de documentos governamentais históricos e contemporâneos da China, Taiwan, Estados Unidos e Nações Unidas, este estudo analisa as narrativas políticas e económicas internacionais avançadas por esses governos e órgãos da ONU. Por fim, avalia as estratégias dos Estados Unidos e da República da China na busca de uma «participação significativa» para Taiwan dentro do sistema da ONU e além dele.

Palavras-chave

China, Taiwan, Estados Unidos, Nações Unidas, participação significativa, organizações internacionais.

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TAIWAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN US-CHINA COMPETITION¹

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Introduction

The so-called "reunification" with Taiwan represents the ideological endgame of the Communist Party of China (CPC). From the Party's perspective, this would mark the culmination of a long journey of national recovery, or "national rejuvenation," following the historical "Century of Humiliation" (The Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and The State Council Information Office, People's Republic of China, 2022). To that end, China has steadily developed and intensified a coercive strategy towards Taiwan, employing a combination of diplomatic, economic, military, and legal measures. This strategy includes a sustained campaign to isolate Taiwan internationally by pressuring other states and international organizations (IOs) to exclude the democratic, "self-ruled island" (*The Economist*, 2025) from global platforms. These efforts reflect a broader ambition not only to assert China's territorial claims but also to challenge the existing international order—making Taiwan a central issue in cross-Strait relations and a focal point in the wider context of US-China strategic competition.

This article focuses on the Sino-American contention in the context of China's comprehensive and coercive anti-Taiwan strategy. The two authors examine Beijing's maneuvers which aim to promote the "One China Principle"—as opposed to the ambiguous "One China Policy"—as well as to strip Taiwan of its remaining "diplomatic allies" and exclude it from international organizations. Drawing on a close study of historical and contemporary government documents, speeches, and statements from China, Taiwan, the United States, and the United Nations (UN), the two scholars analyze the counter-measures taken by the United States to help Taiwan stand up to China's pressure and (re)join or gain "meaningful participation" in a wide range of international organizations. Finally, the article illustrates the consequences of China's coercive actions for Taiwan, the United States, and the international community—particularly the likeminded democratic countries.

 $^{^{1}}$ The views and opinions expressed in this paper are of the authors and they do not represent their affiliated institutions or governments.

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The Two Chinas?

The history of the "Taiwan issue" goes back to the times of the Chinese Civil War (1927-49) between the nationalists headed by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the communists under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong. After a brief interlude for a united front against Japan, the war ended with the victory of the communist forces and the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. In early December, Generalissimo Chiang and approximately two million Kuomintang (KMT) soldiers evacuated to the island of Taiwan. Until his death in 1975, Chiang remained an autocratic president of the Republic of China (ROC), whose jurisdiction shrank to the islands of Taiwan (Formosa), Pescadores, Kinmen, Matsu, and several others. Since 1949, both governments in Beijing and Taipei have claimed that they are the only legal representation of the whole of China. As a result, the Chinese civil war led to the *de facto* creation of two Chinas—although both leaderships have categorically rejected such narratives.

On the one side of the Taiwan Strait, President Chiang has never abandoned the pursuit of retaking the mainland—thus, he developed a plan of invading the PRC known as the Project National Glory, which was never executed. Today, however, the democratically elected authorities of Taiwan do not actively claim their rights to the mainland. Nonetheless, the ROC Constitution still, at least in theory, applies to pre-war China—later amendments only introduced a division between the "Free Area," *i.e.*, the territories under Taipei's jurisdiction, and the "Mainland Area" (Laws and Regulations Database of The Republic of China [Taiwan], 2005). In other words, the amended ROC Constitution technically does not forsake ROC's historical claim of sovereignty over the mainland.

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, Beijing has maintained that Taiwan is a province of the PRC. The so-called "reunification" has thus become one of the most important elements of President Xi Jinping's idea of the "Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (National Development and Reform Commission, People's Republic of China, 2023). It appears that the use of the term "reunification" in English is a deliberate narrative device employed by Beijing, as the prefix "re-" suggests that the mainland and Formosa were once united.² This framing implies that the PRC's mission is merely to restore the *status quo ante bellum*—that is, the situation prior to the Chinese Civil War (Łuszczykiewicz and Mendis, 2023a, p. 41-42). It should be clarified, however, that for most part of its history, the island of Taiwan had not been politically or legally a part of China—it was not until 1684 when Taiwan came under the rule of the Qing Dynasty (Trojnar, 2015, p. 44). This lasted only till 1895, when China ceded Formosa and Pescadores to Japan "in perpetuity and full sovereignty" (Denby, 1895). Furthermore, the Republic of China, established after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, never ceased to exist—since 1949, the ROC has simply continued to operate on the island of Taiwan.

To advance the so-called "reunification" mission, Beijing has consistently promoted its narrative of the "One China Principle," in contrast to the usually more ambiguous "One China Policy." According to Beijing officials, "there is but one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China" (The Mission of

² However, in Chinese, the most commonly used term, 统—tongyi, means simply "unification" (Cody 2019).

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the People's Republic of China to the European Union, 2022). China has been insisting on the adoption of this definition worldwide. To that end, it has promoted a narrative according to which "One China Principle" is a globally accepted norm (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines, 2024). Indeed, there are countries that have officially endorsed it; however, reportedly only 51 countries—not 180 as claimed by Beijing—adhere to its "One China Principle" (Yang and Hetherington, 2023).

One of the countries which coined its own definition of the "One China Policy" is the United States: Washington *recognizes* the PRC as the sole legal government of China, yet merely "acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China" (italics added for clarity and emphasis) (Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China [Shanghai Communiqué], 1972). In other words, the United States does not *recognize* Taiwan as a part of the PRC—it only confirms that Washington is *aware* of Beijing's claim (Green and Glaser, 2017). Some countries and organizations, however, have never defined their "One China Policy"—such as the European Union (EU), which has obligated all of its member-states to adhere to "One China Policy," although it has never clarified its meaning (Brown, 2022)

The major consequence of the PRC-ROC bifurcation is that other states may now recognize—and maintain diplomatic relations with—only one government, i.e., either Beijing or Taipei. The issue of dual representation has thus become a challenge to international organizations.

The United Nations: Switching from Taipei to Beijing

In the aftermath of the World War II, the United Nations was established in October 1945 to prevent future conflicts, maintain international peace and security, and allow dialogue among all countries regardless of their ideological or economic position. At the United Nations Conference on International Organization, which took place in San Francisco between April 25 and June 26, 1945, the ROC became one of the founding members of the UN.

Interestingly, however, the PRC's narratives in this regard seem to omit certain aspects of China's participation in the conference. The official website of the Foreign Ministry of the PRC reads that "a founding member of the United Nations and one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China made important contributions to the founding of the United Nations. In June 1945, the Chinese delegation, which included Dong Biwu, a representative of the Communist Party of China, signed the Charter of the United Nations" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). Indeed, Representative Dong was a Communist Party member who signed the UN Charter. The Foreign Ministry of the PRC did not clarify, however, that the "Chinese delegation" was in fact the ROC delegation of Chiang Kai-shek's representatives. Reportedly, it was Washington that pressured the ROC leader to include a CPC member in the UN delegation (Tang, 2016, p. 144).

For the next two decades, the representatives of the ROC were installed in the so-called UN "China seat" (Carter, 2020). In other words, the PRC—established barely four years

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after the San Francisco conference—did not have its representation in the UN for more than 20 years.

With the so-called US-China "ping-pong diplomacy" and the gradual normalization of Sino-American relations, the geopolitical situation changed diametrically in the 1970s. The Beijing-Washington détente encouraged UN member-states to modify their position on the Chinese representation at the United Nations and its associated bodies. In 1971, the UN General Assembly considered a number of draft resolutions and proposed amendments. The United States opted for dual representation, i.e., keeping a representation for the ROC and granting a separate seat to the PRC at the same time (Office of the Historian, US Department of State, 1973). Eventually, however, at its plenary session on October 25, 1971, the UN adopted Resolution 2758 on the Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations. It mandated

> to restore all its rights to the People's Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it (United Nations, 1971).

In short, the resolution placed Beijing in the "China seat" and removed the ROC representation (Drun and Glaser, 2022, pp. 11-12). From now on, the delegation of the PRC has been the only legitimate representation of China to the United Nations.

Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and China's opening to the world under President Deng Xiaoping, US President Jimmy Carter established diplomatic ties with Beijing in 1979 (Mendis, 2021). By default, the Sino-American rapprochement resulted in ceasing Washington's official ties with Taipei. However, the United States maintained unofficial interactions with Taiwan. Most importantly, Washington guaranteed security of the ROC through the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, three US-China joint communiqués of 1972, 1978, and 1982, and the Six Assurances (Mendis and Wang, 2020b).

It is important to highlight that the 1971 UN Resolution neither affirmed nor denied the status of the Republic of China as a state. It did not even include the names "Republic of China" or "Taiwan"—it only placed the PRC in the UN "China seat" (Mazza and Schmitt, 2021, p. 9). In the next decades, however, the Beijing government has linked the resolution to its "One China Principle," which states that Taiwan is part of the PRC. For example, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi elaborated that the Resolution 2758 "resolved once and for all the representation of the whole of China, Taiwan included, within the United Nations and expelled Taiwan's so-called representatives from the United Nations. It confirmed that Taiwan is a part of China, and also eliminated any room for creating 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan'" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). The ROC has numerously condemned the PRC for "intentionally misinterpreting" the 1971 UN resolution (Focus Taiwan, 2022).

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Taiwan's Shrinking Space on International Stage

Shortly after the proclamation of the PRC in 1949, only a few fellow communist states, including the Soviet Union and its satellites, switched their recognition from the ROC to the PRC. Over time, however, the numbers shifted—particularly after the 1971 UN resolution and the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the United States and China in 1979.

As of mid-2025, when the two authors submitted this article for publication, the number of diplomatic allies of the ROC went down to 12. This small group consists of 11 UN member-states and the Vatican City State (Mendis, 2020) (Liff and Lin, 2022). Among the most recent twists, Honduras changed its diplomatic position in March 2023—Tegucigalpa announced that from now on, it perceives Taiwan as an "inalienable part of Chinese territory" (Lin, 2023). Presumably, Beijing's trade and economic development offer to the Mesoamerican state outbid the prospects given by Taiwan—as suggested by President Tsai Ing-wen's comment that the Taiwanese government would not "engage in a meaningless contest of dollar diplomacy with China" (Office of the President, Republic of China [Taiwan], 2023). More recently, a few days after presidential election in Taiwan in January 2024, the ROC decided to sever diplomatic relations with the Republic of Nauru upon learning that the Pacific island-nation intends to terminate its diplomatic ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing.

China has tirelessly been trying to attract the remaining diplomatic allies of Taiwan. In the early April 2021, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu revealed that Beijing was tempting Paraguay—Taiwan's only "diplomatic ally" in South America—to cut diplomatic ties with the ROC in exchange for millions of doses of China-made Covid-19 vaccines. According to Wu, Taipei had been speaking to "like-minded countries" to handle the South American issue as the spike in coronavirus cases resulted in protests and calls for impeaching the Paraguayan president (*Reuters*, 2021). As reported by Minister Wu, India provided Paraguay with its own COVAXIN vaccines at the request of Taiwan; however, New Delhi denied it, claiming that it was a gift from the Indian government without any involvement of a third party (*Hindustan Times*, 2021).

For Taiwan, each loss of an "ally" further shrinks its space on diplomatic stage. Similarly, the number of states that may officially speak on behalf of Taiwan in the United Nations is decreasing, and their voice is weakening. Without a doubt, stripping Taiwan of its remaining diplomatic allies has become an important element of China's comprehensive isolation campaign against Taiwan, which led to the exclusion of the ROC from the UN in 1971 and, consequently, many other international organizations (Stokes, Sullivan, and Durkee, 2022, p. 1).

China's Anti-Taiwan Campaign in IOs

China's pressure has severely impacted Taiwan's ability to participate in a wide range of IOs. Following the adoption of Resolution 2758 by the UN General Assembly, the Taiwanese representation was soon removed from all UN agencies. In a domino effect, it also led to Taiwan's exclusion from many other IOs outside of the UN system. Notably, however, the ROC was not expelled from those organizations at once in 1971. For

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example, the Lyon-based International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) took another 13 years to remove the ROC representation following the adoption of the UN resolution.

Moreover, Taiwan's expulsion from the UN did not preclude its access to all international organizations. The ROC has now a full membership in 45 intergovernmental organizations and their subsidiary bodies such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the World Organization of Animal Health, and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. Furthermore, Taiwan has an observer (or other) status in 29 intergovernmental organizations and their ancillary bodies—including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) as well as the committees of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Central American Integration System (Government Portal of the Republic of China [Taiwan], n.d.).

Intriguingly, Taiwan has also been able to join some new IOs since 1971. Nevertheless, the process has often been arduous and compromising, as Taipei authorities were often forced to agree to use a name other than the "Republic of China." The most well-known case is the World Trade Organization (WTO), where Taiwan was included as the "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu (Chinese Taipei)" in 2002—barely 21 days after the PRC's entry (Charnovitz, 2006, p. 405).

From the legal point of view, (re)joining the United Nations and its agencies is not a lost cause for Taiwan. In recent years, the ROC authorities have been very active in their efforts to (re)gain meaningful participation in the UN family of specialized agencies. It should be clarified that many of them—like the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—do not require the UN membership to join. Additionally, the statehood is a prerequisite in various agencies; however, the UN Charter does not explain what it actually means to be a state (United Nations, 1945). It is also crucial to observe that neither the 1971 Resolution, nor any other UN document has defined the status of Taiwan.

Nonetheless, China seems to have been successfully blocking Taiwan's attempts to (re)join the UN system. Beijing has been able to put pressure on IOs and influence their policy positions on Taiwan due to several factors. First, China managed to insert a vast number of its nationals in the UN and its affiliated family of organizations at various levels. As of 2019, there were over 1,300 Chinese citizens employed as a regular staff of the UN system (United Nations Digital Library, 2020). Second, Beijing has been successful in promoting Chinese nationals to senior ranks across the UN funds and and **UN-affiliated** programs, its principal organs, other IOs (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2022). Third, Beijing has been widely seen as backing non-Chinese who are particularly supportive of Beijing's agenda. For example, WHO Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of Ethiopia has been considered by many to be an outspoken advocate for the Chinese government's epidemiological response following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Collins, 2020). Concurrently, the World Health Assembly (WHA), the decision-making body of WHO, has not been issuing an invitation to Taiwan since 2016, even during the Covid-19 pandemic—despite the fact that Taiwan was the first country to inform the UN agency

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about the suspicious virus transmissions originating from the Chinese city of Wuhan (Mendis and Wang, 2020a). In May 2022, the proposal sent by 13 WHO member-states (the then-diplomatic allies of Taipei) to allow Taiwan to join as an observer was not even included in the official WHA agenda (*Reuters*, 2022).

It is important to remember, however, that Taiwan used to receive an invitation to attend the WHA as an observer in the past. Between 2009 and 2016, Taiwan was allowed to participate in the Assembly as "Chinese Taipei" on an annual basis. Uncoincidentally, it was made possible during the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou (2008-16) from the KMT, which, at least in recent years, has been believed by Beijing to be more China-friendly than the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). As a result, when President Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP was elected in 2016, Taipei was yet again prevented from participating in the WHA. This situation has continued following the election victory of Lai Ching-te, former vice president during Tsai's second term, in January 2024.

Inserting trusted personnel across the IOs has reportedly allowed China not only to keep blocking Taiwan's access to IOs, but also to impact a wide range of UN activities, events, and narratives. Beijing is believed to have excluded Taiwanese nationals from scientific conferences co-sponsored by the UN and its specialized agencies, as well as to have edited UN documents to reflect its own preferences (*Asia Watch*, 2020). This accusation was based on the leaked information about a secret Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the WHO and PRC in 2005. Even though the content of the MoU itself was never made public, the leaked Memorandum on Implementation of the 2005 China-WHO Taiwan MoU was made temporarily available on WikiSource. According to the document, the MoU restricted Taiwan's access to the WHO and its facilities, and used the name "Taiwan, China" (McCuaig-Johnston, 2021). However, the Memorandum on Implementation disappeared from WikiSource in 2020 (Memorandum on Implementation of the 2005 China-WHO Taiwan MOU, 2005).

Moreover, the UN has been restricting NGOs from access and accreditation, if they fail to comply with Beijing's demands to revise the name "Taiwan" to "Taiwan, Province of China" on their websites and publications. One example was provided by Wikimedia Foundation's blocked accreditation to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2020 and 2021, as Beijing accused the foundation of spreading disinformation via the independent, volunteer-led Taiwan chapter (Wikimedia Foundation, 2021).

The Consequences of Taiwan's Exclusion from IOs: The Case Study of WHO

The reverberations of China's coercive strategies to exclude Taiwan from the UN system and other IOs are perhaps best evidenced by the events which followed the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to a swift border closure and effective government-led strategies, Taiwan recorded lower Covid-19 infection rates than most other countries and has generally emerged as a success story in combating the novel and dangerous virus (Qin and Chang Chien, 2021) (Schleich, 2020) (Summers et. al, 2020). Furthermore, Taiwan has also been recognized worldwide as an aid donor thanks to its "Taiwan Can Help, and Taiwan Is Helping" campaign.

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However, despite effective foreign assistance projects—which allowed Taiwan to gain positive attention of the international community—the island-nation reportedly faced a series of obstacles and complications, mainly due to China's pressure. The most serious of them was the challenge to buy Covid-19 vaccines from abroad. Taipei openly accused Beijing of influencing a German firm producing Covid-19 vaccines and making it nearly impossible for Taiwan to buy vaccines directly (Chung, 2021). As a result, Taiwan had to initially rely on vaccine donations. Whereas the United States and Japan became the two biggest donors, the middle and small sized countries like Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland also made significant vaccine donations.

To bypass China's influence, Taiwanese private companies were compelled to buy foreign-made vaccines on behalf of the Taipei government. Two of the world's biggest technology manufacturers—Foxconn, which makes devices for Apple, and the giant semiconductor chip producer TSMC—as well as the Tzu Chi Foundation brokered agreements worth \$350 million for the BioNTech vaccine (Lewis, 2021). Moreover, soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, Taipei decided to develop its own Covid-19 vaccine—not only to demonstrate the country's capabilities and technological advancement, but also to minimize the consequences of China's practices and compensate Taiwan's geopolitical vulnerability.

Without a doubt, exclusion from IOs and China's growing international pressure have had far-fetched implications for Taiwan and its position on the international stage. Equally important, however, is the fact that Beijing's modus operandi seems to have limited Taiwan's options to contribute successfully to the global community. For instance, Taiwan was barred from participating in official WHO consultations on Covid-19, even though Taiwanese experts could have shared their experience from the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in that forum. The idea that supporting Taiwan's meaningful participation in—and contribution to—the UN system might be in fact advantageous to the rest of the world was highlighted by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who attested on October 26, 2021 that "Taiwan's exclusion undermines the important work of the UN and its related bodies, all of which stand to benefit greatly from its contributions" (Blinken, 2021). In a larger framework, Taiwan's shrinking diplomatic presence also indicates China's growing influences in IOs. Arguably, by tightening control over UN funds and shaping the language of international documents to its advantage, Beijing has gradually sought to reshape the international order from within (Mendis and Łuszczykiewicz, 2023b).

China's influences in IOs have increased concurrently with the United States' neglection of the UN agencies and decrease of Washington's authority—especially in the Global South. Notably, the United States under President Donald Trump withdrew from the Paris-based UNESCO in 2019, and it was not until July 2023 that the Biden administration rejoined the organization (Mendis and Łuszczykiewicz, 2023a). Meanwhile, however, Beijing managed to use its financial leverage stemming from membership dues as it became the largest annual contributor in Washington's absence (Mendis and Łuszczykiewicz, 2021b). Having returned to the White House after the Biden interlude, President Trump once again announced the US withdrawal from UNESCO, scheduled to take effect on December 31, 2026. It would also hand Beijing a pathway to further isolate Washington within the UN system and other multilateral frameworks of global governance.

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Brussels' Support for Taiwan's Participation in IOs

From political and economic perspectives, Taiwan has gone a long way since 1971 when it was excluded from the UN. After a political transformation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, the island-nation has been recognized as one of the most vibrant democracies in the world (Economist Intelligence, 2023). This successful, non-violent metamorphosis has brought the attention, sympathy, and support of many other like-minded democratic countries. The support for Taiwan's inclusion in international organizations has become particularly apparent and widely discussed in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic—as evidenced by the voices of the European Union and the United States which opted for Taiwan's presence in the WHO and other international bodies (*The Economist*, 2022). For example, the European Parliament in October 2021 recommended to

... strongly advocate for Taiwan's meaningful participation as an observer in meetings, mechanisms and activities of international bodies, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); urge Member States and the EU institutions to support international initiatives calling for Taiwan's participation in international organisations; welcome again Taiwan's proactive cooperation with the international community in learning about the COVID-19 pandemic and finding the best ways to respond to it, and underline that this case has proven that Taiwan's contributions in the WHO would be an added value to the health and well-being of the citizens of all its members (The European Parliament, 2021).

The European Parliament went even further in 2024. With its unprecedented resolution of February 28 on the implementation of the common foreign and security policy, the EU Parliament concluded that "only Taiwan's democratically elected government can represent the Taiwanese people on the international stage" (The European Parliament, 2024). Essentially, the EU policy challenged China's narrative, according to which the Taiwanese people are represented internationally by Beijing. It was a landmark in signaling EU's support for Taiwan's international presence and "meaningful participation" in global institutions.

Washington's Less-Known Yet Global Legislation

The United States has similarly supported Taiwan's participation in international organizations—even though, as in the case of the EU, Washington does not formally endorse Taiwan's independence (Yeh, 2016). Over the years, the long-term support of the United States has been determined by the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, in which—despite severing formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan—the American administrations guaranteed the continuation of good relations between Washington and Taipei in accordance with the "One China Policy." More importantly, the TRA reaffirmed Washington's commitment to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character; thus, helping "to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the

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security, or social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan" (Taiwan Relations Act, 1979).

In addition to the TRA, the Six Assurances and diplomatic cables that were declassified in 2020 became the cornerstone of unofficial US-Taiwan relations. However, the most significant development in Washington-Taipei relations occurred during the first Trump administration (Mendis and Łuszczykiewicz, 2021a, pp. 6–7), when the Taiwan Travel Act (2018), the TAIPEI Act (2019), and the Taiwan Assurance Act (2020) were enacted into US law (Mendis and Łuszczykiewicz, 2021).

With regard to the island-nation's presence in IOs, the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019 advocates for "Taiwan's membership in all international organizations in which statehood is not a requirement and in which the United States is also a participant" as well as an "observer status in other appropriate international organizations" (Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, 2020). Similarly, the Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020 expressed "support for Taiwan's defense strategy of asymmetric warfare" and encouraged Taipei to increase its defense expenditures (Taiwan Assurance Act of 2020, in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020). It also reaffirmed US support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the United Nations, WHA, INTERPOL, ICAO, and other international bodies. Finally, the law also called for Taiwan's inclusion in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNESCO, and other international organizations "for which statehood is not a requirement for membership."

It is important to stress that all these US congressional acts may have consequences for other countries as well, depending on the character of their relations with Taiwan. The most explicit case is the TAIPEI Act of 2019, which provides the most unprecedented global consequences, as it technically gives the US authorities a prerogative to either reward or punish countries that either support or act against Taiwan. The TAIPEI Act declares that the US government should

- a) "consider, in certain cases as appropriate and in alignment with United States interests, increasing its economic, security, and diplomatic *engagement* with nations that have demonstrably strengthened, enhanced, or upgraded relations with Taiwan"; and
- b) "consider, in certain cases as appropriate, in alignment with United States foreign policy interests and in consultation with Congress, altering its economic, security, and diplomatic engagement with nations that take serious or significant actions to undermine the security or prosperity of Taiwan." (Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, 2020) (italics added).

In other words, the legislation authorizes US authorities to support or "punish" other countries by expanding or restricting diplomatic, economic, and security assistance based on their behavior toward Taiwan. Essentially, each country's actions may be carefully examined as to whether its government undermines the "security or prosperity" of Taiwan, including the support for Taiwan's international presence. However, despite having such a powerful legislation in hand, the question is to what extent Washington would want to weaponize it. As of mid-2025—when this article was submitted for publication—the future remains uncertain: with the ongoing trade war with China during

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President Trump's second term, anticipating the dynamics of US relations with both China and Taiwan is akin to reading tealeaves.

Conclusion

Barring Taiwan from any form of participation in international organizations—whether through full membership or observer status—has been a core element of China's broader strategy of non-military coercion. This strategy seems to encompass cognitive campaigns related to the 1971 UN resolution and the "One China Principle," as well as efforts to strip Taiwan of its diplomatic allies. Arguably, these measures are designed to weaken Taiwan's international position while strengthening Beijing's influence in international organizations, enabling it to impose its own rules and reshape global governance.

As a result, Taiwan has faced numerous obstacles in its efforts to secure meaningful participation in—and contribution to—international organizations within the UN system and beyond. China's political, legal, and cognitive strategy is perhaps not as visible and spectacular as military maneuvers—for example, when then-US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022 (Łuszczykiewicz and Mendis, 2023b; Łuszczykiewicz-Mendis and Mendis, 2024). Nonetheless, it may be argued that, so far, China's non-military *modus operandi* has proven highly effective.

Despite open declarations of support from the United States and the European Union, breaking the impasse in UN bodies remains, for now, a distant and uncertain prospect for Taiwan. However, it is not an entirely lost cause. An interesting precedent can be found in the case of Palestine, which launched a diplomatic campaign—known as "Palestine 194"—to secure international recognition of the State of Palestine and to obtain UN membership as the 194th member state (Schanzer, Goldberg, and Mark, 2022). Owing to the majority rule and the absence of veto power, Palestine became the 195th full member of UNESCO on October 31, 2011—despite strong opposition from the United States. A year later, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution granting Palestine the status of a non-member observer state at the United Nations.

As reflected in the EU resolution of 2024, some policymakers—especially in the likeminded democratic countries—maintain that the Taiwanese people are not, and should not be, represented by the PRC on the international stage; instead, they support Taipei's idea that 23 million citizens of the ROC should be represented only by the democratically-elected government of the island-nation (Taipei Trade Office in Fiji, 2024). However, as long as the *status quo*—one that helps to avoid a war but satisfies neither side—is maintained, the people of Taiwan will remain in a limbo.

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