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On June 1, President Tsai Ing-wen met with US Senator David Perdue. In addition to thanking Senator Perdue and Taiwan-friendly members of the US Congress for supporting Taiwan's participation in international organizations. Source: Office of the President, Taiwan (R.O.C.), flickr, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/presidentialoffice/42487856161/in/album-72157695603414851/>>.

A Confident Taiwan with Strong Links to the World

Dr. Li-wen Tung

Beijing suspended formal cross-Strait dialogue following Tsai's inauguration and embarked on a campaign of pressure against Taiwan. As the relationship between Taiwan and China has become increasingly difficult, Beijing has continued to squeeze Taipei's international space, establishing diplomatic ties with Burkina Faso.

Taiwan has invested much in consolidating ties with the dwindling ranks of its diplomatic partners to boost its international recognition in the face of relentless inroads by Beijing. The previous defection was that of the Dominican Republic, which established diplomatic relations with mainland China and cut ties with Taipei. This was Beijing's second major success recently in a diplomatic offensive in the Latin American





and Caribbean region, which the United States sees as its own backyard.

Post 2016, it is both a punishment for the refusal of Tsai Ing-wen's administration to state that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China, and a form of psychological pressure aimed at Taiwanese and the international audience, including the international media.

Foreign diplomacy is Taiwan's toughest area, given that diplomatic allies and international organizations are limited by China's comprehensive suppression, and there is not much that Taiwan can do. There is, however, broad international space which includes unofficial allies, NGOs and public diplomacy, by which Taiwan can exist and survive. In fact, Taiwan is a success story for democracy in Asia and around the world and confident with strong links to the world.

Like American ex-Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Thomas J. Christensen said, Taipei has formal diplomatic relationships with only a small number of states, and it is not a member of the United Nations. The reality, however, is that Taiwan could not be the first world, democratic, commercial powerhouse it is if it were not extensively integrated into global society. Its citizens could not travel the world on business and pleasure, its airliners and freighters could not span the globe, and it could not be one of the world's premier sources of information technology, unless it were so integrated. Taipei may not have many embassies, but it has dozens of unofficial offices around the planet staffed

with professional representatives who carry on the business of the people of Taiwan. In the trade arena alone, Taipei would be an economic backwater if it were not thoroughly linked into the dense web of global institutions that support international commerce. Many of Taipei's most important relationships are unofficial, and yet genuine communication and cooperation goes on every day of the year.

The poaching of Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies may seem a symbolic victory for Beijing, but it will do little to dent the island's relationships with its unofficial allies. Since Taiwan's democratisation in the 1990s and China's rise to the status of global power, the old dispute over the legitimacy to rule all of China has been substantially transformed. Nowadays, Taiwan has neither the means nor the political will to continue so-called "dollar diplomacy" to prevent its allies switching to Beijing's side.

President Tsai Ing-wen said Taiwan will not engage in "dollar diplomacy." The tactics employed by China have merely served to increase dissatisfaction and suspicion of its global presence. Instead, Taiwan will continue to promote sustainable development by providing meaningful and substantive contributions to its allies and the international community.

Psychological pressure is without doubt a factor in Beijing's actions, but as Taiwanese grow accustomed to decreasing recognition for Taipei, they have also become more resilient. The darkest era of Taiwan's diplomacy has long passed. The exit from the United Nations and the loss of recognition by the U.S.A. in the 1970s



was a heavy punch; the same move by the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso in 2018 is little more than a nuisance.

China's desire to restrict Taipei's freedom of action internationally rests on the faulty assumption that its "diplomatic allies" are the lifeline connecting the island to the outside world. Instead, Taiwan maintains extensive global engagement, including significant relationships with the United States, Europe and Japan. For many years, despite its dwindling number of diplomatic partners, Taiwan has been able to maintain economic and cultural ties with trade missions and cultural offices in countries that do not recognize Taipei.

These unofficial relations, assisted in large part by these offices, are the lifelines for Taiwan's international relations. To strengthen these unofficial ties, Taiwan has managed to work with some countries to change the designation of their offices. The British Trade and Cultural Office rebranded itself as the British Office in 2015 and the Japanese representation in Taiwan was changed from the Japan Interchange Association to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association in December 2016.

Now, Taiwan's relations with the United States are experiencing significant momentum. While the Taiwan Travel Act is no new Taiwan Relations Act, it expresses a steady change in Washington's attitude to Beijing. China may not like what it sees, but it is Xi's ambitious, and some may say aggressive, agenda for the country that has pushed Taipei and Washington closer together than ever before. It would not be the

first time Beijing's reaction has proved counterproductive.

China's tactics toward Taiwan have not changed in the past two to three decades. Through diplomatic suppression and military threats, these tactics have caused Taiwanese to become further distanced from the idea of "one China." Although China continues to emphasize that the two sides are "one family," and it has introduced 31 measures aimed at attracting Taiwanese, it has continued to shrink Taiwan's diplomatic space, revealing a huge contradiction in Beijing's policy.

Nearly 80 percent of Taiwanese believe that China is unfriendly toward Taiwan, according to a survey released by the cross-Strait Policy Association. The poll showed that 83.5 percent believe China's actions toward Taiwan do not help cross-Strait relations. According to the poll, 64.4 percent of Taiwanese believe that China's suppression of Taiwan would result in worse cross-Strait relations, while 56 percent believe that the Chinese government is damaging the cross-Strait "status quo."

The PRC's growing power presents difficult security challenges for most of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, not just for Taiwan. But these challenges are rarely considered from a multi-lateral perspective—most analyses of regional security issues instead tend to focus on bilateral relationships. It must be noticed that, Xi's first five years in power have coincided with a relatively disturbed East Asian environment.

Chinese assertive political and military





behavior in the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait has challenged the status quo in maritime Asia along China's periphery, thereby undermining Asian stability and causing concern to U.S. and Asian leaders.

China's economic sanctions, military pressure, and diplomatic bans are the most important strategies for its negotiation strategies with neighboring countries. China's purpose is to intimidate neighboring countries so that they turn away from the United States and acquiesce to China.

Beijing may think that, by removing Taiwan's diplomatic recognition, it is killing

Taipei's will to resist its demands. Instead, its attempt to gradually eliminate Taipei from the international arena will only fuel indifference in Taiwan and prompt unofficial allies to find other ways to secure Taiwan's standing.

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Editor's Note: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Prospect Foundation.

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