

Significance of the Three Former Service Chiefs at the Taiwanese Security Dialogue

Visit of The Former Service Chiefs

The three former Service Chiefs General Manoj Naravane (Retd), Admiral Karambir Singh (Retd) and Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria (Retd) visited Taiwan on 08 August 2023 to speak and participate in a security dialogue at the Ketagalan Forum, a security event focused on the Indo-Pacific which is hosted by Taiwan's Foreign Ministry. Apart from the three former Service Chiefs, Major General RPS Bhadauria (Retd) presently the Director of Centre for Strategic Studies & Simulation (CS3) at United Service Institution of India (USI), India's oldest think tank was also present there.

Incidentally, the USI has MoU's with a large number of think tanks and institutes across the globe which includes Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR), Cross-Strait Interflow Prospect Foundation and Chinese Council for Advanced Political Studies (CAPS).

On 08 August President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan spoke at the opening of the Ketagalan Forum: 2023 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue. She stated that "Maintaining the rules-based order is imperative to our region's stability and prosperity". The President further said that, "Taiwan has dedicated itself to being [a] part of the democratic alliance that works to prevent authoritarian expansionism while tackling issues such as climate change, emerging diseases, and terrorism. She also pointed out that, "Taiwan's high-tech sector, especially with its leading edge in semiconductors, will be crucial to creating a secure global supply chain'.[\[1\]](#)

One China Policy

India was among the first countries to recognise communist China in 1949. In 2003, then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared India's support to One China Policy and stated that there is one China and its one China policy remains unaltered.

'One China' is basically the framework guiding relations between China, Taiwan, and the United States, thereby making it a triangular relationship amongst the four key players; China, USA and the two political parties of Taiwan; Kuomintang (KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The four stakeholders converge on the phrase "There is only one China in the world," but have differed substantially on the related components of the 'One-China' question.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) aims at complete unification with Taiwan, with some analysts predicting it to be as early as 2030, especially under the assertive leadership of Chairman Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' of attaining wealth, power, and modernisation for China as a whole. Given the value that China places on unification with Taiwan and its increasing military capabilities and coercion, there are analysts who believe there is a significant probability that China will use force against Taiwan at some point of time. Post the Ukrainian conflict this issue has also been in the spotlight with Admiral Lee His-min a former Chief of General Staff of China saying that; "Taiwan is not ready to deter, let alone fend off a Chinese invasion, at least not using the same tactics and systems as before".

The US government follows the 'One China Policy', interpreted, based on informal and formal institutions that serve as the basis for US-China relations and US-Taiwan relations. KMT continues to profess that the 1992 Consensus (in the sense of 'One China, differing

interpretations') is the best policy for cross-Strait relations. While DPP, the ruling dispensation in Taiwan is well known for its pro-independence and anti 'One China' leanings.

Taiwan's relations with China have deteriorated significantly since President Tsai Ing-Wen assumed office, as indicated by an increase in hostile rhetoric and Chinese military activities near Taiwan's airspace, including increased frequency and scale of Chinese military exercises near Taiwan, to which Taiwan has been objecting.

China's Belligerence Continues

While India recognised One China policy, a reciprocation in the form of One India policy (The phrase 'One India Policy' was first articulated by Late Sushma Swaraj, the then EAM, during discussion with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi during latter's visit to India in Jun 2014) has been absent from the Chinese side. China expected India to recognise Tibet as an integral part of China and accept the One China policy and India did so without reservation.

To the disappointment of India, China has continued to refer Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Arunachal Pradesh as disputed territories. China has always disregarded the sovereignty of India through its stance on Jammu and Kashmir, Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh through denial and issue of stapled visas to certain Indian citizens and number of skirmishes on the LAC in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. China has also been silent over Pakistan's support to terrorism.

India naturally feels wronged by the Chinese stand on its core concerns –questioning India's territorial sovereignty, border transgressions, China's aggressive posturing in India's neighbourhood, lack of support for India's stand against terrorism and China's persistent opposition to India's global aspirations.

India – Taiwan Relations

The relations between the two countries actually took off after 2010 with China's stand on visa to residents of J&K and Arunachal, proving to be a turning point. Since then, numerous delegations from both countries have visited each other, with Taiwan's New Southbound Policy gearing for more engagement. Economic cooperation in areas of trade, investment and industry between India and Taiwan has been very close in recent years. From 1.19 bn USD in 2001–02 to 7.5 bn USD in 2018-19, the two-way trade has increased manifold since the onset of the twenty-first century. India ranks as Taiwan's 14th largest export destination and 18th largest source of imports. Trade has thrived due to the good relations between the two countries.^[2]

In a concerted effort to expand Taiwan's presence across the Indo-Pacific, President Tsai Ing-wen introduced the New Southbound Policy (NSP) in 2016. The NSP builds on the 'Go South' policies of previous administrations, continues Taiwan's efforts to find a solution to the perennial problem of how to balance its economic interests – which depend on relations with China – with its security interests – which do not. The NSP takes a 'people-centric' approach. The flagship foreign policy of President Tsai Ing-Wen, the NSP expands the scope of countries covered in the Go South Policy, which was in practice under former Presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian. Through the policy, Taiwan has extended engagement with Australia, New Zealand, India, and its five South Asian neighbours. The NSP is a national strategy that seeks to reposition Taiwan's role in Asia, by providing a unique framework that encourages multi-layered linkages with these countries that include India.^[3]

The importance of India lies in the fact that it is a key player in the Indo-Pacific Order, and India's support may strengthen Taiwan's positioning in the region. As India is elevating ties with the US, Japan, and Australia, it is logical for Taiwan to build on these Indo-Pacific commonalities and connections and engage with India. There is no doubt that India's role at both global and regional levels is likely to grow further. Greater collaboration between India and Taiwan under the NSP framework is mutually beneficial.

Taiwan Trade Thrives but Security Interests Dominate

In 2021, PRC accounted for 42 per cent of Taiwan's total exports, by value, amounting to USD 188.91 bn. Machinery, instruments, plastic, rubbers and chemical products have been the major commodities exported by Taiwan in the past five years. The annual value of Taiwan's investments in mainland China reached US\$ 5.86 billion in 2021, meanwhile, the mainland's investment on the Island comprised just US\$ 116.24 million in 2021.^[4]

Incidentally, the Taiwanese semiconductor industry, including IC manufacturing, design, and packing, forms a major part of Taiwan's IT industry. Due to its strong capabilities in OEM wafer manufacturing and a complete industry supply chain, Taiwan has been able to and dominate the global marketplace. Taiwanese Companies account for 50 percent of the world market, with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) the biggest player in the foundry market.

There is a view that Taiwan's interdependence with the Chinese economy is eroding its special status as Taiwan's economy is getting increasingly entangled with Mainland China. Presently, the US is seen to be acting as a balancer between China and Taiwan in ensuring peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Under President Biden the US-Taiwan ties have deepened and the arms-sales have also increased as have high-level interactions.

India's Stance

In a written response to a question in the Rajya Sabha in 2021, the Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said; "India's policy on Taiwan is clear and consistent. The Government facilitates and promotes interactions in areas of trade, investment, tourism, culture, education and other such people-to-people exchanges".^[5]

India needs to carefully balance its strategic interests and regional dynamics. India's stance aims at protecting its sovereignty, maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific, and fostering economic growth. It is thus crucial for India to engage with Taiwan while avoiding unnecessary provocations that could escalate tensions with China.

By pursuing a nuanced approach that combines economic cooperation, strategic partnerships, and principled support for democratic values, India can position itself as a responsible regional power while navigating the complexities of its relationship with China and other key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. Ultimately, India's modified approach towards the One China Policy should be guided by its long-term national interests and a commitment to maintaining a free, open, and rules-based order in the region.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that India's stance regarding Taiwan, must ensure that its interests are protected, Chinese expansionism is contained, a level playing field is created in economic co-

operation and trade deficit with China and some leverage is available in negotiations with China.

India need not completely abandon its One China Policy but should adopt a dual-track policy that would involve continuing to engage with China in areas of mutual interest and concern while also enhancing relations with Taiwan based on areas of mutual benefit and complementarity. The security concerns for both countries which emanate from China is one of the areas of convergence and hence there is a need for each side to understand one another, the visit of the three former Service Chiefs should be viewed in this context. We need not shy from forging a relationship with Taiwan.

Endnotes

[1] President Tsai attends opening of Ketagalan Forum: 2023 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue, 23 August, 2023 <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6559>

[2] Taiwan India Relations, Taipei Economic and Cultural centre in India 13 January 2023 https://www.roc-taiwan.org/in_en/post/39.html

[3] Vanvari, N., & Tan, A. C. (2021). India, Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific: Economic–Security Strategic Partnership and Expected Utility Theory. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 8(1), 98–126.

[4] Zhao Ziwen, China-Taiwan trade, and everything you need to know, *South China Monitor*, 07 August 2022 <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3187890/china-taiwan-trade-and-everything-you-need-know>

[5] Asit Ranjan Mishra, India Moves From China to Taiwan For High-Tech Imports, *Rediff. Com* April 28, 2023, [https://www.rediff.com/business/report/india-moves-from-china-to-taiwan-for-high-tech-imports/20230418.htm#:~:text=The%20ministry%20of%20external%20affairs,'](https://www.rediff.com/business/report/india-moves-from-china-to-taiwan-for-high-tech-imports/20230418.htm#:~:text=The%20ministry%20of%20external%20affairs,)

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