US-Taiwan Relations and the Future of the Liberal Order

Christina Lai
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ABSTRACT: Strengthening ties with Taiwan is the best chance the United States has to preserve the liberal international order in Asia and improve its security relative to China. This study offers a normative perspective on how Taiwan can contribute to US-led international institutions and the Asian regional order and reduce conflict risk. It concludes with recommendations for the United States and its partners to integrate Taiwan into multilateral institutions in Asia.

Keywords: US foreign policy, China, Taiwan, Indo-Pacific, rules-based order

China’s rise in the twenty-first century poses challenges and opportunities for the United States and the liberal international order (LIO). Scholars and policymakers in international relations have had heated debates over the nature of the LIO and what tenets should be upheld. In addition, Beijing’s economic coercion and military intimidation toward Taiwan might render it the next flashpoint in Asia, leading to a possible conflict between the United States and China. For example, in 2021, US Admiral Philip S. Davidson, former head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, claimed that within the next six years, China will have the capability to force reunification with Taiwan. The risk of a conflict between China and Taiwan, possibly involving others in Asia, cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation and quest for legal status lead to an empirical puzzle: How can Taiwan, a liberal democracy in East Asia, contribute more to the resilience of the current LIO? Can the United States move beyond bilateralism with Taiwan and maintain its competitiveness with China during the power struggle? Taiwan’s limited participation in international affairs is a missed opportunity for the LIO and presents a long-term risk to the global community.

This article challenges the conventional wisdom that Taiwan’s geostrategic importance will inevitably lead to a conflict and argues that Taiwan’s soft-power reach outweighs its geopolitical location. It focuses
instead on how the United States and its allies might engage Taiwan to reduce the risk of conflict and stabilize the LIO in Asia. While this study acknowledges that a miscalculation could lead to a major conflict, it also observes that this fear has led to the current inertia in US-Taiwan relations. Fears of conflict with China and possible US abandonment of Taiwan are overdetermined and have enabled Beijing’s slow but inevitable creep toward forced reunification.

To achieve greater security vis-à-vis Beijing, the United States needs to embed Taiwan into its newly established regional networks for fostering the LIO. This study offers a normative perspective on how Taiwan can contribute to the US-led international institutions and Asian regional order. The United States and its partners could greatly strengthen the LIO’s crucial rules-based order by integrating Taiwan into the multilateral institutions in Asia and beyond, thus greatly reducing the potential for conflict.

This article first establishes the current state of the LIO in Asia by examining US-China relations, Asian security, and Taiwan’s foreign policy through the framework of the LIO’s critical components. Second, it proposes an in-depth analysis of Taiwan’s quest for political status and its contributions to the LIO. Third, it suggests that the United States move beyond the existing political arrangement with Taiwan and advocate for Taiwan to have a stronger presence in the international community. Finally, it concludes with the prospects of the US-Taiwan-China triangle and policy implications for the Taiwanese government.

**Taiwan and the Liberal International Order**

After World War II, the United States and its Western allies set up international institutions characterized by liberal ideas (such as liberal democracy, the free market, and the rule of law). This system is known as the liberal international order. The US effort to uphold the LIO has encountered increasing challenges from authoritarian countries such as China and Russia, who pick and choose among the existing rules and exploit them. In the context of China-Taiwan relations, a realist perspective might argue that China, with its rising capabilities, would try to take control of Taiwan and exert greater influence in Asia in the near future. This scenario is certainly possible, given the intense power competition between the United States and China.

Although the LIO has fostered unprecedented cooperation among states in Europe, East Asia, and North America since 1945, this concept remains highly contested in international relations. This article offers a common understanding of the LIO: states and non-state actors follow rules, norms, and legal procedures
in international affairs. The rules-based aspect is a constitutive part of the Asian regional order. The future of Taiwan and the Asian regional order also depends on the resilience of the LIO and other middle-power states in the Asia-Pacific. While liberalists are confident that the LIO will remain strong even following America’s recent decline, some have questioned whether the LIO was ever liberal at all. Still others suggest that new forums or alternative institutional settings might emerge to regulate economic affairs and global politics. Despite their contested meanings, this article centers on the fundamental elements underpinning the current US-led LIO: democracy, free trade, and international institutions. It also highlights how Taiwan can significantly strengthen the LIO in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Liberal Democracy and Political Freedom

Taiwan underwent a peaceful transition from authoritarian rule to a vibrant democracy in the 1990s, and it has experienced peaceful power transitions in its presidential elections. Over the last several years, the Taiwanese people have developed a civic identity that embraces democratic government, the rule of law, and open dialogue. For instance, the Sunflower Movement in 2014 was a notable series of large-scale protest organized by college students, social activists, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This social movement was nonviolent in nature, and it demanded that then President Ma Ying-jeou retract a controversial trade pact with China.

More recently, President Tsai Ing-wen has openly indicated the resilience of Taiwan’s democracy, progressive values, and the rule of law in the face of China’s political and security challenges to the liberal democratic order. In a recent statement, Tsai also said she expected Taiwan could contribute more to regional trade, high-end research, and educational exchanges in the Indo-Pacific.

Conversely, China under President Xi Jinping’s rule has imposed stronger social control over its citizens. For example, human rights abuse in Xinjiang, political oppression in response to Hong Kong’s social movements, and strictly enforced lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic all point to Beijing’s refusal to embrace Western political freedoms and legal rights. More recently, China launched misinformation campaigns to undermine Taiwan’s democratic
elections in 2020 and 2024. The increasingly authoritarian rule in China presents a sharp contrast to Taiwan’s democracy and vibrant civil society.

**Free Trade**

Starting in the 2010s, China’s economic sanctions against its neighbors have led to economic losses for Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea. These sanctions also created increasing worries that China might apply these coercive measures more frequently in maritime disputes or political friction, which would gradually undermine the Asian regional order. Meanwhile, Taiwan’s trade reliance on China has rendered its export and service sectors vulnerable to China’s economic sanctions. The Taiwanese government, along with the agricultural and manufacturing industries, needs to diversify its trading partners to hedge against China’s coercive measures.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), formally established in 2016, included countries such as Australia, Japan, and Singapore across the Asia-Pacific region. It was one of the most important economic initiatives that includes specific measures to lower both non-tariff and tariff barriers. This partnership also established an investment dispute settlement mechanism that provides economic safety for all signatories. Entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership was one of the most important objectives for Taiwan’s trade policy, as membership would integrate Taiwan’s economy into the regional network. The Trans-Pacific Partnership intended to formulate a multilateral trade and service agreement with higher standards for labor rights and environmental protection regulations. After US President Donald Trump withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Biden-Harris administration made it clear they would not pursue the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Japan has led negotiating the agreement, which might help Taiwan expand its markets to other counties in the Asia-Pacific region. There are still challenges to Taiwan’s membership, including the Taiwanese government’s need to resolve its trade disputes with Japan. China has also applied for membership and might invoke its One China policy to delay Taiwan’s entrance. Japan, along with other middle powers in the Asia-Pacific region, should seriously consider Taiwan’s case prior to China’s entry, as such a trade pact should prioritize economic merits and qualifications over diplomatic recognition. Taiwan’s CPTPP membership could greatly enhance its resilience to China’s economic coercion because
the trade partnership upholds a higher standard for regional trade agreements, and it could also help Taiwan diversify its trade away from China.

More recently, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen proposed “friend shoring” to address trade vulnerabilities amid increasing geopolitical rivalries. Yellen calls for “countries that share common values about global trade and economy” to work together in competition with China’s unfair trade practices. Although she was referring to diversifying the supply chain of rare earth materials, diversifying Taiwan’s trade policy and development of advanced technologies could help the United States and others to reduce economic reliance on China. For example, Taiwan’s government and the semiconductor manufacturers are well positioned to provide such an opportunity, since they contribute to the resilience of the global supply chain for computer chips.

**Multilateralism**

The other LIO components rely heavily on multilateralism, which stresses transparency, reciprocity, and dispute settlement in international or regional institutions. Beijing consistently blocks Taiwan from joining international organizations, limiting Taiwan’s official participation in regional institutions. It was due to the CCP’s long-held view of the One China principle that Taiwan’s legal status was denied. On the other hand, foreign-policy and global governance scholars have addressed what types of strategies a rising or middle power can implement when it joins international institutions. These organizations’ multilateral settings provide a structural opportunity for stronger and weaker members to exert more balanced influence on one another and reach a consensus on crucial issues.

Taiwan’s unique political status does not preclude it from participating multilaterally in regional affairs. In 2016, the Tsai administration launched the New Southbound Policy (NSP), an interdepartmental ocean affairs council that promotes people-to-people exchanges, investment partnerships, and informal dialogues in Southeast Asian countries. The NSP policy’s nonpolitical nature circumvented the issue of Taiwan’s “official representation.” Therefore, the Taiwanese government, along with NGOs and universities in Taiwan, jointly developed educational and technological programs with local Indian and other Southeast Asian
governments and schools. This bottom-up, multilateral approach to regional engagement aims at deepening economic and cultural ties with Southeast Asia.

Taiwan's Legal Status

Contemporary histories of Taiwan and mainland China have diverged dramatically since World War II, as the former has never been under CCP rule. From the CCP’s perspective, Taiwan became a renegade province following the Nationalist Party’s (Kuomintang, KMT) forced evacuation to the island in 1949. More recently, Xi explicitly claimed that Taiwan’s unification is essential for China’s rejuvenation and national pride.

The formal justification for Taiwan’s exclusion from international organizations comes from the UN Resolution 2758 passed in 1971, in which the People’s Republic of China formally replaced the Republic of China in the “China” seat. The Chinese government dedicated significant efforts to associating its One China principle with the UN resolution, limiting Taiwan’s access to most specialized UN agencies and NGOs. Therefore, Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation and limited participation in international affairs have mainly been due to China’s sovereignty claim over Taiwan. This situation presents a serious challenge to the LIO in the Asia-Pacific, where China’s neighbors are becoming increasingly worried about Beijing’s expansionist ambitions.

In this regard, Taiwan’s quest for political recognition and greater participation in international affairs offers a chance for the LIO to endure, as Taiwan can exert greater influence in Asia. For example, Taiwan demonstrated the strength of its universal healthcare system in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and its goodwill by helping countries in need. Taiwan and the United States should firmly oppose Beijing’s campaigns and coercion, but maintaining Taiwan’s military deterrence and asymmetry capabilities is only part of the solution. Integrating Taiwan into the LIO can also prevent Beijing from conducting reckless military attacks against Taiwan. Unlocking Taiwan’s great potential for the LIO by including it in newly established networks would be indispensable to US-Taiwan relations.

The United States and its allies in Asia and beyond must be careful not to support Beijing’s controversial narrative that Taiwan has always been an integral part of China. These nations need a systematic strategy to enhance Taiwan’s security and diplomatic contributions, and some modest steps would be suitable for positive momentum. For example, they can first consider issuing a joint statement supporting Taiwan’s
reinstatement to the World Health Assembly and its participation in other major international organizations. Coherent resolve and diplomatic dexterity are crucial for addressing Taiwan's political status as a sovereign country (the Republic of China).30 Second, other nations can invite Taiwan to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Plus, and Australian, UK, US (AUKUS) Plus trilateral security partnership. Long-term, a sustainable Taiwan policy should ensure Taiwan's consistent presence in international affairs and embed its security in the multilateral Indo-Pacific security networks.

Democratic consolidation, promoting free trade, and implementing people-centered diplomacy are the key features of Taiwan's agenda. These soft-power appeals have already increased Taiwan's visibility in the globalization era, and the “non-state-centric,” or low-politics, perspective is one of the more effective ways for the Taiwanese government to avoid China's objections.31 Nevertheless, this option will be unsustainable for Taiwan when faced with intense geopolitical competition between China and the United States. Taiwan would also be an underappreciated asset for the United States if it were to reinvigorate the LIO in Asia and beyond.

**Putting US-Taiwan Relations in Perspective**

Ever since the United States normalized diplomatic relations with China, it has maintained informal relations with Taiwan. Specifically, when the United States established diplomatic relations with China through the 1979 Joint Communiqué, the Taiwan Regulations Act (a piece of domestic US legislation) began to regulate US-Taiwan relations.32 Since the 1990s, US policy toward Taiwan has been characterized as one of strategic ambiguity, as both sides have not reached a consensus on how to address China's rise and its challenges to the LIO.

**A Bilateral Relationship**

Given the tense bilateral relations between the United States and China, Congress is becoming increasingly concerned over the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. To address Taiwan's diplomatic presence, Congress issued the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act of 2019, which calls for the US government to “increase economic, security, and diplomatic engagement with nations that have strengthened and maintained ties with Taiwan.”33 Congress also issued the Taiwan Travel Act in 2018 that allowed high-level officials
from Taiwan, including the president or vice president, to meet with officials in the United States.\(^{34}\)

Although these legislative acts signal US commitment to Taiwan, they remain bilateral in nature due to China’s assertiveness.\(^{35}\) Sister-city connections, student-exchange programs, and NGO linkages can maintain current engagement between civil-society groups in Taiwan and the United States and might even lead to a formal or routinized meeting in the future.\(^{36}\) Nevertheless, the bilateral relations between the United States and Taiwan alone, including bills, informal contacts, and arms sales, might be insufficient to address China’s territorial expansion in Asia and its challenge to the LIO.

Currently, the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) is the policy platform for US-Taiwan economic relations. The TIFA council meetings promote trade and investment dialogue between American and Taiwanese authorities, and both sides are committed to protecting intellectual property rights, better worker rights, and supply-chain resilience.\(^{37}\) The Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) established by both governments has provided professional workshops sharing expertise in public health, technological development, and disaster relief.

There is still more to be done, however, to enhance bilateral trade and promote greater engagement among the private and public sectors. For example, the US executive branch should devise a legal framework, along with TIFA and GCTF, to negotiate a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Taiwanese government.\(^{38}\) This deeper engagement would benefit both sides and pave the way for Taiwan to sign FTAs with other nations.

**A Recalibration from Bilateralism to Multilateralism**

Starting in the 2020s, US-led security networks, such as the Quad and AUKUS, point to a gradual departure from the long-held hub-and-spoke alliances in Asia to a multilateral arrangement. These newly established institutions also provide great opportunities to renegotiate Taiwan’s legal status, since these organizations are free from Chinese pressure to deny Taiwan’s participation.

For example, Australia, a Quad and AUKUS member, has an increasing stake in maintaining maritime security and regional stability in the Asia-Pacific. It has also suffered significant economic losses due to China’s trade sanctions on products ranging from wine and beef to coal. Meanwhile, in deterring China’s expansion in the South China Sea or military attacks against Taiwan, the Australian government should not
merely advocate for Taiwan’s defense. Instead, it should work closely with fellow member states, such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, to signal a collective, coherent, and credible commitment to Taiwan’s autonomy.\textsuperscript{39}

This reasoning might also apply to other members in the US-led networks. Including Taiwan in these partnerships can lessen the risk of an individual country suffering from China’s targeted coercion. Furthermore, Taiwan’s strategic location in the first island chain has put it at the frontline of China’s territorial expansion and military provocations.\textsuperscript{40} Taiwan’s de facto control of Itu Aba Island (or Taiping Island, in Chinese) could serve as a focal point for supplying logistics and a naval base in the South China Sea. Taiwan could be a valuable dialogue partner of AUKUS, as its government and technological industries could help strengthen the collaboration on artificial intelligence, cyber security, and quantum computing, one of AUKUS’s main concerns.\textsuperscript{41} Such technology partnerships would bolster free trade and build Taiwan’s multilateral network.

Additionally, the majority of people in Taiwan support the status quo of not declaring legal independence and prefer to maintain the “Republic of China” as the country’s formal name.\textsuperscript{42} The Tsai administration adopted a status quo position to maintain Taiwan’s autonomy while remaining open to engaging in political dialogue with China. Taiwan’s quest to deepen ties with the Indo-Pacific points to China’s challenges to liberal democracy and the LIO. For example, Tsai said:

\begin{quote}
Today, it’s Taiwan, but tomorrow it may be any other country that will have to face the expansion of China’s influences. . . . We need to work together to reaffirm our values of democracy and freedom in order to constrain China and also minimize the expansion of their hegemonic influence.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

If the United States can effectively elicit collective support from like-minded countries, then Taiwan can gain more substantive influences in international politics and regional affairs. In 2021, Taiwan and the United States announced the US-Taiwan Consultations on Indo-Pacific Democratic Governance, a mechanism intended to deliver meaningful commitments, including support for transparent governance, countering disinformation campaigns, and leveraging Taiwan as a platform for democratic promotion.\textsuperscript{44} The Taiwanese government certainly has the political will and capability
to work with the United States and its security allies to make greater contributions to the LIO.

It is unfortunate that Taiwan was not included in IPEF in 2022, as Taiwan’s technology companies support more digital trade talks to ensure greater market access in the Asia-Pacific. For example, the Biden-Harris administration could have expanded the current Blue Dot Network and encouraged Taiwan, which currently has the world’s fifth-largest foreign-currency reserves, to participate actively in the high-quality infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, the Taiwanese government could work with AUKUS member states to strengthen critical communications, operations systems, and cyber security. In fact, the Tsai administration has implemented a foreign-policy posture as a pivot in the Indo-Pacific, expanding its soft-power appeal and economic linkages in the region through the NSP policy and the Indo-Pacific Affairs Section within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among other examples. These policy initiatives strengthen cultural exchanges, investment planning, and trade facilitation with South and Southeast Asian countries.

Admittedly, such a move could present risks of political friction and military conflict, as Beijing may consider Taiwan's regional presence a provocative step toward legal independence. This “red line” scenario would likely trigger China’s use of force against Taiwan. Continued isolation for Taiwan wherein its foreign policy depends solely on the United States would be worse for regional stability, however. Even if Taiwan were considered a normal state, Beijing has tried to woo away Taiwan’s diplomatic partners over the last few years. Suffering from such strong pressure, Taiwan might push back against China’s diplomatic strategy by advocating for more secessionist moves that would not serve Beijing’s interests. Such a spiral of animosity would easily lead to a conflict between China and Taiwan.

Policy Measures for the United States

The US and Taiwanese governments should address China’s assertiveness and provocations by working closely to develop greater deterrence capabilities. Military development is only part of the solution, though. A more urgent but often neglected aspect is how the United States strengthens the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and promotes Taiwan’s substantive participation in international organizations.

The United States needs to take more concrete steps to secure and elevate its bilateral relations with Taiwan. First, Taiwan could be included as a dialogue partner of the Quad and the IPEF and later join different
working groups on critical issues in the Indo-Pacific. For example, the Quad has expanded its scope to address emerging technologies, COVID-19 vaccines, and humanitarian assistance, and the Taiwanese government can certainly share its expertise and knowledge on semiconductors and public health. Similarly, there are four pillars of the IPEF that member states value most: connection, resilience, cleanliness, and fairness. Taiwan’s high-end technology industries and increasing trade volume with Asian countries can fulfill the IPEF’s goals.

In regional-security terms, US-Taiwan defense ties should not be about high-profile arms sales alone but should include a routinized mechanism for addressing security threats to Taiwan, like economic coercion, cyberattacks, and information warfare. Regular dialogue between the United States and Taiwan could turn into a joint review on Taiwan’s capabilities in which both sides ensure greater collaboration on critical issues. Furthermore, the US government could draft a white paper elaborating upon the legal foundation for Taiwan’s participation in a US-led framework, such as the Quad Plus, IPEF, and AUKUS Plus partners. An official statement would also clarify how such Taiwan’s inclusion would be consistent with US policy in Asia.

Admittedly, the Biden-Harris administration has maintained strategic ambiguity for US-Taiwan relations, and these initiatives would require a significant change in the US position. Nevertheless, implementing “Taiwan’s meaningful participation” in international affairs and regional organizations would certainly fail to deliver its intended effect, unless the US government demonstrates political support, bureaucratic buy-in, and legislative backing as an explicit signal to US allies in the Indo-Pacific. These policy measures would enhance US-Taiwan relations and improve Taiwan’s agency in countering Beijing’s efforts to undermine Taiwan’s diplomatic space.

What US Partners Can Do

The United States and its Asian partners can develop substantive alliance relations to facilitate peace and stability in Asia by promoting Taiwan’s presence in regional affairs. Specifically, the United States can engage in contingency planning for a military crisis in the Taiwan Strait with its counterparts in Australia, Japan, and the Philippines.

As a founding Quad member, Japan seeks to uphold the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, and it also shares security concerns with Taiwan over the East China Sea. The Senkaku Islands, Okinawa, and Kadena Air Base
are situated in crucial locations for the Taiwan contingency (military attacks from China) and are vulnerable to China’s navy.\textsuperscript{56} Still, there is no platform for policy coordination and communication for Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. In this sense, a trilateral security network built on existing US-Japan relations and the Quad could help stabilize regional order and promote Taiwan’s resilience.\textsuperscript{57} Such a US-Japan-Taiwan framework could start with Taiwan’s involvement as a dialogue partner on contingency planning and logistics support, strengthening Taiwanese-Japanese security ties over time through intelligence sharing, surveillance, or coast guard training.

Asian countries can also initiate political discussions with the United States about Taiwan’s presence in US-led organizations in the Indo-Pacific.\textsuperscript{58} For instance, Taiwan could begin to participate meaningfully in the Indo-Pacific as a dialogue partner or semiofficial member in America’s multilateral discussions with Australia, Japan, South Korea, and other nations on export controls, cybersecurity, and supply-chain issues. The United States and other Quad members could consider expanding the network and invite Taiwan to join Quad-Plus meetings, initiatives, and workshops, thus improving policy coordination, contingency planning, and economic resilience in the Indo-Pacific.

The rationale for Taiwan’s membership is normative and strategic. First and foremost, Taiwan, a liberal democracy and growing economy, shares similar political values with the aforementioned countries. Second, the more Taiwan participates in US-led institutions and the more diplomatic presence it enjoys in Asia, the more likely this strategy is to prevent Beijing from starting a military conflict or attempting to occupy Taiwan by force.\textsuperscript{59} Collective support of Taiwan from US allies and partners in Asia can remind China that the United States is not the only country attempting to improve Taiwan’s presence in regional organizations and multilateral frameworks.\textsuperscript{60}

According to a recent survey, more than half of American respondents would be in favor of defending Taiwan if China attempted to occupy it by force.\textsuperscript{61} Promoting Taiwan’s substantive participation in the US-led regional networks and maintaining its military deterrence against Beijing’s threats of forceful unification therefore need not be mutually exclusive. More importantly, embedding Taiwan in the regional networks can increase the stakes of an attack by Beijing’s military and therefore ease China-Taiwan tensions. Moving from bilateralism to multilateral
engagement is a feasible and desirable path for the US government to defend Taiwan and maintain the LIO in Asia.

Deterring a military conflict between China and Taiwan is certainly no easy task, given the power shift toward China and geographical challenges in East Asia. Nevertheless, the United States and its partners in Asia can still leverage their collective and technological advantages to raise the cost of a possible Chinese attack amidst China’s continued provocations. This article provides a roadmap for the United States and its allies on the means and ends to stabilize regional order and secure Taiwan’s autonomy. These goals will require real and sustained US support for Taiwan’s participation in multilateral institutions, and US initiatives could gradually gain support from other like-minded countries in Asia and beyond.

Conclusion

A stronger China might be more assertive in forcibly claiming Taiwan as territory. Beijing believes it is entitled to govern the island under the nonintervention principle. As a result, Taiwan’s legal status or political recognition cannot be established easily, given that China has devoted considerable effort to isolating Taiwan. Yet, this does not mean that US allies and partners in Asia and Europe can do nothing about it. In fact, the United States can prioritize its Taiwan policy with newly established institutions, such as the Quad, IPEF, and AUKUS, to ensure Taiwan’s meaningful participation in regional affairs.

Taiwan has much to offer the international community, and it also has much to learn from the emerging regional networks in the Indo-Pacific region. This article emphasizes democracy promotion, the free market, and multilateral engagement. These essential features of the LIO represent deliberate US and Western efforts to establish and maintain the post–World War II order.

Starting in the 2010s, China’s assertive sovereignty claims over Taiwan and rapid military buildup have posed significant challenges to US interests in Asia and its global leadership. A military conflict in the Taiwan Strait or a forced occupation of the island would lead to severe consequences to geopolitics and economic development. If successful, Beijing would expand its growing naval presence in the East China Sea and South China Sea, two of the world’s most prosperous shipping lanes. Prolonged armed conflict might also disrupt Taiwan’s semiconductor production, and delays in chip
delivery would harm the global supply chains for smart phones, cars, weapons, and more.

China's frequent military intrusions into Taiwan's airspace, naval exercises in the Taiwan Strait, and consistent efforts to isolate Taiwan are serious security concerns for regional stakeholders and the United States. Taiwan's future will impact US national interests with respect to the Indo-Pacific's economic development and security. The United States and its allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific and Europe have the political influence and regional initiative to promote Taiwan's participation, stabilize China-Taiwan relations, and reinvigorate the LIO.

Christina Lai

Christina Lai is an associate research fellow in the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, Taiwan. She is also an adjunct faculty member in global security studies at Johns Hopkins University. She is interested in US-China relations, Chinese foreign policy, East Asian politics, and qualitative research methods. Her work has appeared in Politics, International Politics, Political Science, the Journal of Contemporary China, Pacific Review, International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, Asian Survey, and Asian Security. Her policy-related works and commentary have appeared in the NATO Association of Canada, the Global Taiwan Institute, Bloomberg, and BBC News.
Endnotes


60. Taylor, “Taiwan Flashpoint.” Return to text.


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