

Australia-Taiwan relations: Prospects and limitations

Part 3. Defence and security considerations

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This is the final paper of a three-part UTS:ACRI Analysis series examining the prospects for and limitations on the Australia-Taiwan relationship following the election of Lai Ching-te as President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) on January 13 2024. Part 1 discussed what the election of Lai means for Australia-Taiwan ties and cross-Strait relations. Part 2 examined how Australia can navigate its one China policy and economic and trade relations with Taiwan, and how Canberra might respond to Taipei's desire for greater diplomatic space. Part 3 concludes the series with a discussion of the Taiwan factor in Australia's defence and security policy in the Indo-Pacific.

These UTS:ACRI Analyses are based on a series of interviews the author conducted in late 2023 and early 2024 with representatives from Taiwan's two main political parties, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Kuomintang (KMT), senior officials from Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defense and Taiwanese academics and analysts.¹

Key takeaways

- Taiwan recognises there are limits on defence cooperation with Australia; it welcomes growing intelligence and diplomatic cooperation. Researchers reporting to Taiwan's Ministry of Defense suggest that while direct bilateral military cooperation is neither possible nor advisable, Australia should coordinate with the US and its allies and partners to provide indirect military support to Taiwan.
- Taiwanese analysts suggest that Australia could assist Taiwan with the development of national security legislation based on Australia's Espionage and Foreign Interference Act 2018 to tackle People's Republic of China (PRC) fifth column activity, espionage and foreign interference. Taipei is also open to cooperation in cyber defence, though Taiwanese officials feel their capabilities in this area are superior.
- The US regards the first island chain which stretches from Japan to the Philippines and includes Taiwan as an essential barrier to Chinese expansion into the traditionally US dominated Western Pacific. In this context Taiwan has become an irreplaceable partner and base in the US' competition with the PRC for dominance in the Indo-Pacific.
- Taiwan has called on Australia to help expand its diplomatic space by building on existing development assistance cooperation to Taiwan's diplomatic allies in the Pacific and supporting

¹ Some interview participants requested anonymity and have been de-identified.

Taiwan's accession to international and regional organisations, including the World Health Organization, the International Civil Aviation Authority and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Introduction

Taiwan is deeply concerned about its security and its status in the world. It has consistently called on countries, including Australia, to reiterate their support for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and the Indo-Pacific in general.²

In 2023, Taiwan's Foreign Minister at the time, Joseph Wu, expressed the view that Australia should maintain a united front with the US and the West on Taiwan and advocate for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.³ Australia has consistently called for the maintenance of the status quo and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait but it has thus far not engaged in military cooperation with Taiwan.

This paper raises the key questions of whether the defence of Taiwan is a priority for Australia and how Australia as an ally of the US and an AUKUS partner could play a role with the US in the defence of Taiwan should conflict arise. It also raises the question of whether Taiwan has agency in its defence or is in fact dependent on the US to defend it. This paper discusses, too, the relevance of the war in Ukraine to Taiwan and Australia. Finally, it records suggestions from Taiwanese officials, academics and analysts about how Australia and Taiwan can deepen defence and security ties, including joint US-Australian naval patrols in the South China Sea, greater military cooperation with the Taiwan military, joint defence development projects, and cooperation on national security legislation and cyber defence.

Can and will Australia defend Taiwan?

Australia's position under the Albanese government of not directly engaging in military cooperation with Taiwan is consistent with long-term Australian defence policy. Historically, Australia has not seen the defence of Taiwan as a key national security interest of Australia. In 2004, then-foreign minister Alexander Downer stated that Australia did not regard its obligations under the ANZUS Treaty to include the US-led defence of Taiwan.⁴ In 2022, former prime minister Paul Keating asserted that Taiwan was 'not a vital Australian interest'.⁵ The *UTS:ACRI/BIDA Poll* that year indicated that less than 40 percent of Australians believed that '[if] China launches a military attack on Taiwan, Australia should send troops to go to Taiwan's defence', although the figure in support of military intervention increased if it was in support of a US-led effort.⁶ The *UTS:ACRI/BIDA Poll 2023* stated that Australian public support for military intervention was slightly lower than for the year before.⁷

The defence of Taiwan has not been regarded by the government or the Australian Defence Force (ADF) as of essential national interest for many years. In 2011, for example, in preparation for taking up his post as Australian representative to Taiwan, the author was briefed by senior Australian Department of Defence staff that Taiwan was not a defence priority for Australia. The briefing primarily focused on the defence of South Korea from attack by North Korea, which was the top priority for the ADF in Northeast Asia at that time. When

2 Author's discussions with a number of senior Taiwanese officials and politicians between 2011-2023. See also 'MOFA thanks US, Australia for statement supporting cross-strait peace, stability', *Taiwan Today*, October 27 2023 <https://taiwantoday.tw/news_amp.php?unit=2&post=243820>.

3 Author's interview with Joseph Wu, then-Foreign Minister of the Republic of China (Taiwan), July 6 2023.

4 'Downer flags China shift', *The Age*, August 18 2004 <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/downer-flags-china-shift-20040818-gdyh62.html>>.

5 La Trobe University, 'Australia and China: A conversation with Paul Keating', October 12 2022 <<https://www.paulkeating.net.au/shop/item/australia-and-china-a-conversation-with-paul-keating-12-october-2022>>.

6 Elena Collinson and Paul Burke, *UTS:ACRI/BIDA Poll 2022: The Australia-China Relationship: What do Australians Think?*, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, May 12 2022 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/news/utsacribida-poll-2022>>.

7 Elena Collinson and Paul Burke, *UTS:ACRI/BIDA Poll 2023: The Australia-China Relationship: What do Australians Think?*, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, July 11 2023 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/news/utsacribida-poll-2023>>.

questioned, defence officials said it was basically inconceivable that Australia would be engaged in a conflict over the Taiwan Strait in the foreseeable future.⁸

There appears, however, to be a nuanced shift in the Australian government's stance in recent years. Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles at the Seoul Defence Dialogue on October 18 2023 rejected Keating's 2022 assertion in relation to Taiwan. He said that Australia cannot be 'passive bystanders' in the event of conflict over the future of Taiwan and called for the strengthening of deterrence against coercion in the Taiwan Strait.⁹ Marles clarified that his comments were not a pre-commitment of Australian forces to a future war but rather a call for Australia to work with its allies and partners to ensure a conflict is prevented.¹⁰ In general terms, the Australian Department of Defence and senior military officials consistently view any military intervention regarding the defence of Taiwan purely through the lens of the Australia-US alliance. Australia does not engage in direct military cooperation with Taiwan's military. Any Australian military cooperation in support of Taiwan would be of necessity linked to the US military's plans and operations.¹¹

The US regards the first island chain which stretches from Japan to the Philippines and includes Taiwan as an essential barrier to PRC expansion into the traditionally US-dominated Western Pacific. Australian National University (ANU) Emeritus Professor of Strategic Studies and former Deputy Secretary for Strategy in the Australian Defence Department Hugh White has pointed out that holding Taiwan would be essential to US plans to 'hem in China'.¹² In this context, Taiwan becomes an irreplaceable partner and base in the US' competition with the PRC for dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

One Taiwanese scholar stated that, in their view, Taiwan is a 'toy' in the struggle for hegemony in the Western Pacific and in this struggle Taiwan has 'little agency'.¹³ On one hand, it is an outsider lacking diplomatic recognition and largely spurned by the nations of the Global South. On the other hand, the US and much of the West is pulling Taiwan closer. Taiwan's political elite have welcomed that embrace but two questions remain in the back of their minds: (1) can the US be relied on if war comes¹⁴ and (2) are Japan and the US primarily using Taiwan as a tool and a base in its struggle for dominance with the PRC in the Western Pacific?

How does Taiwan see Australia supporting its defence?

Taiwan is not looking for direct military cooperation with the ADF but instead is focused on Australia's support for the US military in the region. Researchers from the Institute for National Defence and Security Research (INDSR), which reports to Taiwan's Ministry of Defense, stressed that direct military cooperation between the Australian military and the Republic of China (ROC) Armed Forces was not possible or advisable. Instead, they said, Australia should coordinate with the US and its allies and partners on how indirectly to support Taiwan.¹⁵

Australian considerations in the defence of Taiwan

It is Australia's alliance with the US and its increasing defence alignment with Washington in support of maintaining US military primacy in the region that is potentially drawing Australia into a possible conflict between the US and the PRC over Taiwan. According to the ANU's Emeritus Professor Hugh White, the AUKUS fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, when and if it is in place in the 2030s, would draw Australia into conflict

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- 8 Discussions with senior Australian Department of Defence officials in preparation of author's posting to Taipei as Australia's Representative to Taiwan, July 2011.
 - 9 Richard Marles, 'Address to the opening of the Seoul Defence Dialogue 2023', October 18 2023 <<https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/speeches/2023-10-18/address-opening-seoul-defence-dialogue-2023>>.
 - 10 Daniel Hurst, 'Australia cannot be 'passive bystanders' in a war between US and China, Richard Marles says', *The Guardian*, October 18 2023 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/18/australia-cannot-be-passive-bystanders-in-a-war-between-us-and-china-richard-marles-says>>.
 - 11 Author's discussions with former and currently serving Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials who requested anonymity. See also Kevin Magee, 'Australia-Taiwan relations under the new Labor government', *The China Story*, Australian Centre on China in the World, December 12 2022 <<https://www.thechinastory.org/australia-taiwan-relations-under-the-new-labor-government/>>.
 - 12 Hugh White, 'Fatal shores: AUKUS is a grave mistake', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, issue 20, February 2024, pp. 6-50.
 - 13 Author's interview with an Academia Sinica scholar who requested anonymity, July 14 2023.
 - 14 Kevin Magee, 'Australia-Taiwan relations: Prospects and limitations | Part 1: What does a Lai presidency mean for Australia and cross-Strait relations?', Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, May 13 2024 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/analyses/what-does-lai-presidency-mean-australia-and-cross-strait-relations>>.
 - 15 Author's interviews with Lee Che-chuan, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 5 2023; and Lee Jyun-yi, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 14 2023. Both discussed Australian-US cooperation in support of Taiwan.

with the PRC as the fleet's war fighting capabilities suggest an intervention far from Australia's shore in support of the US Navy, including in the Taiwan Strait.¹⁶ Indeed, on April 3 2024, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, during a talk at the Center for a New American Security in Washington DC, suggested that Australian nuclear-powered submarines acquired under AUKUS could be deployed against the PRC in any military conflict over Taiwan.¹⁷

A decision by Australia to commit to the defence of Taiwan would also have a significant impact on Australia's relationship with Japan. Japan is an increasingly important strategic partner for Australia. Tokyo, as it has moved away from its constitutional pacifist stance, has shifted in recent years to regard the defence of Taiwan as essential to its national interests. Japan is concerned that its islands near Taiwan, including Okinawa which hosts large US military bases, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (administered by Japan but claimed by both the PRC and Taiwan) and the Japanese Yaeyama Islands east of Taiwan could be subject to an attack by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Japan is also concerned that if the PRC controls Taiwan, its naval territory will retract, and Beijing will gain control over its vital sea lanes.¹⁸

A parallel between Ukraine and Taiwan

Taipei and Canberra are closely monitoring the situation in Ukraine – both see the outcome as a possible portent of developments in the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan has strongly supported Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022 as there is concern in Taipei that a Russian victory might embolden the PRC to take stronger military action against Taiwan. On March 28, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu told the *New York Times* that a Russian victory could embolden the PRC to move against Taiwan and would fuel anti-American propaganda that the US could not be depended to defend Taiwan.¹⁹

Australian political figures and analysts²⁰ share the concern that a victory by Moscow would encourage Beijing to launch an attack on Taiwan. Both Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Marles and Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie have remarked that a Russian victory would encourage the PRC to move against Taiwan, a matter of real concern to Australia.²¹

Closer security and defence cooperation: Suggestions from Taiwan

Support for US activities in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and the East China Sea

An INDSR researcher suggested that Australia could support the US' naval activities in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and the East China Sea, by sending ships to these areas in order to challenge the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and keep Beijing unsure of Western military intentions.²² These joint operations, the researcher said, would facilitate better coordination between the US and Australian militaries.²³ They stated that a constant Australian military presence with US forces would be welcome, not just in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, but also east of Taiwan and in the Philippine Sea.

16 Hugh White, 'Fatal shores: AUKUS is a grave mistake', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, issue 20, February 2024, pp. 6-50.

17 Richard Fontaine and Kurt Campbell, 'AUKUS: Securing the Indo-Pacific, a conversation with Kurt Campbell', April 3 2024, Center for a New American Security <<https://www.cnas.org/publications/transcript/aukus-securing-the-indo-pacific-a-conversation-with-kurt-campbell>>.

18 Akira Kitado, 'Japan boosts defences on remote islands near Taiwan amid China fears', *Nikkei Asia*, March 31 2024 <<https://asia-nikkei.com/politics/defense/japan-boots-defenses-on-remote-islands-near-taiwan-amid-china-fears>>.

19 Edward Wong, 'Taiwan's top diplomat says US aid to Ukraine is critical for deterring China', *New York Times*, March 28 2024 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/28/us/politics/taiwan-china-ukraine-aid.html>>.

20 See, e.g., Rory Medcalf, 'Australia's lessons from Taiwan and Ukraine', *The Australian Financial Review*, August 5 2022 <<https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/australia-s-lessons-from-taiwan-and-ukraine-20220804-p5b76k>>; Lavina Lee, 'Australia and the Ukraine crisis: Deterring authoritarian expansionism', *International Politics*, January 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-023-00548-3>>.

21 See Andrew Hobbs, 'Bushmasters making a "real difference" in Ukraine', *The Australian Financial Review*, September 18 2022 <<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/bushmasters-making-a-real-difference-in-ukraine>>; Andrew Hastie, 'Championing values in the Indo-Pacific', Henry Jackson Society Engaging Taiwan Conference, July 22 2022 <https://www.andrewhastie.com.au/speech_championing_values_in_the_indo_pacific>.

22 Author's interview with Lee Che-chuan, Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 5 2023.

23 Author's interview with Lee Jyun-yi, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 14 2023.

Scholars from Academia Sinica, Taiwan's national academy, suggested that Australia could coordinate joint naval patrols with the US Navy in the South China Sea and in the Taiwan Strait to challenge Beijing's extensive claims to sovereignty over all the waters of the South China Sea. They asserted this would help to deter Beijing and disrupt its harassment of Taiwan. They suggested joint US–Australian patrols in the whole South China Sea and within the PRC-claimed nine-dash line, but not within the territorial sea (12 nautical miles) around PRC-occupied features.²⁴ In fact, Taiwan claims all the features in the South China Sea. Taiwan only occupies Itu Aba/Tai ping Island and the Pratas/Tungsha Islands. Taipei does not claim all the waters within its 11-dash line and maintains that only the 12 nautical mile zone around each of the features belongs to Taiwan. The PRC claims outside the 12 nautical mile zone are not claimed by Taipei and therefore subject to naval patrols.²⁵

Australia, while retaining the right to sail through and overfly all the international waters in the South China Sea, has to date refrained from joining the US in freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) to challenge maritime claims by the PRC or other countries. Nor have Australian vessels or aircraft entered into any PRC-claimed 12 nautical mile zones. However, Australian vessels and aircraft transiting near PRC-held features have been issued radio challenges by the PLAN or challenged by PLAN ships.²⁶ Joining US-led patrols or FONOPs to challenge the PRC's claims would be an escalation in Australia's approach to the PRC's South China Sea claims and elicit a PRC protest and response. Australia has strongly supported the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and criticised the PRC claims.²⁷ Yet it is unlikely at this stage that Australia would see value in participating in joint naval patrols or FONOPs with the US in the South China Sea.²⁸

The opportunities for direct Australian military cooperation and military technological cooperation are limited due to the remit of Australia's one China policy – a fact readily recognised by Taiwan. However, both sides welcome increased cooperation with the US in providing deterrence to the PRC. This US-focused cooperation is already evident through recent military activity in the Indo-Pacific.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) since 2015 has conducted a number of operations in the Taiwan Strait and the waters adjacent to Taiwan, most recently in 2023. The RAN has also been exercising with the United States Navy (USN) and Filipino forces near the Philippines²⁹ and in the South China Sea with the USN and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.³⁰

Military to military dialogue

Last year, the head of the Taipei-based think tank the Prospect Foundation Lai I-chung suggested that Australia should consider posting a uniformed military attaché to Taiwan.³¹ On the other hand, Taiwan's Foreign Minister at the time, Joseph Wu, indicated that were already civilian defence and intelligence exchanges between Australia and Taiwan.³² In 2020, for example, Australia posted a civilian defence official to the Australian Office in Taipei.³³

24 Author's interview with Academia Sinica scholars Tsai Ming-chang, Chang Liao Nien-chung, Lin Cheng-yi, Guo Pei-yi, Lin Thung-hong and Wu Chien-hue, July 4 2023.

25 Kevin Magee, 'Taiwan's South China Sea', *The China Story*, Australian Centre on China in the World, November 16 2023 <<https://www.thechinastory.org/taiwans-south-china-sea>>.

26 See, e.g., David Wroe, 'RAAF now being routinely challenged by Beijing in South China Sea', *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 3 2016 <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/raaf-now-being-routinely-challenged-by-beijing-in-south-china-sea-20160203-gmkvkb.html>>; Australian Associated Press, 'Australian warships "challenged" by Chinese navy in South China Sea', *The Guardian*, April 20 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/20/australian-warships-challenged-by-chinese-navy-in-south-china-sea>>; and Andrew Greene, 'Australian warships challenged by Chinese military near heavily fortified Spratly Islands', *ABC News*, November 15 2022 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-15/australian-warships-challenged-chinese-military-spratly-islands/101643528>>.

27 See, e.g., Melanie Burton, 'Australia says China's South China Sea claims are unlawful', *Reuters*, July 25 2020 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN24Q09C/>>.

28 Kevin Magee, 'Taiwan's South China Sea', *The China Story*, Australian Centre on China in the World, November 16 2023 <<https://www.thechinastory.org/taiwans-south-china-sea>>.

29 Australian Government Department of Defence, 'HMAS Anzac conducts Exercise Lumbas 2023 in the Philippines', media release, July 28 2023 <<https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2023-07-28/hmas-anzac-conducts-exercise-lumbas-2023-philippines>>.

30 Dzirhan Mahadzir, 'US joins Japan, Australia for trilateral South China Sea naval exercise', *USNI News*, February 9 2024 <<https://news.usni.org/2024/02/09/u-s-joins-japan-australia-for-trilateral-south-china-seas-naval-exercise>>.

31 Author's interview with Lai I-chung, Chairman, Prospect Foundation, July 5 2023.

32 Author's interview with Joseph Wu, then-Foreign Minister of the Republic of China (Taiwan), July 6 2023.

33 Author's interviews with former and currently serving Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials who requested anonymity, October 5 2023.

Taipei has expressed interest in opening up a dialogue with the Australian Department of Defence in Canberra but to date Defence has preferred to maintain low key contact, solely through the civilian defence official based at the Australian Office in Taipei.³⁴ A senior Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) official suggested that it was disappointing that while there was now increasing civilian military and intelligence cooperation in Taipei, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Australia was still not able to engage with the Department of Defence in Canberra.³⁵

Defence industry cooperation

INDSR researcher Lee Jyun-yi suggested that Australia and Taiwan should consider defence industry cooperation. One example he suggested was the possible joint development by Australia and Taiwan of drone technology with the supply of Australian component parts. He suggested Australian Defence Department and Taiwan Ministry of Defence could explore other possible areas of defence industry cooperation³⁶

As discussed above, however, Australia has been reluctant to engage in overt military cooperation with Taiwan, preferring to work through the US when engaging the ROC Armed Forces. Australia has not engaged in uniformed personnel to uniformed personnel or military technology cooperation with Taiwan and it would require a significant change of policy to do so. There is no indication that Canberra is considering doing so due to concerns on how this would affect relations with Beijing.

National security legislation

The INDSR's Lee Jyun-yi also suggested that Australia could assist Taiwan in developing national security legislation based on Australia's Espionage and Foreign Interference Act 2018 in order to help Taiwan address PRC fifth column activity, espionage and foreign interference.³⁷ While Taiwan under Tsai Ing-wen's administration implemented five national security laws and an anti-infiltration law to directly challenge PRC activity in this sphere, the Australian experience could complement this existing legislation.

Cyber cooperation

A senior Taiwanese official indicated that Taipei would welcome enhanced cooperation on cyber defence with Australia. However, they also stated that Taiwan's technical capability and expertise was already robust given their involvement in countering relentless malicious PRC cyber activity over the years. As such, they noted that there would be limited gains for Taiwan in pursuing cyber cooperation with Australia.³⁸ Cooperation with Taiwan, however, would be beneficial to Australia, given Taiwan's experience in the area.

International organisation participation

Taiwan seeks security through greater 'diplomatic space' through increased cooperation and interaction with friendly countries who do not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, as well as implementing a more flexible one China policy. As discussed in Part 2 of this UTS:ACRI Analysis series, there has been considerable debate about the more flexible application of the one China policy by Australia and like-minded countries.³⁹ Taiwan also aspires to membership of international and regional organisations. Senior Taiwanese officials and scholars suggested that Australia should support Taiwan's aims to expend its diplomatic space by supporting Taiwan joining international and regional organisations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).⁴⁰

³⁴ Author's interviews with senior Taiwanese officials who requested anonymity, June 29 2023 and September 15 2023.

³⁵ Author's interview with a senior Taiwanese official who requested anonymity, September 15 2023.

³⁶ Author's interview with Lee Jyun-yi, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 14 2023.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Author's interview with a senior Taiwanese official who requested anonymity, July 11 2023.

³⁹ Kevin Magee, 'Australia-Taiwan relations: Prospects and limitations | Part 2: Diplomatic and economic links, Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, May 16 2024 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/analyses/diplomatic-and-economic-links>>.

⁴⁰ Author's interview with Academia Sinica scholars Tsai Ming-chang, Chang Liao Nien-chung, Lin Cheng-yi, Guo Pei-yi, Lin Thung-hong and Wu Chien-hue, July 4 2023.

Australia has consistently supported Taiwan's participation in international organisations such as the WHO or ICAO where statehood is not a prerequisite.⁴¹ There is strong evidence that Taiwanese participation of these organisations would be advantageous to Australia and the wider international community. The effective Taiwanese response to the COVID-19 pandemic was viewed by many countries, including Australia, as evidence of the value of Taiwanese participation in the WHO.

Taiwan had participated in the WHO and ICAO as an observer during the Ma Ying-Jeou administration (2008-2016). The PRC has blocked Taiwan's participation in the WHO, ICAO, the UNFCCC and other agencies since 2016 despite efforts by Australia and other Western countries to facilitate Taiwan's participation. The PRC had insisted that the Tsai administration (2016-2024) accept the 1992 Consensus and the one China principle as a prerequisite for Taiwan to continue participating in the WHO, ICAO and UNFCCC. The Tsai administration refused to do and Taiwan was excluded from these organisations.⁴²

Australia could continue to advocate for Taiwan to participate in the WHO, ICAO and other agencies where statehood is not a prerequisite, although it is likely that Beijing will continue to oppose Taiwan's participation following the election of President Lai Ching-te.⁴³

Cooperation in the Pacific

Academia Sinica scholars suggested that Australia could consider increasing development assistance cooperation with Taiwan in the Pacific, especially with Taiwan's three diplomatic allies Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands.⁴⁴

Australia along with Zealand and Taiwan have a record of cooperation with these countries in areas including development assistance, agriculture, food, education and women's rights.⁴⁵ Given Pacific development remains a priority for the Australian government.⁴⁶ These existing areas of cooperation could be built on and expanded. The signing of the Australian-Tuvalu Falepili Union in November 2023, a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between Australia and Tuvalu,⁴⁷ could, for example, provide the basis for expanding cooperation on developmental assistance.

Conclusion

As discussed in Part 1 of this UTS:ACRI Analysis series, Taiwan is concerned about PRC military action and is strengthening its defences.⁴⁸ However, it sees the prospects of a full scale invasion of the island by 2027 as unlikely. There are concerns, however, that Taiwan could be subjected to PRC cyber attacks and grey-zone pressure tactics.⁴⁹

Australia has taken a cautious approach to defence relations with Taiwan. Australia supports the status quo across the Taiwan Strait but has not taken a firm position on whether it will come to Taiwan's defence, in the event of an invasion by the PRC. Australia seeks to balance its relations between the PRC and Taiwan. The

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- 41 See, e.g., Mike Pompeo, Mark Esper, Marise Payne and Linda Reynolds, 'Joint Statement Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2020', Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, July 28 2020 <<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/united-states-of-america/ausmin/joint-statement-ausmin-2020>>.
- 42 For more detail see Kevin Magee, 'Australia-Taiwan relations: Prospects and limitations | Part 1: What does a Lai presidency mean for Australia and cross-Strait relations?', Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, May 13 2024 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/analyses/what-does-lai-presidency-mean-australia-and-cross-strait-relations>>.
- 43 Author's interview with Su Chi, former Secretary-General, National Security Council (2008-2010), January 8 2024.
- 44 Author's interview with Academia Sinica scholars Tsai Ming-chang, Chang Liao Nien-chung, Lin Cheng-yi, Guo Pei-yi, Lin Thung-hong and Wu Chien-hue, July 4 2023.
- 45 Author's attendance in Australia-New Zealand-Taiwan aid coordination meetings for the Pacific between 2011-2014. See also Anthony Bergin, 'China's South Pacific aid: what are we afraid of?', *The Strategist*, Australia Strategic Policy Institute, January 29 2019 <<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-south-pacific-aid-afraid>>.
- 46 See, e.g., Penny Wong and Don Farrell, 'Australian support for our region's trade and development', media release, February 24 2024, <<https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/don-farrell/media-release/australian-support-our-regions-trade-and-development>>.
- 47 Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union', November 9 2023 <<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tuvalu/australia-tuvalu-falepili-union>>.
- 48 Kevin Magee, 'Australia-Taiwan relations: Prospects and limitations | Part 1: What does a Lai presidency mean for Australia and cross-Strait relations?', Australia-China Relations Institute, University of Technology Sydney, May 13 2024 <<https://www.uts.edu.au/acri/research-and-opinion/analyses/what-does-lai-presidency-mean-australia-and-cross-strait-relations>>.
- 49 *Ibid.*

PRC is by far Australia's largest trading partner and, as such, exerts an influence on how Australia approaches Taiwan. The question of national security and defence is also a source of friction with Beijing.

Australia does not engage with the ROC military directly as the US military does.⁵⁰ There is also little desire or expectation in Taiwan for direct military cooperation involving the ADF. Certainly, among Taipei interlocutors, there is also a low expectation that Australia would come to Taiwan's aid in the event of a war.⁵¹ Taiwan sees Australia potentially only assisting its defence if US forces and US allies such as Japan deploy their forces to defend Taiwan. It is the US alliance and the increasing defence alignment with the US in support of maintaining US military primacy in the region that could potentially draw Australia into a conflict between the US and the PRC.⁵²

As Hugh White pointed out, Taiwan is part of the first island chain and holding Taiwan is essential, as such, to 'hem in China'.⁵³ If the AUKUS submarine fleet is fully operational by the 2030s – and there is no guarantee it will be given the immense cost and complexity of the endeavour – this would potentially draw Australia into conflict with the PRC. This is because the AUKUS submarine fleet's war fighting capabilities suggest an intention to deploy them far from Australia's shores in support of the USN, including in the Taiwan Strait.⁵⁴ The US and the PRC will ultimately determine whether there is war or peace in the region. If there is a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, then, as Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Marles said, Australia could not be 'passive bystander'.⁵⁵

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50 Nancy A. Youssef and Gordon Lubold, 'U.S. to expand troop presence in Taiwan for training against China threat', *Wall Street Journal*, February 23 2023 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-expand-troop-presence-in-taiwan-for-training-against-china-threat-62198a83>>.

51 Author's interview with Lee Jyun-yi, Associate Research Fellow, Division of National Security Research, Institute of National Defense and Security Research, July 14 2023.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Hugh White, 'Fatal shores: AUKUS is a grave mistake', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, issue 20, February 2024, pp. 6-50.

54 Hugh White, 'Fatal shores: AUKUS is a grave mistake', *Australian Foreign Affairs*, issue 20, February 2024, pp. 6-50; and Richard Fontaine and Kurt Campbell, 'AUKUS: Securing the Indo-Pacific, a conversation with Kurt Campbell', April 3 2024, Center for a New American Security <<https://www.cnas.org/publications/transcript/aukus-securing-the-indo-pacific-a-conversation-with-kurt-campbell>>.

55 Daniel Hurst, 'Australia cannot be "passive bystanders" in a war between US and China, Richard Marles says', *The Guardian*, October 18 2023 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/18/australia-cannot-be-passive-bystanders-in-a-war-between-us-and-china-richard-marles-says>>.