

# TAIWAN'S POTENTIAL ROLE IN THE FREE AND OPEN INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

*Convergence in the South Pacific*

By Denny Roy



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NBR SPECIAL REPORT #77 | MARCH 2019

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INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY**  
*Convergence in the South Pacific*

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This is the seventy-seventh NBR *Special Report*.

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## — FOREWORD —

At the Indo-Pacific Business Forum in July 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo described the current administration’s approach to the Indo-Pacific region as aspiring “to a regional order, independent nations that can defend their people and compete fairly in the international marketplace.” First proposed by Japan over a decade ago, the concept of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy is now a top priority for the United States as well. The strategy seeks to re-energize cooperation among U.S. allies and partners across many dimensions, including security, development, economic growth, and innovation.

Taiwan, ever a willing partner, was quick to highlight its ability to support this developing U.S. strategy through its engagement in Southeast Asia. Less discussed is how Taiwan’s relations with the South Pacific Island states also make it an obvious partner for the United States and its allies to help build capacity and strengthen democratic norms in the region. Despite historic U.S. ties to these countries, especially those that belong to the Compact of Free Association (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau), the general understanding of the importance of the South Pacific within the United States remains low. Taiwan, meanwhile, has for decades been involved with South Pacific Island nations, six of which are among its seventeen remaining diplomatic allies.

In this NBR *Special Report*, Denny Roy explores the strategic importance of the South Pacific to both the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan, which leads them to compete for influence in the region, transposing their cross-strait rivalry onto the South Pacific Islands. Dr. Roy also considers how China’s growing presence in the South Pacific influences regional dynamics and threatens the security interests of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Finally, he analyzes the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy and explains how Taiwan’s engagement in the South Pacific converges with U.S. national security policy. As of now, Taiwan is an unacknowledged partner, and the question remains as to whether it will be fully integrated into the strategy.

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NBR SPECIAL REPORT #77 | MARCH 2019

# Taiwan's Potential Role in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: Convergence in the South Pacific

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the role of the Pacific Islands in Taiwan's grand strategy and argues that Taiwan's struggle to maintain formal diplomatic relations with these states dovetails with the U.S.'s reformulated Indo-Pacific strategy, even if Washington has yet to articulate a clear plan for coordinating activities in the South Pacific with Taipei.

### MAIN ARGUMENT

The long-standing rivalry between Taiwan and China for diplomatic recognition among the Pacific Island states in some respects mirrors the larger competition between the U.S. and China for influence in the Asia-Pacific region, now reformulated as the "Indo-Pacific." Taiwan's activities in the Pacific Islands are largely supportive of the goals of the U.S. "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy (FOIP), and Taipei has openly expressed willingness to partner with Washington at a time when China has a clear and growing commitment to exploiting Oceania for political, economic, and strategic gains. The U.S. government, however, lacks a concept or plan for cooperating with Taiwan either in the South Pacific or elsewhere in the region. Consequently, Taiwan acts as an unacknowledged partner.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Intensified U.S.-China competition and the U.S. commitment to the objectives enumerated in FOIP increase the value of a de facto independent Taiwan for the U.S.
- Taiwan's Pacific Islands policy and the U.S.'s FOIP have common interests in deepening investments in and ties with regional countries as a counter to Chinese influence. Taiwan offers the Pacific Islands an alternative to engagement with China, which could enhance China's platforms for challenging the liberal regional order.
- A closer Washington-Taipei working relationship would have the disadvantage, however, of increasing Beijing's sense of regime insecurity and heighten the possibility that it might lash out aggressively.
- A sensible middle path for the U.S. is to quietly support Taiwan's efforts to improve its standing in the Pacific Islands. This would help Taiwan fulfill its potential as a contributor to FOIP, in this case by deepening the influence of the liberal bloc in a strategically important subregion.



The United States has strong interests in maintaining decisive influence in the South Pacific. Many of the island states are receiving U.S., Australian, and New Zealand assistance to develop economically and to improve their quality of governance. These states host military installations that impart strategic leverage over vast stretches of the Pacific Ocean, including the maritime periphery of U.S. allies Australia and New Zealand. The United States has especially close ties with the Compact of Free Association countries, including a defense commitment along with basing rights.<sup>1</sup> The People's Republic of China (PRC) is now robustly challenging U.S., Australian, and New Zealand leadership positions in the Pacific Islands by providing aid in exchange for political clout. Beijing might gain not only increased support from these states for Chinese positions on international issues but also bases for Chinese warships, threatening the U.S. grand strategy of expanding and protecting a liberal regional order.

Meanwhile, the Republic of China (ROC, also known as Taiwan) struggles to maintain its diplomatic status in the Pacific Islands. Six of the remaining seventeen countries that officially recognize the ROC are Pacific Island states: Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. China, however, is trying to buy off Taiwan's diplomatic partners worldwide and has increased its flow of aid to the Pacific states to cultivate greater influence. A possible partial reversal of fortune for Taipei arrived in 2017–18 with the Trump administration's announcement of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy, accompanied by a more competitive approach toward China throughout the region as well as a commitment by U.S. ally Australia to stand its ground against China in the Pacific Islands. Taipei was quick to express its ability and willingness to partner with Washington. But as of early 2019, FOIP lacks an explicit role for Taiwan even as U.S. officials reaffirm that the ROC exemplifies the values of the liberal regional order.

This report first explains how Taiwan's engagement in the Pacific Islands stems from the country's paramount foreign policy objective of maintaining its political autonomy despite increasing Chinese pressure, and why consequently the Pacific has become another arena of cross-strait rivalry. Next, it summarizes the significance of the Pacific Islands for Beijing's larger ambitions beyond the rivalry with Taipei. Finally, the report examines how Taiwan's Pacific Island activities further the objectives of FOIP, arguing that Taiwan's potential added value merits stronger coordination with and support from the United States.

## The Role of the Pacific Islands in Taiwan's Grand Strategy

The ROC's activity in the Pacific Islands is an outgrowth of its grand strategy, especially the preeminent concern of protecting national autonomy. Taiwan is a small country on the periphery of a vast China that seeks to incorporate the island's territory, people, and resources and to extinguish the ROC's legal existence as a de facto independent state. Beijing insists that Taiwan submit to this outcome or face forcible military conquest. Against this threat posed by a geographically close and much larger adversary, and compounded by severe limitations in its opportunities to buy foreign weapons systems, Taiwan practices a grand strategy that relies heavily on cultivating goodwill with other governments. Taipei tries to demonstrate constructive international citizenship through activities such as dispatching technicians to developing countries to share its expertise in areas such as agriculture and healthcare. By demonstrating that a de facto independent Taiwan

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<sup>1</sup> The Compact of Free Association countries are the United States, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.

has global value, Taipei hopes to nurture support in the international community that would move foreign governments to pressure China to abandon any plans to invade or attack the island. As Tsai Ing-wen said in her 2018 National Day speech, “The best way to defend Taiwan is to make it indispensable and irreplaceable to the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Aiding the developing world also helps Taiwan curry favor with particular states that are willing to establish or maintain official diplomatic relations with it rather than with China, given that Beijing does not allow any government to recognize both simultaneously. The contest for diplomatic recognition dates back to the Cold War when the UN General Assembly gave the PRC the “China” seat previously occupied by the ROC government in Taiwan. Both governments continued to fight the battle for international recognition by striving to collect the highest possible number of formal diplomatic partners. Taipei considers the retention of at least a few, even if they are small and poor, as crucial to national morale and the ROC’s international legitimacy. These states also serve practical purposes as sites for stopovers for officials in transit or meetings with foreign officials from third-party countries. States that have formal relations with the ROC are also more likely to stand up for Taiwan in international forums.

Chinese pressure on countries that recognize Taiwan to switch recognition to the PRC has increased with China’s accumulation of wealth and the end of the “diplomatic truce” that prevailed under Taiwan’s previous president, Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party). Since the election of Tsai in 2016, five countries have severed relations with the ROC in favor of the PRC. None of these is in Oceania, but the Solomon Islands is reportedly at risk to flip in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

China recently used its economic leverage to try to turn Palau, which has diplomatic relations with Taiwan and gets an annual “stimulus” grant of \$10 million from Taipei. Tourism generates about 40% of Palau’s GDP, and in recent years over half of the island’s tourism came from China. In late 2017, Beijing turned off the spigot, halting Chinese travel agencies from arranging group tours.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the ambassador to Taiwan, Dilmei Olkeriil, said that Palau would maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Five members of Palau’s House of Delegates criticized that statement, saying that “right now mainland Chinese tourists dominate Palau’s tourism market by a significant margin and fuel Palau’s economy.” Tsai promised Palau’s visiting House of Delegates speaker that Taiwan would increase its direct flights to Palau starting in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

China has pressured its own diplomatic partners, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, to restrict even their unofficial engagement with Taiwan. After the Fijian prime minister visited Beijing in May 2017, Fiji closed its twenty-year-old representative office (a de facto embassy) in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> In February 2018, Papua New Guinea forced the ROC’s representative office to change its name from “Trade Mission of the Republic of China (on Taiwan)” to “Taipei Economic and Cultural Office.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Full Text of President Tsai Ing-wen’s National Day Address,” Focus Taiwan, October 10, 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201810100006.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> James Batley, “Will Solomon Islands Abandon Taiwan?” Lowy Institute, Interpreter, September 4, 2018, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/will-solomon-islands-abandon-taiwan>.

<sup>4</sup> Edward White and Nicolle Liu, “Palau Holds Out as China Squeezes Taiwan’s Allies,” *Financial Times*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/d153df12-df02-11e7-8f9f-de1c2175f5ce>; John Gerard Perrotet and Andres F. Garcia, “Tourism,” World Bank, Background Paper, no. 4, June 1, 2016, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/524541503688261330/Tourism>; and Keoni Everington, “China Bans Tour Groups to Vatican, Palau to Isolate Taiwan,” *Taiwan News*, November 23, 2017, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3304777>.

<sup>5</sup> Bernadette Carreon and Bruce Lloyd, “The Two-China Rivalry over the Pacific Islands,” *Vanuatu Independent*, February 19, 2018, <https://vanuatuindependent.com/2018/02/19/the-two-china-rivalry-over-the-pacific-islands>.

<sup>6</sup> “Fiji Is Closing Its Representative Office in Taipei,” *Asia One*, May 18, 2017, <http://www.asiaone.com/asia/fiji-closing-its-representative-office-taipei>.

<sup>7</sup> “Taiwan Protests Forced Name Change of Office in Papua New Guinea,” Focus Taiwan, February 13, 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201802130024.aspx>; and “PNG Accused by Taiwan of Bowing to Chinese Pressure,” *Radio New Zealand*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/350423/png-accused-by-taiwan-of-bowing-to-chinese-pressure>.

The region has two rival multilateral organizations. New Zealand founded the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF; originally the South Pacific Forum) in 1971, with itself and Australia as members. The PIF suspended Fiji's membership in 2009 after the country's president abrogated the constitution and seized all powers of government. China opportunistically reached out to isolated Fiji. Xi Jinping visited the island (a first by a Chinese president), and China provided funding for an alternative organization founded by Fiji, the Pacific Islands Development Forum, of which neither New Zealand nor Australia is a member. Fiji's prime minister then demanded that the PIF expel Australia and New Zealand or allow China to join.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, Taiwan is on the same side as the liberal democracies, providing regular annual funding to the PIF. At the 2018 meeting, Foreign Minister Jauhsieh Joseph Wu announced that Taiwan would contribute an additional \$2 million to a medical fund for PIF member states.<sup>9</sup>

### *Checkbook Diplomacy*

Rivalry in the Pacific between the PRC and the ROC has resulted in a continuation of "checkbook diplomacy" that is expensive for both countries, but especially onerous for Taiwan with its much smaller treasury—a reversal of the situation in the 1970s, when Taiwan was richer than China. Beijing spends about ten times what Taipei spends on financial aid to the Pacific Islands. Both are secretive about the amounts of money offered to entice a country to switch its diplomatic recognition. This limits the cost to both by making the market value of recognition unclear to states that might try to maneuver the competitors into a bidding war. It also helps reduce resentment among the domestic audiences in China and Taiwan. Because the negotiations and payoffs are often secret, the ROC and PRC governments are subject to being cheated by providing money without gaining the expected benefit. In 2006, for example, Taiwan lost \$30 million when negotiations with Papua New Guinea broke down and foreign intermediaries pocketed the money.<sup>10</sup> This checkbook diplomacy is not popular with the Taiwan public, with most people seeing the effort as money wasted in chasing countries of little international consequence.<sup>11</sup> Former president Chen Shui-bian earned praise at home for saying he had ended the country's checkbook diplomacy, although he later admitted that the policy had continued because of relentless diplomatic competition from Beijing.

Both Taiwan and China draw criticism for impeding the development of good governments in the Pacific Islands by giving cash and other benefits directly to political elites, which often facilitates graft. In the Solomon Islands, for example, Taiwan contributes substantially to "constituency development funds," nontransparent slush funds for individual members of parliament. Critics argue that this has exacerbated strife in local politics while failing to deliver tangible public benefits.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Isaac Davison, "Fiji Wants NZ Ousted from Pacific Forum, or China Let In," *New Zealand Herald*, April 7, 2015, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11428607](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11428607).

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan Sets Up US\$2 Million Health Care Fund for Pacific Island Nations amid Diplomatic Tussle with Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2162908/taiwan-sets-us2-million-health-care-fund-pacific-island-nations>.

<sup>10</sup> Jenny W. Hsu et al., "Huang Apologizes for PNG Fund Scandal," *Taipei Times*, May 3, 2008, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2008/05/03/2003410908>.

<sup>11</sup> Kwei-Bo Huang, "Taiwan and Its South Pacific Allies," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, December 11, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/taiwan-and-its-south-pacific-allies>.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Leua Nanau, "Moving Beyond the 'Musical Chairs' of Solomon Islands Politics," Australian National University, Devpolicy Blog, November 10, 2015, <http://www.devpolicy.org/moving-beyond-the-musical-chairs-of-solomon-islands-politics-20151110>.

## *How Taipei Stays in the Game*

Taiwan manages to be competitive with China in the Pacific Islands for several reasons. With no hope of matching the PRC in the sheer monetary value of aid, the ROC has emphasized projects that build personal working relationships with the recipient island states, as opposed to the PRC's approach of investing in large construction projects (usually employing imported Chinese workers) and resource extraction.<sup>13</sup> Typical of this approach is the Taipei-funded Pacific Islands Leadership Program, a ten-week course that trains young Pacific Island professionals in Taiwan and at the East-West Center in Honolulu. Taiwan's activity in the Pacific Islands has parallels with the Tsai administration's New Southbound Policy, announced in 2016. Covering Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, the policy's stated goal is to build social networks and foster economic cooperation that connects Taiwan with partner countries through such activities as youth exchange programs, tourism, sponsorship of foreign students to enroll in Taiwan universities, promotion of foreign-language study by Taiwanese students, and collaboration in areas such as agriculture and public health.<sup>14</sup>

As it has done in other parts of the world, China has squandered some of its gains in the South Pacific through overbearing behavior. As an example, prior to the PIF meeting in September 2018, host Nauru (which has diplomatic relations with Taipei) said it would stamp visas for the visiting Chinese delegates only in their personal passports and not in their diplomatic passports. The Nauru government stated that this was in keeping with the way China treats travelers from Nauru, but Beijing took the gesture as a snub.<sup>15</sup> Other Pacific Island states threatened to boycott the meeting in support of China. Samoa's president warned Nauru's president Baron Waqa that this was "a dangerous precedent that....questions the integrity, credibility and foundation of our organization."<sup>16</sup> At the PIF meeting, Du Qiwen, head of the Chinese delegation, reportedly broke protocol by demanding to speak ahead of more senior-level Pacific Island officials during a meeting to discuss climate change. Waqa refused to allow Du to speak. "Look at him, he's a nobody," said Waqa. "He's not even a minister and he's demanding to be recognized and to speak before the prime minister of Tuvalu. Is he crazy?" The disagreement delayed the meeting. Du then reportedly walked slowly around the edge of the room glaring at the participants before leading the Chinese delegation in a walkout. Waqa called Du's behavior "arrogant" and said of the Chinese, "They're not our friends. They just need us for their own purposes."<sup>17</sup>

In another example, during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Papua New Guinea in November 2018, four PRC officials forced their way into Foreign Minister Rimbink Pato's office to deliver China's preferred wording for the meeting's final joint communiqué.

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Nguyen and Jonathan Pryke, "Exploring Taiwan's Aid to the Pacific," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, September 25, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/exploring-taiwan-s-aid-pacific>.

<sup>14</sup> Jing Bo-jiun, "Taiwan's Regional Strategy in Southeast Asia: Kicking the New Southbound Policy into High Gear," National Bureau of Asian Research, January 31, 2018, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/taiwans-regional-strategy-in-southeast-asia-kicking-the-new-southbound-policy-into-high-gear/#footnote26>.

<sup>15</sup> Nic Maclellan, "China-Taiwan Spat at Forum," *Islands Business*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.islandsbusiness.com/breaking-news/item/2186-china-taiwan-spat-at-forum.html>.

<sup>16</sup> "China Visa Spat Almost Derailed Pacific Leaders Summit in Nauru," *Guardian*, September 4, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/04/china-visa-spat-almost-derailed-pacific-leaders-summit-in-nauru>.

<sup>17</sup> "China Must Apologise for 'Arrogance' at Pacific Summit, Says Nauru President," *South China Morning Post*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2163002/china-must-apologise-arrogance-pacific-summit-says-nauru>.

Pato had denied the officials' request for a meeting to preserve his impartiality as the APEC host, and his staff summoned security personnel to expel the Chinese officials.<sup>18</sup>

Far more than Taiwan, China is criticized for the disproportionately weak economic impact of its aid. In the case of construction projects in the islands, Taiwan usually provides funds for the local government to purchase materials and labor. China, on the other hand, usually provides the materials and labor, and therefore less benefit to the local economy. The danger of excessive indebtedness, as well, is a growing fear associated with aid from China but not with aid from Taiwan. Whereas Taiwan gives money primarily in the form of grants, China is now shifting from grants to loans. Even at low interest rates, these loans can become a crushing burden for small Pacific Island states, magnifying Chinese leverage. Some states have mistakenly assumed that loans were effectively grants because China would eventually forgive them, only to discover that Beijing still expected repayment.<sup>19</sup> The smaller Pacific Island states are simply unable to repay large loans. Even in larger island countries such as Tonga, which has official relations with the PRC, money owed to China is a sizable part of the national debt and a long-term burden on the economy. Debt to China, for example, was equal to one-third of Tonga's GDP in 2018. After the country tried unsuccessfully to get Beijing to forgive this debt,<sup>20</sup> Prime Minister Samiuela Akilisi Pohiva openly warned against the danger of indebtedness to China.<sup>21</sup> He originally planned to propose during the 2018 PIF meeting that Pacific Island nations band together to demand debt forgiveness, but he backed down under Chinese government pressure.<sup>22</sup>

China has tried to use the long-established Chinese diaspora in the Pacific Islands to its advantage. An example is Thomas Chan, an ethnically Chinese businessman and politician in the Solomon Islands. Chan steered the country toward selecting the Chinese company Huawei for an undersea telecommunications cable project and allegedly worked to oust its prime minister to pave the way for switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China.<sup>23</sup> These Chinese communities are, however, a double-edged sword for Beijing. Although they can help legitimize and facilitate the entry of new Chinese economic and political activities, they are also sometimes the target of resentment from indigenous populations, such as during the riots in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and the destruction of the Chinatown in Honiara, Solomon Islands, both in 2006.

Taiwan, on the other hand, has the modest advantage of having distant blood ties with Oceania. The non-Chinese aborigines that account for only 2%–3% of Taiwan's population are ethnographically related to Polynesians and are likely the source of the Austronesian

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<sup>18</sup> Natalie Whiting and Stephen Dziedzic, "APEC 2018: Chinese Officials Barge into PNG Foreign Minister's Office after Being Denied Meeting," ABC News (Australia), November 18, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-18/chinese-officials-create-diplomatic-storm-at-apec/10508812>.

<sup>19</sup> This happened to Tonga, for example. See Matthew Dornan and Philippa Brant, "Chinese Assistance in the Pacific: Agency, Effectiveness and the Role of Pacific Island Governments," *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 354.

<sup>20</sup> "Tonga Backs Down in Public Calls for China to Write Off Pacific Island Debts after Complaint from Beijing," *Telegraph*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/17/tonga-backs-public-calls-china-write-pacific-island-debts-complaint>.

<sup>21</sup> Charlotte Greenfield and Jonathan Barrett, "Tonga PM Fears Asset Seizures as Pacific Debts to China Mount," Reuters, August 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pacific-debt-tonga-graphic/tonga-pm-fears-asset-seizures-as-pacific-debts-to-china-mount-idUSKBN1L10KM>; and Charlotte Greenfield and Jonathan Barrett, "Tonga Backs Down on Pacific Plan to Pressure China on Debt," Reuters, August 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/pacific-debt-tonga/tonga-backs-down-on-pacific-plan-to-pressure-china-on-debt-idUSLAN1V82FW>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Eddie Osifelo, "Solomon Islands Party Makes New Bid to Remove Prime Minister," *Pacific Islands Report*, November 24, 2016, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2016/11/24/solomon-islands-party-makes-new-bid-remove-prime-minister>.



language family. Taiwan has played up this connection through such activities as establishing a biennial Austronesian Cultural Festival in Taitung in 2016.<sup>24</sup>

## China's Strategic Interests in the South Pacific

Taiwan's interest in the South Pacific is focused on leveraging the region to support the country's struggle to win global diplomatic favor against countervailing Chinese pressure. China's interests are broader. They include a view that the South Pacific offers economic opportunities independent of the possible political benefits to Beijing. Chinese companies target the Pacific Islands for their natural resources, such as fish, timber, and minerals; as additional markets for Chinese exports; and as locales for tourism joint ventures. Most potentially problematic for the United States and its allies is the strategic motive that has recently emerged for Chinese activity in the region, particularly an interest in building ports for use by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy.<sup>25</sup> In 2014, China organized the eight Pacific Island countries with which at the time it had formal diplomatic relations to announce a "strategic partnership."<sup>26</sup> Reliable Chinese access to ports in the Pacific Islands could help ensure safe passage and resupply of Chinese shipping between China and the Panama Canal and help the PLA Navy break through the U.S.-controlled "second island chain." Beijing might intend some of the Chinese-built infrastructure improvements in Oceania to be preparations for a stronger Chinese presence in the region, possibly to include strategically relevant facilities such as naval bases. It has reportedly approached both Tonga and Vanuatu about the possibility of hosting a Chinese military base.<sup>27</sup>

Gaining influence in the South Pacific indirectly advances a demonstrated PRC interest in loosening Australia's alliance with the United States.<sup>28</sup> Both Canberra and Wellington see China as challenging Australia's and New Zealand's historically preeminent influence in an area that is close and strategically vital to them.<sup>29</sup> The diplomatic rivalry in the South Pacific is now as much China versus Australia as China versus Taiwan. Australia provided about six times China's aid to the Pacific Islands in 2006–13, but a recent increase in Chinese funding puts China on a trajectory to eventually overtake Australia as an aid donor.<sup>30</sup> Canberra is pushing back by increasing its own

<sup>24</sup> "Taitung Readies for Austronesian Cultural Festival," *Taiwan Today*, August 2, 2016, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=18,23,45,18&post=102506>.

<sup>25</sup> Grant Wyeth, "What to Make of China in the South Pacific?" *Diplomat*, September 29, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/what-to-make-of-china-in-the-south-pacific>.

<sup>26</sup> "China, Pacific Island Countries Announce Strategic Partnership," *China Daily*, November 23, 2014, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014xiattendg20/2014-11/23/content\\_18961677.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014xiattendg20/2014-11/23/content_18961677.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Salman Rafi Sheikh, "Regional Powers Take Steps as China's Military Eyes Global Reach," *Asia Times*, May 29, 2016, <http://www.atimes.com/article/regionalpowers-take-steps-as-chinas-military-eyes-global-reach>; Sofia Pale, "Where Will First Chinese Overseas Military Bases Spring Up?" *New Eastern Outlook*, May 24, 2016, <https://journal-neo.org/2016/05/24/where-will-first-chinese-overseas-military-bases-spring-up>; and David Wroe, "China Eyes Vanuatu Military Base in Plan with Global Ramifications," *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/china-eyes-vanuatu-military-base-in-plan-with-global-ramifications-20180409-p4z8j9.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Geoff Wade, "China's Efforts to Break the Australia-U.S. Alliance," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, December 16, 2013, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-efforts-to-break-the-australia-us-alliance>.

<sup>29</sup> John Power, "China: The Real Reason Australia's Pumping Cash into the Pacific?" *South China Morning Post*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2157169/china-real-reason-australias-pumping-cash-pacific>; and Graeme Dobell, "China Challenges Australia in the South Pacific," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, October 2, 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/china-challenges-australia-in-the-south-pacific>.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Pryke, "The Bad—and Good—of China's Aid in the Pacific," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, January 11, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/bad-and-good-china-aid-pacific>; and Kate Lyons, "Huge Increase in Chinese Aid Pledged to Pacific," *Guardian*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/08/huge-increase-in-chinese-aid-pledged-to-pacific>.

investment and trying to undermine some of China's.<sup>31</sup> When Australia announced in November 2018 that it would grant an additional \$2 billion to build Pacific Island infrastructure, Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguangu responded testily that “other countries should not obstruct China’s friendly cooperation and exchanges with the island nations....The island country region is not any country’s sphere of influence.”<sup>32</sup>

Chinese aid to the Pacific Islands can also buy their support on issues outside Oceania. In Vanuatu, the PRC has constructed several government buildings and a national stadium and has agreed to upgrade three airfields to accommodate flights from China. In 2016, Vanuatu became the first Pacific Island state to publicly support the PRC’s claims in the South China Sea. Prime Minister Charlot Salwai Tabimasma even acknowledged that his government took this position at China’s request.<sup>33</sup>

In sum, China’s interest in the South Pacific is not limited to constraining Taiwan’s international space. Beijing also seeks to extract natural resources, to develop markets for Chinese exports, to extend the reach of the PLA Navy, to curry additional support for Chinese positions on international issues, and to cut into the strategic cushion carefully cultivated by U.S. security partners Australia and New Zealand.

## Taiwan and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy

Taiwan, for its own reasons, has been building capacity to compete with China for influence in the South Pacific. Furthermore, it is a close friend and quasi-protectorate of the United States, despite the lack of formal bilateral relations. How, then, does Taiwan fit into the updated U.S. regional strategy named “free and open Indo-Pacific”? It is first necessary to establish what FOIP means.

### *The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*

Senior U.S. officials have settled on a brief overview statement explaining FOIP, but officials have emphasized different parts of the statement or offered different interpretations.<sup>34</sup> It is not yet clear how much FOIP will differ in practice from the Obama administration’s “rebalance” posture. It is also unclear how the strategy will resolve apparent contradictions such as the juxtaposition with the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership or Washington’s aspiration to simultaneously sponsor a region-wide order while conceptually dividing the Indo-Pacific into separate categories of countries that support or do not support that order.

As articulated by the Trump administration, FOIP includes six elements: (1) keeping international waters and airspace unobstructed, (2) reducing barriers to international trade and investment, (3) promoting political liberalization, (4) opposing bullying behavior, (5) building the

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<sup>31</sup> Catherine Graue and Stephen Dziedzic, “Federal Minister Concetta Fierravanti-Wells Accuses China of Funding ‘Roads that Go Nowhere’ in Pacific,” ABC (Australia), January 9, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-10/australia-hits-out-at-chinese-aid-to-pacific/9316732>; and Liam Fox, “Australia, Solomon Islands, PNG Sign Undersea Cable Deal amid Criticism from China,” ABC (Australia), July 11, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-12/australia-solomon-islands-png-sign-undersea-cable-deal/9983102>.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Blanchard, “China Says Nobody Can Stand in Its Way in Pacific Island Cooperation,” Reuters, November 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-apec-summit-china/china-says-nobody-can-stand-in-its-way-in-pacific-island-cooperation-idUSKCN1N10XO>.

<sup>33</sup> “China Pressures Vanuatu to Support South China Sea Claims, PM Admits,” *Pacific Islands Report*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2016/08/15/china-pressures-vanuatu-support-south-china-sea-claims-pm-admits>.

<sup>34</sup> “The United States aims to ensure the freedom of the seas and skies, promote market economics, support good governance, and insulate sovereign nations from external coercion, while enabling partners to protect and advance the rules-based order.” “U.S. Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region.” U.S. Department of State, Fact Sheet, August 4, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/08/284927.htm>.

capacity of friendly governments, and (6) maintaining the liberal order the United States helped construct after World War II. China seems to be the unnamed other that is the source of the problems FOIP addresses, consistent with the adversarial tone toward China expressed in the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy. Each of the core elements of FOIP connects indirectly, if not directly, with various ongoing problems in U.S.-China relations.

Regarding “freedom of the seas and skies,” the obvious challenge to the accessibility of what the United States considers international seas and airspace is China’s attempt to establish a sphere of influence on its maritime periphery that would include veto power over certain foreign activities. The country’s attempt to claim exclusive rights in the South China Sea that are not recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) fits into this category, as did Beijing’s declaration of an unusually restrictive air defense identification zone over the East China Sea in 2013.

FOIP restates the United States’ commitment to liberal international trade. This long-standing pillar of postwar U.S. foreign policy, however, has a distinctly Trump administration reboot. It incorporates the administration’s mantra of “free, fair and reciprocal trade, and investment,” reminding the region that President Donald Trump emphasizes getting favorable trade terms for the United States over any commitment to abstract ideals. This economic aspect of FOIP appears to be at least partly inspired by frictions with China. In July 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pledged \$113 million toward building economic infrastructure in the region as part of the U.S. commitment to FOIP. He suggested this was a response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Although \$113 million is a paltry sum compared to China’s pledges for regional construction projects, which total around \$1 trillion, Pompeo described it as a “down payment” and added pointedly that the United States “does not invest for political influence but rather practices partnership economics.”<sup>35</sup> In case that statement was not clear enough, Vice President Mike Pence said at the APEC meeting in Papua New Guinea in November 2018 that “the United States deals openly, fairly. We do not offer a constricting belt or a one-way road.”<sup>36</sup>

The Trump administration is much criticized for its alleged lack of interest, compared with its predecessors, in promoting democratization and human rights.<sup>37</sup> This could remove a major source of U.S.-China friction. FOIP, however, retains political liberalization in the region as a U.S. strategic objective. Pence recently said that “authoritarianism” has “no place in the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>38</sup> In an elaboration of the strategy, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Alex Wong said, “We want the societies of the various Indo-Pacific countries to become progressively more free—free in terms of good governance, in terms of fundamental rights, in terms of transparency and anti-corruption.”<sup>39</sup> China, of course, scores low by U.S. standards on civil and political liberties, the ruling elite’s accountability to the Chinese public, and the inconsistency and politicization of anticorruption prosecutions. From the Chinese

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<sup>35</sup> Ariana King, “U.S. Answers Belt and Road with Own Indo-Pacific Investment Plan,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, July 31, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-Relations/US-answers-Belt-and-Road-with-own-Indo-Pacific-investment-plan>.

<sup>36</sup> Mike Pence (remarks at the APEC CEO Summit, Port Moresby, November 16, 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2018-apec-ceo-summit-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea>.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Kellogg, “Will the Trump Administration Get Serious on Human Rights in China?” East Asia Forum, May 29, 2018, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/05/29/will-the-trump-administration-get-serious-on-human-rights-in-china/>; and “Trump’s Inattention to Human Rights Is a Blow to Democracy,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, June 27, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Editorial2/Trump-s-inattention-to-human-rights-is-a-blow-to-democracy>.

<sup>38</sup> “Remarks by Vice President Pence and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Statements,” White House, November 13, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-statements>.

<sup>39</sup> “Briefing on the Indo-Pacific Strategy,” U.S. Department of State, April 2, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.htm>.

government's point of view, Wong's comments reflect the continuation of a decades-old U.S. commitment to overthrow the monopoly of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on political power in China and represent an existential threat to the regime.

FOIP also mentions protecting U.S. partners from "external coercion" and "enabling" them to support "the rules-based order." There can be little doubt which country U.S. strategists have in mind as the chief practitioner of coercion and challenger to the rules-based order.<sup>40</sup> It is safe to assume that "coercion" refers to some of China's activities in the South China Sea, as well as the country's willingness to employ economic leverage against foreigners on political issues. Anti-bullying is one of the norms of the international system that the United States enforces. In late 2017, then secretary of state Rex Tillerson said that the United States "will not shrink from China's challenges to the rules-based order."<sup>41</sup> The "partners" with which Washington intends to work through FOIP are "nations that share our values across the region," a formulation that decreasingly includes China.<sup>42</sup> The same goes for the "enabling," or the United States' strategic capacity-building efforts in the region. U.S. law since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 has proscribed the sale of military equipment and services to China. On the other hand, several friendly Asian governments are major buyers of U.S. arms exports, and in recent years Washington has donated a substantial cache of military equipment to the Philippines.

Nonetheless, FOIP is not a declaration of a new cold war against China, nor does it validate the erroneous but widely held Chinese belief that the United States is making a serious effort to suppress the "rise" of China.<sup>43</sup> Both countries compete for influence in the region with the goal of denying a potential adversary strategic leverage. Each attempts to persuade or pressure third parties not to align more closely with the other. If this is in some sense "containment," China does it roughly as much as the United States does. China's behavior at the recent APEC meeting in Papua New Guinea, seduction of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, and economic sanctions against South Korea in retaliation for the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in 2016–17 are examples. FOIP is not a blueprint for blocking Chinese attempts to achieve prosperity through what Washington would consider "responsible" global citizenship. Rather, it is essentially a recommitment to defend the extant regional order and to resist Chinese attempts to undermine that order. FOIP thus implies an interest in winning the competition with China for influence in strategically important geographic spaces, lest Beijing use that influence to challenge the rules of the regional order or to weaken the United States' ability to defend it.

### *Taipei Willing, but Washington Unsure*

Taipei immediately embraced FOIP and expressed interest in supporting the strategy, presumably to enhance Taiwan's relevance and value to Washington and increase the chances that the United States will intervene to defend the island if it comes under PLA attack.

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<sup>40</sup> China arguably also favors a rules-based order but one with different rules. See, for example, Jia Xiudong, "Opinion: China Supports a Rules-Based Order That's Fair and Just," China Global Television, June 4, 2018, [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e7a67444f77457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e7a67444f77457a6333566d54/share_p.html).

<sup>41</sup> Jeff Seldin, "U.S. Intelligence Keeping Wary Eye on China's President Xi," Voice of America, October 21, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-intelligence-keeping-wary-eye-on-china-president-xi/4080272.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Mike Pence (remarks at the Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., October 4, 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china>.

<sup>43</sup> Dingding Chen, "What China Thinks of the Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Diplomat*, May 2018, <https://magazine.thediplomat.com/#/issues/-LAWCg2zSGAbYVn-2Qr2/read>.

In May 2018, Taiwan's government established the Indo-Pacific Affairs Section within its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In August, President Tsai and Foreign Minister Wu both participated in the 2018 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue held in Taipei, the theme of which was "Promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region." Between the two of them, Tsai and Wu have argued that Taiwan is relevant to FOIP in three ways: (1) as a country that shares "values and beliefs" with the United States, (2) through its ability to help build capacity in regional countries friendly to the United States, and (3) as a landmass that occupies an "irreplaceable" and "important geostrategic position."<sup>44</sup> Wu sounded like he was auditioning when he said, "As the Trump administration carries out its strategy for Asia, Taiwan stands [as] an ideal partner for like-minded countries in the pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific."<sup>45</sup>

For obvious reasons, Taiwan is not an ideal political partner. Not only is the island relatively isolated, but the CCP government claims sovereignty over it. Preventing *de jure* Taiwan independence is a "core interest" (*hexin liyi*) for the regime, meaning Beijing would seriously consider going to war over the island even if China were expected to lose. Most of the Asia-Pacific governments basically accommodate Beijing's "one China" policy and do not have diplomatic relations with Taipei, which greatly limits their cooperation with it, especially in the political and security spheres. The historical difficulty of partnering with Taiwan is evident in the lack of a coherent vision among U.S. policymakers for integrating it into FOIP, despite Taipei's expressed eagerness to contribute to the strategy.

In statements about FOIP, Washington sees Taiwan as relevant in two ways. First, it shares liberal democratic values with the United States. Pence, for example, stated that Taiwan's democratic political system represents "a better path for all the Chinese people."<sup>46</sup> Serving as an exemplar of democracy for mainland China, however, is a passive role that does not clearly imply active U.S.-Taiwan cooperation. Randall Schriver, the assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific affairs, similarly noted that Taiwan is an "important contributor to the Indo-Pacific Free and Open concept" as it "demonstrates" values such as democracy, good governance, and human rights and that there is "a role for Taiwan to uphold those values throughout the region." He further opined that it is "to our benefit to think creatively" about "how we can continue to partner with Taiwan to promote those values," but he did not offer even a conceptual outline for how to do so.<sup>47</sup>

Second, U.S. strategists still see Taiwan largely as a geopolitical flashpoint for potential U.S.-China conflict. In the U.S. National Security Strategy released in December 2017, Taiwan is mentioned in the section discussing FOIP, but only for the purpose of restating the U.S. commitment under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to sell arms to Taiwan.<sup>48</sup> During his speech

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<sup>44</sup> "Full Text of President Tsai Ing-wen's National Day Address," Focus Taiwan, October 10, 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201810100006.aspx>; and "Foreign Minister Joseph Wu Highlights Taiwan's Strategic Importance at the Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China, Press Release, August 31, 2018, [https://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/News\\_Content.aspx?n=1EADDCFD4C6EC567&s=C7471F93DFB675F4](https://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/News_Content.aspx?n=1EADDCFD4C6EC567&s=C7471F93DFB675F4).

<sup>45</sup> Russell Hsiao, "Backgrounder: A 'Free' and 'Open' Indo-Pacific and Taiwan," Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief, September 19, 2018, <http://globaltaiwan.org/2018/09/vol-3-issue-18/#RussellHsiao09192018>.

<sup>46</sup> Mike Pence (remarks to the members of the Board of Trustees of the Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., October 4, 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china>.

<sup>47</sup> Randall Schriver, "U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia" (remarks at the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., August 7, 2018), available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?449519-1/us-policy-southeast-asia&start=118>.

<sup>48</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., December 2017), 47, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSSFinal-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. The publicly released summary of the National Defense Strategy commits to "detering aggression" in the Indo-Pacific region but does not mention Taiwan specifically. U.S. Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," January 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.



at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018 about U.S. policy toward the Indo-Pacific region, the then defense secretary James Mattis did not attempt to directly connect Taiwan with the objectives of FOIP. Instead, he repeated the old U.S. government mantras about supporting the TRA, opposing unilateral changes to the Taiwan Strait status quo, and insisting that the ultimate solution is accepted by “people on both sides of the Strait.”<sup>49</sup> In another instance of the U.S. focus on Taiwan as a flashpoint, the U.S. Department of Defense did connect Taiwan with FOIP after the passage of two U.S. Navy warships through the Taiwan Strait in October 2018, but only by mentioning Taiwan as a front-line geographic space—not as a partner. Commenting on the event, a spokesperson repeated the same rationale used for freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea: “The ships’ transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The U.S. Navy will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows.”<sup>50</sup>

Taiwan is thus not conceptually integrated into FOIP. The island continues to function as a free-standing beacon of political liberalization and as a beneficiary of U.S. protection. Washington lacks a plan, however, for cooperation with the ROC to achieve FOIP’s goals.

## An Unacknowledged Partner

FOIP increases the value to the United States of a *de facto* independent Taiwan. Not all of Taiwan’s activities in the South Pacific align with the overarching project to maintain and strengthen the liberal regional order. Some of its attempts to buy favor among Pacific elites foster corruption rather than good governance. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the United States and its allies Australia and New Zealand, Taiwan gaining influence in the region is preferable on balance to China gaining influence because the former lacks the latter’s adversarial strategic ambitions. From Taipei’s standpoint, the adversarial stance that FOIP takes toward China has the advantage of seemingly closing off the possibility that the United States would sacrifice Taiwan. Specifically, it reduces the risk that Washington would abrogate the TRA, stop selling arms to Taipei, and officially avow that Beijing has sovereignty over Taiwan.

The lack of integration of Taiwan into FOIP suggests the possibility that Washington is missing an opportunity to coordinate with Taipei in making better use of the capabilities and qualities that American strategists attribute to Taiwan. However, U.S. policymakers might assess that the benefits of a closer working relationship are outstripped by the problems caused by further antagonizing China. A PRC government that perceives the U.S. government as openly organizing an anti-China alliance might view the political incorporation of Taiwan as more urgent. Chinese leaders might succumb to pressure to establish a deadline for unification to eliminate a major arena of vulnerability to expected U.S. efforts to weaken the PRC, and they would be prone to overreacting to developments on Taiwan seen as setbacks to the CCP’s agenda.

If open and close cooperation with Taipei is overly provocative, the challenge for the U.S. government is to craft a partnership that is discreet but mutually beneficial. The South Pacific is a suitable arena. The U.S. government can work through its relationships with Pacific Island states

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<sup>49</sup> James Mattis (remarks at the plenary session of the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, June 2, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1538599/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-plenary-session-of-the-2018-shangri-la-dialogue>.

<sup>50</sup> Chiang Chin-yeh and Joseph Yeh, “Ships’ Passage Shows U.S. Commitment to Free Indo-Pacific: DoD,” Focus Taiwan, October 23, 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201810230004.aspx>.

to support Taiwan's diplomatic status. Among other levers, Washington can pressure wavering countries not to sever diplomatic relations with Taipei and encourage aid recipients to favor assistance from Taiwan over China when they have a choice. In addition, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) provides relatively noncontroversial opportunities for cooperation. There are already precedents of HADR cooperation on which to expand. The U.S. Navy invited medical personnel from the ROC military to participate in a U.S.-managed humanitarian-relief training exercise in Kiribati in 2017 and again in the Solomon Islands in 2018. ROC Navy vessels also helped deliver emergency supplies to the Philippines under the direction of U.S. Pacific Command after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.<sup>51</sup> Another low-profile avenue for cooperation is for Washington to fund U.S., Australian, New Zealand, Japanese, and Western European NGOs that work with groups from Taiwan engaged in assistance programs in the Pacific Islands. In this case, activities that improve the quality of life in the Pacific Islands can simultaneously bolster Taiwan's international image and support the larger U.S. goal of reinforcing a regional order based on liberal principles.

In both its aspirations and its performance, Taiwan is much more closely aligned with U.S. values and international objectives than is China. It is generally a supporter of the liberal regional order that the United States sponsors, while China is at best an intermittent supporter and often a challenger. The competition for diplomatic recognition between Beijing and Taipei is mutually exclusive, so Taiwan's successes fill space that China might otherwise occupy. If the United States, Australia, and New Zealand fear that China is trying to displace their influence in Oceania as a long-term strategic objective, the allies should see Taiwan's activities in the region as a welcome counterweight.

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<sup>51</sup> Lo Tien-pin and Jonathan Chin, "Taiwan Said to Be Asked to Join U.S. Relief Drill," *Taipei Times*, June 25, 2018, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/06/25/2003695505>.





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