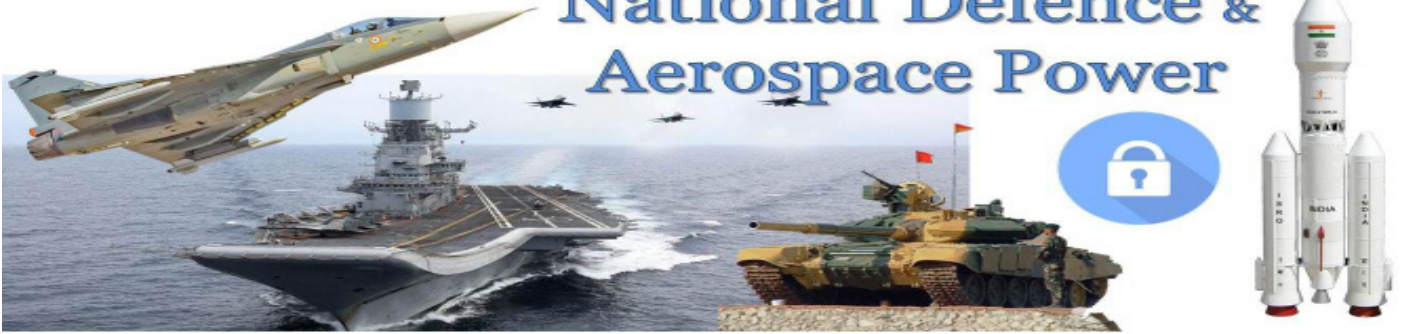




National Defence & Aerospace Power



TAIWAN AND THE QUAD: WHAT’S BREWING IN THE INDO-PACIFIC?

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China seems to be developing a routine of escalation of tensions vis-à-vis Taiwan through its consistent and regular military posturing across the Strait. Recently, one of the largest Chinese air incursions was reported on 15th June when “28 Chinese military planes flew into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ)”¹. This month too, “Chinese planes have been tracked in Taiwan’s identification zone on four occasions, in fact, since mid-September of last year, Beijing stepped up its gray-zone tactics by regularly sending planes into Taiwan’s ADIZ.”²

Chinese incursions have become more pronounced, almost becoming a part of strategic signalling between China on one side and the US and its allies on the other.

The message is clear- to reiterate the ‘one-China policy’ in the year of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CPC) centenary celebrations to bolster the nationalist rhetoric. These incursions have become more pronounced, almost becoming a part of strategic signalling between China on one side and the US and its allies on the other. Recently, the US too, “conducted several rounds of naval patrols transiting the Taiwan Strait and signed a coastguard agreement with the country.”³ Set in the context of deteriorating US-China relations and Taiwan’s improved ties with Japan, these incursions hardly come as a surprise.

Responding to this growing Chinese aggressive posture, the calls for supporting and defending Taiwan have become a part of the security conversations of significant Indo-Pacific players. This is being reflected in the recent joint Statements from the US-Japan, Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign-Defence Ministerial Consultation, the EU-Japan Summit and the US-ROK Joint Statement, all of which have “underscored the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait”⁴.

The reference to the bolstering of Taiwan’s defense, even adding to such a power projection, is increasingly gaining acceptance. In a recent Australian National University

(ANU) podcast, US diplomat Michael Goldman mentioned that “Taiwan figures as part of one of the contingencies in the US-Australia strategic planning”.⁵ Additionally, the statement by Japan’s deputy PM reiterating “the country’s need to defend Taiwan with the United States in case of the island’s invasion”⁶ resonates the same sentiment.

Last year too, in a *Foreign Affairs* article titled, “*American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous (2020)*”, the author, Richard Hass, made a convincing case for a shift in the US policy towards Taiwan - to adopt a policy of “strategic clarity” to replace a four-decade old policy of “strategic ambiguity”. He further explained, why now is the time for the US to explicitly declare the certainty of its response in case of any contingency that directly or indirectly threatens the security of Taiwan.

Longstanding debate pertaining to supporting Taiwan’s security is gaining currency within the strategic visions of the Indo-Pacific countries and gradually the Taiwan issue is being ‘internationalised’ in the official conversations of Indo-Pacific players including important global platforms such as the G-7.

This implies that the question of whether the US would come to the aid of Taiwan in case of a Chinese attack should no longer be left as a guessing game. Haas argued that the US should not only declare its intention of preventing a misadventure in the Taiwan Strait, signalling a departure from the previous policy of ambiguity, but also dedicate and direct the American efforts towards the defense of Taiwan as a top priority, involving consultations with allies such as Japan and South Korea. For the US, the policy shift can be initiated in the form of a pledge, in a manner that is consistent with the US’ *one-China policy*, at the same time laying down clear indication that, in no way this should be interpreted as the US support to Taiwan’s independence. It is noteworthy that the rationale for suggesting such a shift emanates mainly from two factors; one, the rising military gap between Taiwan and China and two, the growing assumption that China might attempt to gain control of Taiwan with the use of force.

It now appears that a longstanding debate pertaining to supporting Taiwan’s security is gaining currency within the strategic visions of the Indo-Pacific countries and gradually the Taiwan issue is being ‘internationalised’ in the official conversations of Indo-Pacific players including important global platforms such as the G-7. The recent G-7 communique has come heavily on China’s pervasive practices that are not aligned with the global rules-based order and values. This includes human rights issues as well as economic practices. It has further reiterated the importance of “peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and...the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.”⁷

In the above context, QUAD is often talked about as an available and evolving framework to incorporate Taiwan. While some scholars have even argued in favour of taking forward the Taiwan agenda via the QUAD plus framework as an attempt to “aid the regional goals of balancing China and ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific”,⁸ there are others, that favour QUAD to be supported as “a crucial part of the India-Australia-Japan proposed Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)”.⁹ Some have even argued that “...the QUAD countries should build up Taiwan’s defensive capabilities... (and) the best option would be for Taiwan to

produce its own weapons, and the QUAD countries should support this...”¹⁰

Viewed in the light of the recent Chinese behavior that includes, isolation of Taiwan in international agencies such as the WHO, its increased military assertiveness surrounding the island which includes, “conducting 380 incursions into the island’s air defence identification zone in 2020 alone”¹¹ and the recent public opinion polls in the State-run Global Times that is suggestive of “70 per cent of mainlanders strongly support using force to unify Taiwan with the mainland”¹², there may be merit in considering with seriousness the internationalisation of the Taiwan issue within the Indo-Pacific QUAD-Plus framework.

What is becoming more pronounced, albeit faintly, is the idea of QUAD’s strategic counterweight to be exploited to counter China, not only diplomatically but also militarily, especially for changing the military balance in the geographies of the Indo-Pacific region, such as in the context of China- Taiwan.

Indeed, the evolving Chinese military and diplomatic posture have certainly created the space for such a policy execution; however, it is also true that internationalising the Taiwan issue within the evolving security contours of the Indo-Pacific will take its own course and will be largely governed by the countries’ individual security priorities and their view on the future of their bilateral relations with China.

Additionally, if this happens, this would also come with a complex set of challenges of predicting the Chinese response towards the same. Will China interpret it as an infringement upon its sovereignty? or a dilution of other countries’ one-China policy? There are no clear answers. Amidst all this, what is becoming more pronounced, albeit faintly, is the idea of QUAD’s strategic counterweight to be exploited to counter China, not only diplomatically but also militarily, especially for changing the military balance in the geographies of the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the context of China-Taiwan.

Furthermore, the idea of the inclusion of Taiwan as a part of any institutionalised mechanism in the Indo-Pacific such as the QUAD-Plus, is possible for two reasons: 1) QUAD remains an issue-based alignment that is open to countries willing to cooperate on areas of mutual interests. If viewed in this context, the space for such an inclusion exists; and 2) Taiwan itself has indicated its willingness¹³ to participate in the QUAD plus framework. Yet, it is important to note here with caution that the Taiwan issue does not seem to be a strategic priority among the QUAD countries for now. Thus, it remains to be seen in what manner the Taiwan issue is adopted as a part of any evolving mechanism in the Indo-Pacific, keeping intact the ‘One China Policy’.

However, one may imagine that in a situation of escalating tensions directly and imminently threatening peace across the Taiwan Strait, the internationalisation of the Taiwan issue within the Indo-Pacific strategic construct may take place. Thus, if that happens, it would largely be in response to the immediate Chinese security posture.

In this regard views from India- an important actor from the Indo-Pacific definitely

deserves mention. While the current Joint Statements from various players point in one direction, it is important to note that India has refrained from directly addressing the issue as yet. While India benefits from a prosperous and conflict-free Indo-Pacific, 'strategic ambiguity' may be the best course of action for now. The current interactions

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between the Government of India and Taiwan are limited to un-official, non-governmental ties, including "trade, investment, tourism, culture, education and other such people-to-people exchanges"¹⁴ and would likely remain so in the immediate future. Yes, a possibility of India getting roped in the debate because of the expectations from the Indo-Pacific allies exists. However, in this case, the Indian equation with China as well as Taiwan, in relation to Taiwan's position on the India- China conflict, would likely determine the Indian response. One may argue that the possibility of India responding to the issue similar to the US may not be an immediate reality and would come with New Delhi's own reevaluation of its equation with Taiwan.

Finally, the question of America's strategic clarity on Taiwan is to be addressed with caution. While the narrative suggests a policy shift, it would only be revealed later. Indeed, the passing of the "Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019"¹⁵ is significant; however, it has only "broadened the foundation of (US') Taiwan policy and reinforced key commitments of existing policy"¹⁶. It doesn't reflect a significant shift; it is a call for mobilising diplomatic support for Taiwan. In the long run, it would be the most effective "in persuading some of Taiwan's 15 remaining diplomatic partners and other nondiplomatic partners to not switch ties from Taiwan switching to Beijing or [encouraging them in] strengthening their ties with Taiwan".¹⁷ For now, the Taiwan issue would only continue to figure in the strategic signalling of not the only US and its allies but also China.

Notes:

¹ "Taiwan reports largest daily incursion yet by Chinese air force", 16 June 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/15/asia/taiwan-china-warplanes-largest-adiz-incursion-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>. Accessed on 18 June 2021.

² "Chinese warplane enters Taiwan's air defence zone, 4th incursion this month", *Business Standard*, 08 July 2021, Available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/chinese-warplane-enters-taiwan-s-air-defence-zone-4th-incursion-this-month-121070800154_1.html. 21 July 2021.

³ Melissa Conley Tyler, "Biden wins over Taiwan", *East Asia Forum*, 29 June 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/29/biden-wins-over-taiwan/>. Accessed on 22 July 2021.

⁴ "U.S.- Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: "US- Japan Global Partnership For A New Era", White House Briefing, 16 April 2021, Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/>, accessed on 13 June 2021, and "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement", White House, 21 May 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/21/u-s-rok-leaders-joint-statement/>, Accessed on 13 June 2021, and Joint Statement, "EU-Japan Summit 2021, Taking forward a flourishing partnership". Available at <https://www.consilium.europa>.

eu/media/49922/eu-japan-Summit 2021, Taking forward a flourishing partnership”. Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49922/eu-japan-summit-may-2021-statement.pdf> and Ninth Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, 09 June 2021, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/ninth-japan-australia-22-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-consultations>.

⁵ National Security Podcast, “Charged’ Affaires Mike Goldman on US-Australia relations and regional security” Australian National University, <https://play.acast.com/s/the-national-security-podcast/charged-affairesmikegoldmanonus-austrialiarelationsandregionalsecurity>. Accessed on 14 June 2021.

⁶ “Japan deputy PM comment on defending Taiwan if invaded angers China”, *Reuters*, 06 July 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japans-aso-peaceful-solution-desirable-any-taiwan-contingency-2021-07-06/>. Accessed on 22 July 2021.

⁷ G-7 Statement, “Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué”, June 13, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/13/carbis-bay-g7-summit-communiqué/>. Accessed on 15 June 2021.

⁸ Jagannath Panda, “Will the Quad Evolve and Embrace Taiwan?”, *National Interest*, February 17, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/will-quad-evolve-and-embrace-taiwan-178351>. Accessed on 14 June 21

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Satoru Nagao, The Quad must strengthen and support Taiwan, August 2, 2020, <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/quad-must-strengthen-support-taiwan>. Accessed on 14 June 2021.

¹¹ Oriana Skylar Mastro, The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force, July/August 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation>. Accessed on 13 June 2021.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Martin Greene, “DPP legislator suggests Taiwan join Quad”, *Taiwan News*, 30 December 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4090313>. Accessed on 18 June 2021.

¹⁴ “Rajya Sabha: Unstarred Question No.1205, to Be Answered on 11.02.2021”, <https://mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/33511/question+no1205+peopletopeople+contact+with+taiwan>. Accessed on 15 June 2021.

¹⁵ 116th Congress Public Law 135, US Government Publishing Office, Taiwan Allies International Protection And Enhancement Initiative, (Taipei) Act Of 2019, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-116publ135/html/PLAW-116publ135.htm>. Accessed on 23 July 2021.

¹⁶ Mercy A. Kuo, Trump and the TAIPEI Act, *The Diplomat*, 21 April 2021, Available at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/trump-and-the-taipei-act/>. Accessed on 23 July 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.



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