

# Understanding Global South Perspectives on Taiwan

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JANUARY 2026

## THE ISSUE

*To develop a better understanding of Global South perspectives on cross-Straits dynamics and Taiwan's engagement with the developing world, the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies convened an international task force consisting of 20 leading scholars and practitioners from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Over the course of four workshops, task force members analyzed the increasing support that many Global South countries have offered for Beijing's position on Taiwan, and how U.S. policy affects the position of Global South countries. They also considered opportunities for Taiwan to enhance its economic, diplomatic, and people-to-people engagement across the Global South. This brief summarizes the key takeaways from the task force's deliberations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Taiwan faces a challenging international environment, beset by mounting pressure from Beijing and mixed signals from Washington. Taiwan's geopolitical position and its irreplaceable role in global value chains mean that any shift in the cross-Straits status quo would carry profound ramifications for international stability and prosperity. Much has been written about U.S. and "Global North" perspectives on the daunting challenge of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, but Taiwan's relationship with the developing world has received comparatively less attention.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Global South powers have a critical stake in Taiwan's future. The economic cost of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan—estimated to reach \$10 trillion—would fall heavily on the developing world, which would suffer disproportionately from a global economic downturn and face major supply chain disruptions.<sup>2</sup> The precedent of larger powers using force to incorporate smaller ones could destabilize fragile

borders around the world, especially if Beijing were to succeed. Furthermore, many Global South countries prefer to chart a nonaligned path in which they do not have to "choose" between the United States and China, instead maximizing the benefits both powers can offer; a war over Taiwan would make such a position impossible.

Taiwan's interests are also deeply linked to its position in the Global South. It is in the Global South that Beijing seeks to build international support for the most extreme interpretations of its "One China Principle," secure votes to exclude Taiwan from international organizations, and advance a narrative in which Taiwan and the United States hold exclusive responsibility for deterioration of the cross-Straits status quo. In economic terms, Taiwan relies heavily on foreign workers, particularly from Southeast Asia, and its trade with developing countries comprises a significant 20–25 percent of its total trade activity.<sup>3</sup> As policymakers in G7 capitals work to support Taiwan's international position

and reinforce the cross-Strait status quo, it will be critical to understand the perspectives of Global South stakeholders.

These perspectives are not easily summarized. Taiwan's relationships with developing countries vary widely, owing in large part to the diversity of the Global South itself. Some of Taiwan's relationships draw on centuries of cultural exchange and commercial interactions, while others have only emerged in recent years. Many relationships are heavily circumscribed by pressure from Beijing, but some countries have found creative pathways for engaging Taiwan without drawing Beijing's ire. Care must be taken to avoid undue generalizations across such a broad swath of the world.

To better understand Taiwan's position in the Global South and implications for policymakers in Washington and Taipei, the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies convened an international task force of experts from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. This task force met over a series of four virtual workshops during the summer and fall of 2025 to discuss trends in these regions' relations with Taiwan, as well as their perspectives on cross-Strait issues. During the workshops, task force members discussed the economic, diplomatic, and people-to-people aspects of Taiwan's ties with the Global South. They considered opportunities for deepened engagement and the obstacles that would complicate such efforts.

This report highlights key takeaways from the task force's discussions. In summary:

1. Taiwan faces a daunting challenge across the Global South, amid Beijing's vast engagement, influence, and leverage;
2. Global South stakeholders often see no contradiction between endorsing Beijing's aggressive posture toward Taiwan during peacetime and intending to be neutral should a conflict break out;
3. U.S. policy plays an important role in how Global South stakeholders determine their posture toward Taiwan, but the same U.S. policy can catalyze widely divergent outcomes in different regions;
4. Taiwan must carefully prioritize its partnerships and objectives;
5. Economic cooperation carries the most potential for expanding Taiwan's presence in the Global

South, and technology investments from Taiwan are highly prized;

6. Taiwan's diplomatic engagement can make a difference, if the message is tailored to the local political context; and
7. People-to-people ties are welcome, but remain limited.

The report concludes with brief recommendations for policymakers in the United States and other G7 countries, as well as in Taiwan. Takeaways and recommendations reflect the conclusions of this report's CSIS authors, and do not reflect the views of the task force as a whole. Members were invited to supplement this report with individual statements, which can be viewed in Appendix II.

Task force participants were selected partly for their interest and familiarity with China and Taiwan issues, and as such, the views expressed in task force workshops were not necessarily representative of regional stakeholders more broadly. In the following analysis, the authors have sought to acknowledge and account for the risk of selection bias to the extent possible.

## TASK FORCE TAKEAWAYS

### **1. Taiwan faces a daunting challenge across the Global South, amid Beijing's vast engagement, influence, and leverage.**

Support for Taiwan is weak throughout the Global South, and understanding of cross-Strait dynamics and Taiwan's value proposition is exceedingly limited. Most decision-makers in the Global South do not see Taiwan's fate as particularly relevant to their own national interest, whereas maintaining a positive relationship with Beijing is generally viewed as an existential matter for a country's economic prospects, and therefore, its political stability.

In recent decades, China has gained tremendous political and economic influence across the Global South, which it has increasingly used to urge Global South leaders to adopt its preferred stance toward Taiwan. Following the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen and other candidates from the Democratic Progressive Party, Beijing undertook a global campaign to isolate Taiwan and limit its formal and informal engagement with the broader world. As a result, Taiwan's standing in the Global South has waned

considerably over the past decade. This is evidenced by Taiwan's shrinking cohort of official diplomatic partners, reduced appetite for engagement on the part of Taiwan's unofficial partners, and unqualified support across much of the Global South for Beijing's One China Principle.

Task force members agreed that it would be very challenging to reverse this overall trend, even as Taiwan may be able to advance its position with a select subset of Global South countries, stakeholders, or communities. Members noted it will require exceptional diplomatic skills and significant resources for Taiwan to simply maintain its current cohort of formal diplomatic partners, amid Beijing's ongoing efforts to "flip" their recognition.

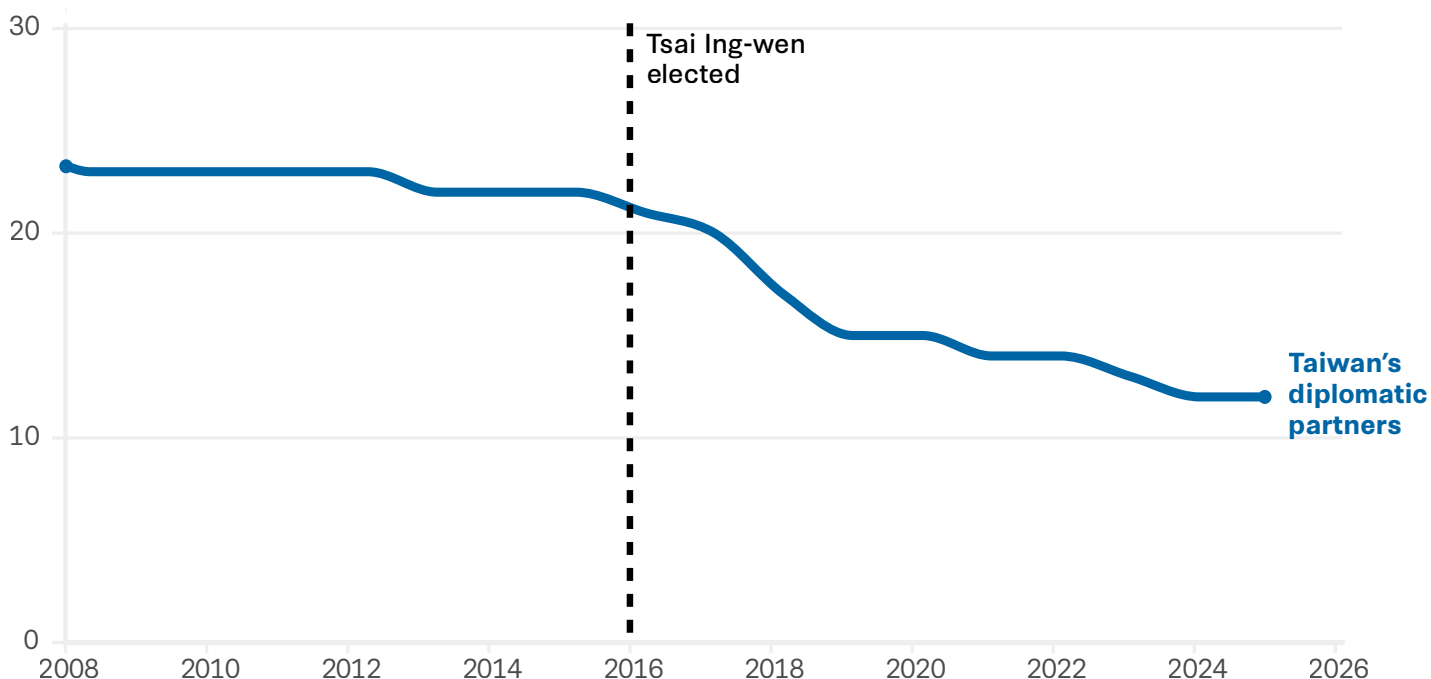
When it comes to Taiwan's unofficial relationships, Beijing has been equally assertive in pressuring Global South countries to minimize engagement. In 2017, for instance, the Nigerian government ordered Taiwan to relocate its trade office out of the capital city of Abuja to Lagos, soon after inking a \$40 billion commercial agreement with Beijing.<sup>4</sup> More recently, the South African government, under pressure from Beijing, ordered Taiwan to move its representative office out of the country's administrative capital, Pretoria—though to date Taiwan has refused to comply.<sup>5</sup> Beijing does not only pressure governments; for example,

it has repeatedly demanded that Indian journalists revise publications that refer to Taiwan as a country.<sup>6</sup>

Global trends aside, task force members underscored that relations with Taiwan vary considerably across the diverse regions and countries that make up the developing world. These relationships vary based on a country's level of economic development and its industrial strengths, which influence the extent to which it will be dependent on Beijing and, separately, see value in commercial or scientific engagement with Taiwan. Taiwan's standing is also shaped by the relative strength of a country's ties with Washington and Beijing. Other important factors include geographic proximity to Taiwan, perceived exposure to the implications of a cross-strait crisis, and depth of historical ties to Taiwan.

Within the Global South, Taiwan's strongest unofficial ties lie with Southeast Asia. Though most Southeast Asian governments remain wary of government-to-government engagement, these nations have benefited from relatively deep trade, commercial, and cultural ties with Taiwan. Many Southeast Asian countries claim a One China "Policy," rather than accepting Beijing's One China "Principle." Taiwan is home to large Southeast Asian diaspora populations, and Southeast Asia is a popular destination for Taiwanese tourists. From a security perspective, Southeast Asia has an

**Figure 1: Taiwan's Loss of Diplomatic Partners**



Source: Jonah Bock, "Why Countries Abandon Taiwan: Indicators for a Diplomatic Switch," Global Taiwan Institute, August 21, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2024/08/why-countries-abandon-taiwan-indicators-for-a-diplomatic-switch/>; and official diplomatic statements.



immediate stake in cross-Strait stability, as any conflict over Taiwan would play out in their neighborhood. This reality was brought into stark relief in the wake of then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s 2022 visit to Taiwan, after which Beijing lobbed missiles over Taiwan—and toward Southeast Asia.

*Task force members observed that most leaders in Africa, Latin America [with exceptions], the Middle East, and South Asia do not believe Taiwan’s political status is relevant to their own national interests.*

Taiwan has sought to build upon this foundation through its New Southbound Policy (NSP), a flagship initiative launched by the Tsai administration in 2016 and continued under the current Lai administration as “NSP Plus.” The NSP launched a suite of programs designed to expand Taiwan’s cooperation with Southeast Asia, as well as South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. Task force members observed steady progress in NSP implementation, but argued that more resources may be required to achieve the policy’s goals.

Taiwan’s standing in other regions of the Global South is more tenuous. Task force members observed that most leaders in Africa, Latin America (with notable exceptions among Taiwan’s diplomatic allies and countries that only recently recognized Beijing), the Middle East, and South Asia do not believe Taiwan’s political status is relevant to their own national interests. Knowledge of Taiwan’s history, development story, and contemporary geopolitical position is low, and areas of common interest are perceived to be limited.

**2. Global South stakeholders often see no contradiction between endorsing Beijing’s aggressive posture toward Taiwan during peacetime and intending to be neutral should a conflict break out.**

Most Global South countries have explicitly endorsed China’s claims on Taiwan. A recent Lowy Institute study shows that the vast majority of the 119 countries that endorse Beijing’s “One China Principle”—which asserts that the PRC is the sole legitimate government over all of China, including Taiwan—fall within the Global South.<sup>7</sup> Beijing has successfully pressed Global South countries to echo its biased interpretation of UN Resolution 2758, inaccurately pointing to this 1971 text as grounds for asserting sovereignty over Taiwan and excluding Taiwan from international organizations.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, China has also insisted on more aggressive positions vis-à-vis Taiwan in the joint statements issued during regional summits. In 2024, the leaders’ statement from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit declared that “Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory,” and the same language was added to the China-Central Asia summit leaders’ statement in 2025.<sup>9</sup> Earlier that year, the premier China-Latin America forum endorsed Beijing’s One China Principle for the first time.<sup>10</sup> With limited exceptions in Southeast Asia and among Taiwan’s official diplomatic partners, Global South countries have supported Beijing’s position or remained silent in the wake of People’s Liberation Army exercises in the Taiwan Strait and other acts of coercion against Taiwan.

Nonetheless, task force members noted that most Global South governments see themselves as neutral players on the Taiwan issue and believe a cross-Strait military crisis would be deeply harmful to their interests, particularly if it resulted in outright conflict between the United States and China. Such a war, they feared, would force Global South countries

Table 1: Key New Southbound Policy Metrics, 2018 vs 2024

	2018	2024
Taiwan’s total trade with NSP countries	\$117.1 billion	\$171.5 billion
Taiwanese FDI to NSP countries	\$2.4 billion	\$8.7 billion
Number of NSP countries’ students studying abroad in Taiwan	51,970	71,012

Source: Taiwan Executive Yuan (2018, 2024).

to choose between these great powers—a geopolitical worst-case scenario for governments that have premised their security and economic growth on welcoming support from both the United States and China, and carefully balancing between them on sensitive issues. Members also expressed concerns that a Taiwan conflict would disrupt Global South countries’ access to key technologies, disturb trade networks, and destabilize the international environment more broadly, increasing the risk they would be drawn into spillover conflicts.

*Beijing has invested tremendous energy in generating the appearance of consensus across the Global South for its One China Principle, its expansive interpretation of UN Resolution 2758, and a right to pursue reunification by any means.*

Why, then, do Global South countries so frequently endorse Beijing’s right to use force against Taiwan—effectively endorsing a war they believe would, at minimum, undermine the viability of a nonaligned geopolitical position? Task force members assessed that most Global South governments intend to remain neutral in any actual conflict between Beijing and Taipei—and perceive the outbreak of conflict to be the moment in which their position would truly matter. In peacetime, conversely, these governments see “One China Principle” language as a costless goodwill gesture toward Beijing. While this argument may, in part, be an effort to resolve the cognitive dissonance of claiming neutrality in world affairs while endorsing Beijing’s position on Taiwan in exchange for economic largesse, it may also speak to a genuine assumption in the capitals of the Global South that their declaratory position on Taiwan does not meaningfully affect Beijing’s decisionmaking on the matter.

This perspective may underestimate the importance Beijing places on its international reputation—at least during peacetime. Beijing has invested tremendous energy in generating the appearance of consensus across the Global South for its One China Principle, its expansive interpretation of UN Resolution 2758, and a right to pursue reunification by any means. To the degree it is successful in

this effort, Beijing will feel emboldened to take increasingly aggressive steps to erase Taiwan from the international stage and erode the long-standing norms that have maintained cross-Straits peace and stability for decades—including through dangerous military exercises around the island.

Alternatively, if Beijing one day decides it is time to fight for Taiwan, this will be seen as an epoch-defining moment from which it cannot back down. It is difficult to imagine the sudden neutrality of the Global South (or opinions in the broader international community) making a difference at that late stage. While the Global South could play an important role in deterring conflict, it is less likely to wield influence over the course of events once conflict breaks out.

**3. U.S. policy plays an important role in how Global South stakeholders determine their posture toward Taiwan, but the same U.S. policy can catalyze widely divergent outcomes in different regions.**

Task force members agreed that second to China, the United States is often the most important driver of Taiwan’s standing in the Global South. Several members stressed that Global South leaders perceive U.S. support for Taiwan to have waned over the course of 2025. This change, they noted, may prompt a commensurate shift away from Taiwan in Global South countries. Members noted that some countries, particularly in Latin America, maintain a relationship with Taiwan primarily because they believe this is something Washington wants them to do.

Additionally, members pointed to a larger group of Global South countries that endeavor to balance between the United States and China, partnering with both without definitively aligning with either. For these countries, U.S. support for Taiwan serves as a break on how far they are willing to go in endorsing Beijing’s cross-Straits ambitions. Even if these countries support the One China Principle, members noted the countries in question may view this as a compromise between the Chinese and U.S. positions, in part because they do not understand the complexities of either stance. If these governments come to believe the United States no longer supports or prioritizes Taiwan’s international space and the question of cross-Straits peace and stability, members believed their position on Taiwan would swing even further toward Beijing.

At the same time, task force participants disagreed on whether Taiwan should openly align itself with the United

States in its own diplomatic outreach. In regions where public opinion of the United States is relatively negative, Taiwan should distance itself from the United States and avoid foregrounding its role in U.S.-China competition. In these scenarios, Taiwan will benefit from building relationships with Global South partners in its own right, rather than being weighed down by negative views toward U.S. power projection. In regions where views of the United States are more positive, however, Taiwan will benefit from joint programming and coordinated messaging with the United States. In either case, it will be critical for Taiwan and the United States to carefully assess and coordinate on who should take the lead in making Taiwan's case.

Taiwan's standing with Global South countries can also be significantly impacted by the strength of the overall U.S. bilateral relationship with that country. For example, the strong momentum in the U.S. alliance with the Philippines created a geopolitical environment in which new forms of political, commercial, and maritime cooperation between the Philippines and Taiwan became possible.

#### **4. Taiwan must carefully prioritize its partnerships and objectives.**

Task force members emphasized that Taipei cannot compete on a one-for-one basis with Beijing's value proposition in the Global South. Yet it can still compete successfully by leveraging asymmetric strengths (addressed in the following three takeaways), leveraging a locally tailored partnership with the United States (as discussed above), and rigorously prioritizing key partnerships and objectives. Taiwan's economic and diplomatic institutions face significant resource constraints, and the polarized political environment in Taipei will complicate any effort to increase spending on international engagement. An unfocused approach risks spreading limited resources too thin.

Accordingly, task force members recommended that Taiwan clearly define the types of engagement it wishes to prioritize. For example, is it more important to reward "good behavior" and focus on countries that are already relatively positive toward Taiwan, even though these are likely to be smaller players on the international stage and Taiwan is already receiving their support? Or is it more important to try and build new relationships with the larger and more influential Global South powers, recognizing they have strong ties to Beijing, and Taiwan's progress will be

incremental at best and limited to less sensitive sectors?

Task force members encouraged Taiwan to apply equal rigor in prioritizing its objectives. If Taiwan's top objective is maintaining or expanding its international space, then new commercial, educational, or scientific partnerships in the Global South would carry inherent strategic value. But if Taiwan is primarily seeking to limit near-term political support for Beijing's position on cross-strait issues, engagement should be conceived as a means to that end. While these two objectives are complementary, many task force members believed Taiwan should prioritize one or the other, in order to allocate scarce resources in a coherent and strategic fashion.

As the task force debated these questions, some members advocated for Taiwan to devote resources to regions that are heavily inclined toward China, such as the Middle East, while others suggested conserving resources for regions with which Taiwan already has some limited traction, such as in Southeast Asia. One member encouraged Taiwan to deprioritize the Global South altogether and focus on shoring up support from its G7 allies, arguing that Global South support could only benefit Taiwan if it had already achieved a strong position among "Global North" countries that would always be more willing to take risks on Taiwan's behalf.

#### **5. Economic cooperation carries the most potential for expanding Taiwan's presence in the Global South, and technology investments from Taiwan are highly prized.**

In all four task force convenings, members emphasized that economic ties play a decisive role in shaping Global South countries' relations with Taiwan. By prioritizing economic cooperation and commercial engagement, Taiwan can create opportunities for mutual material benefit and demonstrate respect for developing countries' priorities. Stronger trade and investment ties may also give Global South powers a more compelling reason to care about Taiwan's geopolitical fate, as these links create a shared interest in mutual prosperity. In addition, a strategy of economic engagement avoids some of the harsh zero-sum dynamics of pursuing more formal political ties, which Beijing would vigorously contest. Commercial engagement can open a more accessible avenue for deepened relationships and understanding between Taiwan and Global South countries.

Taiwan cannot compete dollar-for-dollar with China, whose extensive trade networks, overseas investments, and state-backed commercial diplomacy are unparalleled in

scale across much of the Global South. Taiwan does maintain a sizeable trade network in its own right, and it ranks in the top 10 trading partners of many Southeast Asian countries. But Taiwan's trading heft becomes more tenuous beyond Asia, and even close to home, the scale of Taiwan's trade cannot compete with the incentives Beijing offers. Taiwan's trade with Global South countries reached \$203 billion in 2024, a fraction of their \$2.83 trillion in trade with China.<sup>11</sup>

But Taiwan benefits from several high-impact, specialized areas of economic influence, and it can leverage its unique commercial strengths to expand engagement and build trust with emerging powers. The island is a world leader in high-tech manufacturing, and overseas investment from Taiwan's technology champions provides coveted opportunities for upskilling and economic growth. Task force members noted strong appetite across the Global South for such investment. They suggested that Taiwan use strategic outbound investments with a "quality-over-quantity" approach, drawing on its asymmetric strengths.

Task force participants stressed the unique needs and interests of Taiwan's potential commercial partners in the Global South. Wealthier countries seek semiconductor investments and integration with other high-tech value chains. Less developed countries often prioritize basic developmental imperatives like healthcare, water access, sanitation systems, and disaster monitoring—but there is a strong appetite for technology-enabled solutions for these foundational development needs as well. Regional differences are also salient. The Middle East's commercial relations with Taiwan center on energy exports and financial capital in search of returns. Taiwan's commercial ties with Southeast Asia, by contrast, have been characterized by manufacturing foreign direct investment (FDI) and supply chain integration.

In assessing Taiwan's economic engagement with the Global South, several task force participants again highlighted the important role played by the United States. The vitality of the U.S. economy was perceived as an important proxy for the vitality of Taiwan's, and many countries see a decision to bet on Taiwan as, more fundamentally, a bet on the United States. Additionally, U.S. investment or commercial diplomacy can supplement and strengthen Taiwanese trade and investment packages.

### **Taiwan as a Technology Superpower**

Task force members viewed high-tech investment as one of Taiwan's most compelling offerings for Global South

partners. Taiwanese technology giants are already major international investors. Foxconn, ASE, Acer, Pegatron, and Vanguard, among others, are well known for their FDI presence in Southeast Asia. These companies have illustrated that Taiwanese FDI can powerfully accelerate emerging economies' efforts to upgrade their technology sectors. Now, as these companies continue their overseas expansion—Foxconn in India, Pegatron in Indonesia, and ASE in Mexico, for instance—other Global South countries see opportunities to benefit from Taiwan's unique innovation ecosystem.<sup>12</sup>

*To engage a broader set of Global South countries, Taiwan will need to diversify its tech diplomacy tool kit and strengthen its brand as a technology superpower, reaching beyond semiconductor manufacturing to deliver compelling commercial partnerships in other cutting-edge sectors.*

Nowhere is this dynamic more salient than in Taiwan's world-leading semiconductor industry. Task force members observed that among Global South elites, semiconductor manufacturing is a rare area where Taiwan's brand eclipses China's. Yet "semiconductor diplomacy" has significant limitations. Even basic semiconductor manufacturing requires a reasonably sophisticated technological ecosystem, a pool of specialized talent, and reliable access to large amounts of energy and water resources. Many countries in the Global South lack these prerequisites. In May 2025, TSMC declined generous subsidies to build fabrication facilities (fabs) in India, Qatar, and Singapore, in part due to a shortage of skilled local labor.<sup>13</sup> If these three countries—each of which boasts a large, well-established tech sector—were deemed ill-suited for semiconductor manufacturing, similar investments face long odds in poorer parts of the Global South. Even in regions that *are* equipped to absorb semiconductor-related FDI, there are far more countries seeking fabs than the market can support. From a geopolitical perspective, this means that doling out semiconductor



investments is not a scalable strategy—even though it may serve as a powerful tool in select, prioritized markets.

To engage a broader set of Global South countries, Taiwan will need to diversify its tech diplomacy tool kit and strengthen its brand as a technology superpower, reaching beyond semiconductor manufacturing to deliver compelling commercial partnerships in other cutting-edge sectors. Task force participants raised financial technology, agricultural technology, commercial drones, robotics, and precision manufacturing (especially for electronics equipment) as sectors in which Taiwan has compelling commercial capabilities and a strong international reputation. However, Taiwan does not have the same incumbency advantage vis-à-vis China in these sectors, and price competition will be fierce. China has established a powerful brand, especially in the Global South, as a leader in science and innovation, so Taiwan must continue searching for niches and areas of comparative advantage in order to remain relevant.

For example, Taiwan's research partnerships represent an important dimension of its technology diplomacy in the Global South. The Industrial Technology Research Institute, Taiwan's flagship center for applied technology research and development, facilitates research collaboration with a diverse range of partners, easing their entry into Taiwanese supply chains.<sup>14</sup> The Taiwan-Asia Exchange Forum also fosters scientific exchange within the Indo-Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Task force members encouraged Taiwan to scale up these opportunities and make them available to more scientists across the Global South.

## **6. Taiwan's diplomatic engagement can make a difference, if the message is tailored to the local political context.**

Task force members assessed Taiwan's diplomatic playbook. While Taiwan's representative offices, track II engagement, and parliamentary diplomacy won praise, members observed that Taiwan's messaging and public diplomacy could be better tailored for Global South audiences.

Many participants noted that Taiwan's representative offices across the Global South punch above their weight and forge important relationships, despite limited staffing and significant political constraints. But in many cases, a small number of offices must support Taiwan's engagement with large regions spanning multiple countries. For example, in the Middle East ("West Asia," by Taiwan's official classification), only 10 offices service 28 countries, which

naturally limits the offices' impact.<sup>16</sup>

Members commended Taiwan's engagement with scholars and think tanks, as well as its support for track II dialogues. Taiwan's well-resourced think tank ecosystem can play an important role in fostering understanding between Taiwan officials and their counterparts in Global South countries; this is particularly true when government-to-government engagement is deemed too sensitive, as is often the case.

Participants emphasized the unique role of Global South countries' parliamentary systems in creating channels for engagement with Taiwan. As in the United States and Europe, parliamentary officials in the Global South may be able to engage with Taiwan far more freely than their counterparts in the executive branch of government. In 2023, for example, over 80 parliamentary officials from 11 African countries welcomed then-President Tsai Ing-wen's trip to Africa.<sup>17</sup>

With respect to diplomatic messaging, task force members assessed that Taiwan's rhetorical emphasis on democratic norms and values is not persuasive in the Global South. Even among democratic countries like India and Indonesia, appeals to democratic solidarity are less likely to motivate action than tangible economic incentives. Task force members noted that Taiwan's values-based narrative is also complicated by the fact that several of its official diplomatic allies are undemocratic.

Members identified two distinct economic arguments that could resonate more powerfully with Global South audiences. Firstly, Taiwan can highlight the unique value delivered by Taiwanese companies and investments. Secondly, Taiwan can help Global South stakeholders understand that questions of cross-strait peace and stability have profound and global economic implications. Taiwan can seek opportunities to increase awareness of the fact that cross-strait conflict would precipitate a catastrophic economic shock, likely undercutting economic development across the Global South.

Beyond the economic ramifications of a cross-strait conflict, some Global South countries—particularly those in Southeast Asia—share certain security interests with Taiwan. In Southeast Asia, Chinese maritime aggression in the South China Sea carries echoes of its coercion in the Taiwan Strait. These commonalities have prompted the Philippines to explore deeper security ties with Taiwan.<sup>18</sup> While other Southeast Asian countries would be loath to invite Beijing's ire through overt security cooperation with Taiwan, a discreet dialogue on shared maritime challenges may provide a foundation for building trust and understanding over time.

Taiwan's diplomatic outreach should also be carefully



tailored to the domestic political environment in the Global South countries with whom it seeks to engage. One task force member noted that some large Global South countries are reluctant to speak out in favor of Taiwan because they accept Beijing’s narrative regarding Taiwanese “separatism” and fear stoking independence movements within their own borders. Other countries may be wary of echoing Taiwan’s rhetoric of democratic values to avoid drawing attention to weak democratic institutions at home. Taiwan’s diplomatic messaging must be responsive to the local political context.

## 7. People-to-people ties are welcome, but remain limited.

Task force participants assessed that further investment in people-to-people exchanges with Taiwan would be welcome—even in countries that heavily favor Beijing vis-à-vis Taipei on political issues. However, members noted that Taiwan’s outbound tourism, academic programming, and cultural exchange focus on the United States, Australia, and Japan, with far fewer links to Latin America, the Middle East, or Africa. This stands in contrast to China, participants emphasized, where grassroots cross-cultural exchange with Global South partners is much deeper.

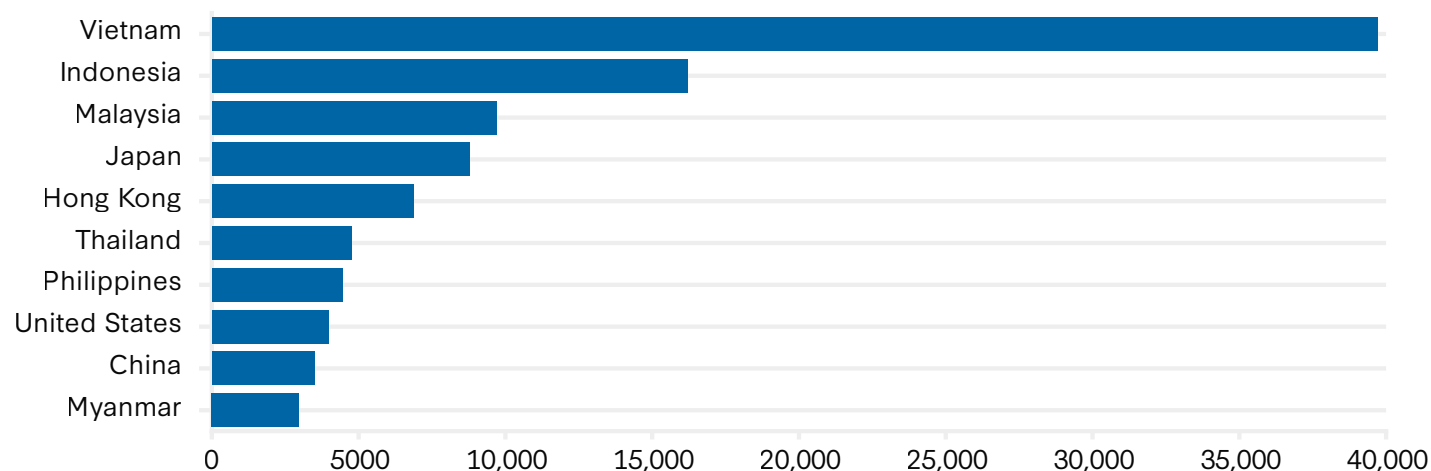
Task force members recommended that Taiwan place particular priority on educational and scholarly exchange. Of the 63,302 students from Taiwan who studied abroad in 2024, only 1,489 studied in Global South countries.<sup>19</sup> Only

a single student studied abroad in Africa. More students from the Global South (predominantly from Southeast Asia) study in Taiwan; in the 2024-25 academic year, over 87,000 students from Global South countries studied at Taiwanese institutions.<sup>20</sup> Task force members cited the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund’s (ICDF) educational exchange programs as a positive example of scholarly collaboration that could be scaled across more regions. Participants also spoke positively of the 92 branches of the Taiwan Alumni Association around the world.<sup>21</sup>

Task force members emphasized that investing in educational exchange could significantly enhance Taiwan’s international space over the longer term. Ambivalence toward Taiwan in the Global South is exacerbated by limited understanding of Taiwan’s history and geopolitical position. Several members recalled the difficulty of rallying support for Taiwan’s autonomy among peers who were unfamiliar with the legal and historical bases for the cross-strait status quo, coupled with a relentless propaganda campaign from Beijing asserting that any international divergence from Beijing’s position on Taiwan represents a violation of Chinese sovereignty. Additionally, members emphasized that outbound exchange for Taiwanese students and professionals in the Global South will provide them with experience, local knowledge, and personal networks that can serve as a springboard for deeper engagement over the course of a lifetime.

**Figure 2: Most International Students in Taiwan Come from Southeast Asia**

Number of international students in Taiwan by nationality, 2024/25 academic year (top ten)



Source: “Top 10 Countries: A Growing Educational Hub,” Study in Taiwan, <https://www.studyintaiwan.org/why-taiwan/key-numbers/chart1?p=1#table>.

## *Task force members emphasized that investing in educational exchange could significantly enhance Taiwan’s international space over the longer term.*

Another opportunity to deepen Taiwan’s people-to-people ties with certain portions of the Global South is through its substantial migrant worker population. According to Taiwanese immigration data, as of August 2025, nearly 955,000 foreign nationals from the Global South, nearly all of whom hail from Southeast Asia, lived in Taiwan; taking into account undocumented workers and visa overstays, the true number of foreign workers would be substantially higher.<sup>22</sup> To the degree that Southeast Asian countries have come to see more of a stake for themselves in cross-strait peace and stability, that stake is viewed primarily through the lens of overseas workers’ well-being and safety. Overseas workers may increasingly color India’s perspectives on Taiwan as well, in the wake of a February 2024 agreement welcoming Indian migrant workers to the island.<sup>23</sup> Noting that diaspora communities in Taiwan generally maintain strong ties to their countries of origin, task force participants stressed that improving migrants’ living and working conditions in Taiwan would be a powerful way to improve Taiwan’s image overseas and ultimately strengthen geopolitical ties.

Task force members also highlighted the importance of Taiwan’s cultural exports and soft power, particularly in Southeast Asia, where Taiwanese musicians and cinema often gain significant popularity. However, these cultural products have little penetration in other regions of the Global South.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

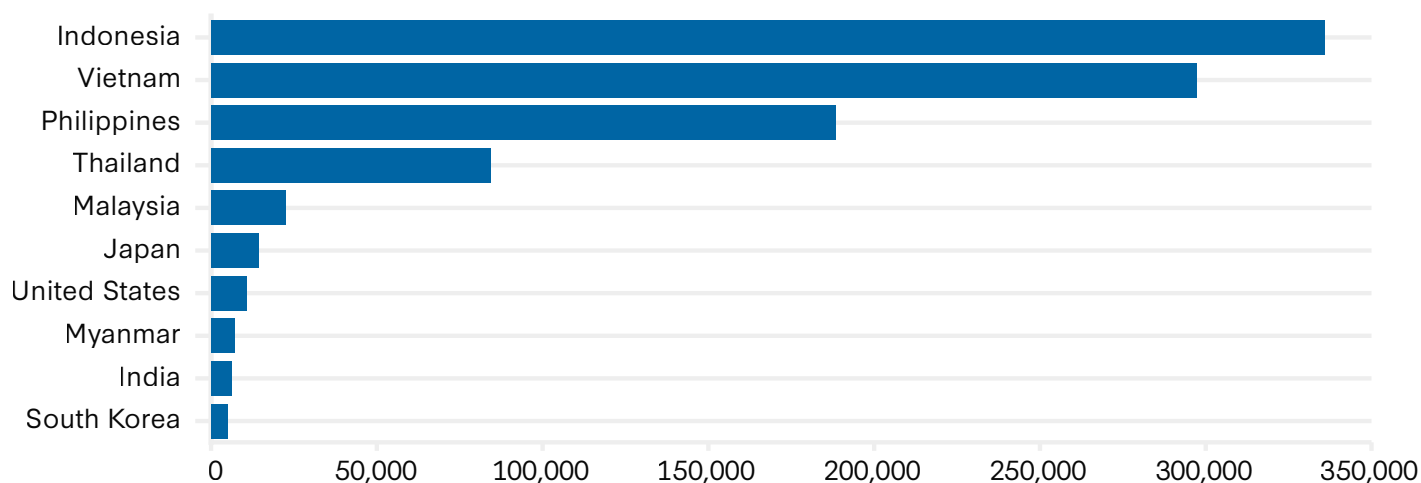
Based on the task force’s findings, the authors propose several recommendations for policymakers.

For Taiwan:

- Taiwan’s strongest supporters will always be found among its official diplomatic partners and the “Global North.” Taiwan should prioritize engagement with these allies. But it should also **allocate dedicated resources for engaging the most influential Global South countries**, even if their governments have supported Beijing’s cross-strait policies to some degree. If these governments are not eager to engage the Taiwanese government, Taipei can still seek opportunities to foster positive perceptions of Taiwan among youth, civil society, business communities, scholars, and other sympathetic communities. Even modest inroads may bear dividends over time as generational change takes its course, particularly in democratic societies in which minority interest groups can influence government policy.
- Taiwan’s strategy for engaging with the Global South should seek to **cultivate shared economic**

**Figure 3: Most Foreign Residents in Taiwan Come from the Global South**

Number of foreign residents in Taiwan by nationality, August 2025 (top ten)



Source: “2025.8Foreign Residents by Nationality,” National Immigration Agency, Republic of China (Taiwan), September 25, 2025, [https://www.immigration.gov.tw/5475/5478/141478/141380/398200/cp\\_news](https://www.immigration.gov.tw/5475/5478/141478/141380/398200/cp_news).

**interests.** Global South partners are most likely to support Taiwan's continued autonomy when they can identify a material self-interest in preserving the status quo. Commercial diplomacy is Taiwan's most powerful asset in pursuing this goal. The modest size of Taiwan's ICDF is insufficient for a challenge and opportunity of this scale; accordingly, Taiwan should consider the establishment of a development finance institution akin to the Japan Bank for International Cooperation or U.S. Development Finance Corporation. Taiwan should also leverage its brand as a semiconductor superpower to **deliver technology-enabled solutions and investments** that upskill Global South workforces and foster sustainable growth.

- Taiwan's diplomatic rhetoric in the Global South should **emphasize the unique and irreplaceable value that Taiwan delivers for its partners.** In the Global South, Taiwan's values will not resonate in the abstract; instead, Taiwan must demonstrate how its democratic society generates compelling economic, scientific, and cultural opportunities for the people of Taiwan and the broader international community.
- Taiwan should endeavor to **cultivate broad-based domestic interest in the affairs of the Global South.** Taiwan could invest in initiatives that facilitate outbound educational exchange, expand its Overseas Volunteers Service, and consider the development of regional studies programs.

For the United States, G7 nations, and other supporters of Taiwan:

- The United States should **maintain unwavering support for Taiwan and its international space.** Vocal U.S. support for Taiwan raises global awareness of the issue, provides diplomatic cover for other countries to follow suit, and reassures Taiwan's commercial partners their investments are secure. When the United States appears to deprioritize support for Taiwan, other countries feel there is no geopolitical cost for more fulsomely backing China's position.
- The United States and likeminded partners should seek additional opportunities to **partner with Taiwan to deliver concrete capacity-building and development assistance** to Global South partners—recognizing that across the Global South's

diverse geographies, some G7 partners will be better positioned to boost Taiwan's standing than others. As one example, the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (now supported by the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Taiwan) has provided an important platform for delivering practical capacity-building trainings in the Global South, and is ripe for expansion.<sup>24</sup>

- The United States and like-minded partners should **expand educational efforts about the history and importance of cross-Strait peace and stability.** These efforts can provide a much-needed counternarrative to Beijing's framing of Taiwan as a purely domestic issue. Taiwan should pursue these efforts as well, but because of its limited access and capacity, partners will have to step up.
- The United States and likeminded partners can help Global South countries **build resilience to Chinese economic coercion.** By itself, Taiwan cannot offset the economic costs incurred by a country that alienates Beijing by supporting Taipei. U.S. allies and partners, which wield far greater economic resources than Taiwan alone, could provide economic shelter for countries that meaningfully expand their relationships with Taiwan.
- The United States and likeminded partners can **engage educational institutions** in their respective countries to encourage the establishment of three-way partnerships comprising a university in a developed country, a university in Taiwan, and a university in the Global South. Taiwanese students wishing to study abroad often seek degrees from developed countries' universities, limiting their exposure to the Global South. These three-way partnerships could provide Taiwanese students with a wider range of international experiences, while also opening new opportunities for students from the Global South to study in Taiwan. ■



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*This report is made possible by support from Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States.*

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## APPENDIX I: TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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## APPENDIX II: STATEMENTS FROM TASK FORCE MEMBERS

### BEYOND ECONOMICS: A STATEMENT ON TAIWAN IN AFRICA

By Abdul-Gafar Tobi Oshodi

Beijing's influence in many African countries is not in doubt, and is essentially built on its significant provision of development finance. Taiwan does not come close to this, as highlighted in the report. However, while economic drivers are obvious in China's relationship with Africa, there are other conditions that could limit Taiwan's attraction. One of these is the nation-building challenges confronting African countries following the arbitrary borders created and the amalgamation of precolonial states by colonial powers. Many countries have continued to struggle with building a strong sense of national citizenship from the enduring pre-colonial connections and attachments. Nigeria illustrates this example: Despite the Biafra civil war (1967-70), fought between the federal and the secessionist Biafra forces, Nigeria still confronts the challenges of nation building. Against this background, it is unlikely for a country like Nigeria to shift its allegiance from China to Taiwan. While this non-economic dimension in Africa's relationship with Taiwan is often overlooked, it remains an unsaid element in Nigeria's policy. This report acknowledges Beijing's narrative of Taiwanese separatism, which has fueled fears that supporting Taiwan could stoke independence movements in a context where nation building remains a challenge. In African countries such as Nigeria, however, such nation-building challenges predate the division of China and Taiwan in 1949. Therefore, recognition of the histories, forms, depth, and dynamics of these challenges and tensions by Taiwan is crucial for its engagement with such African countries. Indeed, Africa-China relations is also influenced by the history of China's support for the anti-colonial forces on the continent. This history, coupled with the legacies of colonialism as marked by the same challenges of nation building, combine to enhance China's influence in Africa relative to Taiwan in the noneconomic context.<sup>25</sup>

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### TAIWAN SHOULD EMPLOY "SEMICONDUCTOR DIPLOMACY" IN AFRICA

By Emeka Umejei

Semiconductors are crucial to the functionality of electronic devices, and their applicability spans both civilian and military sectors. Semiconductors are responsible for the production of high-tech products and services and thus a force for global economic development and technological innovation. Taiwan is reputed to play a dominant role across all facets of semiconductor production, including upstream, midstream, and downstream. However, Taiwan is yet to apply its dominant role in semiconductors for diplomacy in the Global South. It is time Taiwan leveraged its semiconductor advantage in exchange for economic and political advantage in the Global South.

In Africa, there is little or no information on Taiwan's leading role in semiconductors. Taiwan can take several steps to remedy this. First, Taiwan should consciously project its leading role in semiconductor production and distribution in the media in Africa. Second, Taiwan should embark on "semiconductor diplomacy," through which it can design seminars and training for African policymakers, political actors, and business executives. Through this semiconductor diplomacy, Taiwan would likely attract new friends and influence a section of policymakers and political actors in the Global South.

Furthermore, Taiwan would benefit from enhancing its domestic understanding of Africa and the importance of engagement with African countries. There is neither a department of African studies nor a center for African studies in Taiwan, which is not good for Taiwan's engagement with the continent. If Taiwan is interested in attracting and keeping African scholars, a department for the study of Africa should not be considered a luxury.

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## GIVING A CHANCE TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

By Fabricio A. Fonseca

For an actor like Taiwan, which faces great challenges, including diplomatic isolation and security threats, the instruments associated with public diplomacy, particularly in the Global South, offer important opportunities. This has been illustrated by the experience of Taiwan's public diplomacy in the European Union, North America, and in some countries of South and Southeast Asia. The souring relations between China and the West have given authorities in Taiwan a chance to take advantage of the increasing frustration toward the Mandarin-learning promotion efforts by Beijing in places like the United States and Western Europe, where many Confucius Institutes (CIs) have ceased operations. The announcement and creation of the Taiwan Center for Mandarin Learning in 2021, and its rapid expansion in the United States and Europe, illustrate Taipei's ambition in some areas of public diplomacy. Nonetheless, it also highlights the inclination of Taiwan to strengthen ties with the Global North, while overlooking the increasing opportunities in other parts of the world.

As a result of China's impressive economic growth and its efforts to diversify trade and investment links with the rest of the world, the interest of people in the Global South in learning Mandarin has visibly increased. In contrast to the Global North, universities and higher education institutions in the Global South do not have enough resources to include Mandarin courses into their curricula. Therefore, cooperation with China for the creation of CIs is a growing trend in the Global South. Nonetheless, an increasing demand for Mandarin courses in those countries can represent an opportunity for Taiwanese diasporas that live and work there. The same can be said when looking at the number of Taiwanese universities that have successfully negotiated memoranda of understanding with their counterparts in the Global South, despite some of them also hosting CIs. Therefore, educational and cultural exchanges, as part of an active public diplomacy, are areas in which universities around the world are continuously eager to engage.

The presence of Taiwanese entrepreneurs who do business in the Global South, as well as scholars and students who decide to go to universities in the Global South for academic exchanges, can contribute to a more effective implementation of Taiwan's public diplomacy. More official support

for Taiwan-related Mandarin schools in countries in the Global South could serve the purpose of promoting the study of Taiwan's language and culture, and of finding students that would become key parts in the management of bilateral ties, through the provision of scholarships, exchanges, and the administration of Mandarin proficiency tests. The remaining question is whether Taipei would seize the opportunity and join the efforts from Chinese institutions and entrepreneurs to meet the increasing demand for Mandarin courses in the Global South. It would be a mistake to see the promotion of Mandarin learning as a zero-sum game. Ultimately, according to the rules of the market, competition in a service such as language learning could create more benefits for audiences in the Global South, while contributing to the practice of public diplomacy and cultural exchanges, especially for Taiwan.

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## TAIWAN MUST ENGAGE THE GLOBAL SOUTH—ESPECIALLY IN ITS OWN REGION

By Sana Hashmi

A clash over Taiwan would have broad repercussions, particularly for neighboring states and countries in the Global South. Most Global South countries maintain neutrality in the event of a conflict, and a cross-Straits crisis would likely elicit a similar response. However, neutrality does not eliminate the fact that a nearby conflict would threaten their economic and strategic interests. China's extensive influence and engagement within the Global South further reduces the likelihood of any vocal criticism from these countries. This situation is compounded by Taiwan's relatively limited and unstructured outreach to the Global South, which has historically received less attention in its strategic planning, given the prioritization of the West, particularly the United States.

The closest Taiwan has come to engaging the Global South is through the New Southbound Policy introduced under former President Tsai Ing-wen, which has now been expanded into the New Southbound Policy Plus. To date, engagement has primarily been limited to some Southeast Asian countries and India. While Southeast Asia has long benefited from Taiwanese investment and strong

people-to-people ties, governments in the region generally remain indifferent to Taiwan.

India represents a more complex case, competing with China for influence within the Global South. While it is likely to maintain a policy of neutrality and nonalignment in the event of a cross-Straits conflict, India also has significant economic and technological interests in Taiwan, which it sees as a potential partner.

India previously adhered to the “One China Policy,” but this commitment has gradually diminished. Since 2008, India stopped referencing the policy in joint statements, and in 2014, India’s Minister of External Affairs conveyed to her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi that India would no longer uphold the One China Policy if China did not recognize a corresponding “One India Policy.” Since then, India has made no public proclamations of the policy in official documents or joint statements.

Interestingly, even during its adherence to the One China Policy, India maintained deliberate ambiguity regarding Taiwan, prioritizing economic and technological cooperation. From Taiwan’s perspective, India is viewed as a like-minded partner aligned with the West, a potential counterbalance to China, and a security stabilizer in the Indo-Pacific. While both see each other as significant, expectations diverge. India focuses cautiously on economic and technological ties, while Taiwan views the relationship primarily through a security lens. India’s influence in the Global South may also create opportunities for Taiwan beyond the bilateral and China context, underscoring the need for Taiwan to expand its own regional strategy rather than rely solely on bilateral partnerships or overemphasize the security dimension.

Taiwan must broaden its engagement and shape its own narrative in the Global South, where its presence and influence remain minimal. This is not about matching China dollar-for-dollar, which would be unrealistic, but about developing a sustained, systemic outreach through developmental, economic, educational, and academic diplomacy. Limiting diplomacy to the United States and the West risks leaving Taiwan isolated in its own region. Despite being more economically developed than most Global South countries and a technological powerhouse, Taiwan’s geographic and strategic position necessitates proactive regional engagement. Episodic diplomacy and neglect would undermine its long-term interests and the wider stability of the region. Strengthening self-sufficiency and preparedness must

therefore include robust non-defense engagement, with the Global South as a key focus.

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## ENDNOTES

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