

Taiwan Policy Centre Submission to Foreign Affairs Select Committee Inquiry: Update to the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IRR0017)

In light of changes to the UK's strategic environment since the publication of the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy in March 2021, what updates should the Government make to the Integrated Review?

This submission will focus on one significant omission from the original Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy that we at the Taiwan Policy Centre strongly believe should not only be included in the updated Review but given significant focus.

It is a matter of global geo-political importance which was neatly summed up by [James Forsyth in The Spectator](#) magazine who described it as “the most important geo-strategic issue of this decade.”

That omission is the situation in Taiwan, which was not mentioned once in the entire 112 pages of the original Integrated Review document.

The failure to make any reference at all to Taiwan looks all the more glaring in the light of recent events around the visit of US Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, which has seen a significant increase in Chinese hostility towards Taiwan and a unilaterally-driven fundamental change in the status quo in the Taiwan Straits by the Chinese Communist Party regime in Beijing.

While the Government has made some comment on the situation in Taiwan, this has been vague at best, and the recent political upheaval at home means there is a lack of clarity about precisely where the UK stands on the issue of Taiwan.

The Integrated Review is a document intended to draw together the UK foreign policy, defence, and security vision for the coming decade. To omit what many experts believe is going to be the biggest foreign policy, defence, and security issue of the coming decade is something that this update needs to put right.

In this submission, the Taiwan Policy will outline our suggestions as to how the UK Government should do this.

The current situation

Despite fundamental and radical changes to Taiwan's political economy and constitutional order, the country remains stuck in the birdcage of a Republic of China (ROC) constitutional polity and framework.

Despite the self-evident existence of two Chinas, Taiwan is nevertheless regularly warned by both the US and People's Republic of China (PRC) to not replace the ROC with a new republic on threat of military conflict.

As of the time of writing, under treaty and international law, the official status of Taiwan remains 'to be resolved' until the relevant interested parties negotiate a settlement or until the United Nations recognises Taiwan's right to self-determination.

As we have seen by the PRC's recent disproportionate and hostile response to the visit of US Speaker Nancy Pelosi, there is now a significant threat that the PRC will seek to annex Taiwan by force to 'settle' the question and status of Taiwan to preclude any other outcome, including the wishes of the Taiwanese people.

It should now be clear to diplomats and foreign policy analysts that the PRC is moving to change the 'status-quo' in Taiwan-China relations from a position of some respect for the median line of the Taiwan Strait and overlapping commercial airspace and air defence identification zones (ADIZ) to one of daily incursions by the PLA into both.

The events of the last few months have now given the world ample and clear demonstration of China's intent towards Taiwan. The window for appeasing, trying to renegotiate, or the possibility of neutralising that intent will not stay open indefinitely.

This appears to be understood by US President Joe Biden, who, in a number of statements, has arguably challenged the parameters of the US policy of 'strategic ambiguity' by increasingly unambiguously stating that the US would intervene militarily if Taiwan was attacked by the PRC. UK policy has not done the same. Indeed, it can be argued that the UK's Taiwan has remained largely unchanged since diplomatic recognition was switched from Taipei to Beijing in 1950.

The military balance of the cross-strait relations has been in the PRC's favour for some time.

We agree with the view of Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu that China possesses, or is close to acquiring, the ability to manifest its desire to annex Taiwan by force, and to permanently settle the 'Taiwan Question' before other regional parties or allies can intervene.

The invasion of Ukraine heralding a move by China to do likewise this year is a non sequitur, as we wrote in our inaugural report, [Ukraine Today, Taiwan Tomorrow?](#).

But China's 'war of a thousand paper cuts' against Taiwan is as real as Russian tanks on Ukraine's border were. As [Stokes, Yang, and Lee](#) wrote:

Taiwan faces an existential threat from the People's Republic of China. For the CCP, an all-out amphibious assault is only one possible course of action. The coercive options available

to Beijing are limited only by the extent of imagination and could take forms that have not been anticipated by Taiwanese government leaders, who might struggle to find appropriate responses. Rather than invade, China could instead carry out subversion, blockade, or sabotage operations against Taiwan's telecommunications networks and power grid. To defeat coercion, Taiwanese government leaders must be capable of harnessing the latent power of their nation's military and civil society to find optimal responses to future Chinese actions.

As far as deterring a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has written in its [March 2022 research paper](#) that “European capitals could leverage political, economic and even some limited military means for deterrence ahead of or during a Taiwan contingency if there is the political will to do so” and they conclude that:

“...Europe can no longer avoid the Taiwan issue strategically, politically, economically and even militarily. A different approach to Taiwan is needed as China changes the status quo across the Strait. Several European governments have increased their calls for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

“Others, most notably Lithuania, have also strengthened their ties with Taiwan, triggering political and economic coercion from Beijing. But it is still not clear what European countries and the EU would be willing and able to bring to the table in the case of a serious escalation across the Taiwan Strait.”

This conclusion applies every bit as much to the UK Government, which generally takes the approach that the issue of Taiwan will quietly resolve itself and subsequently buries its head in the sand on the issue.

A revised UK policy towards Taiwan in the updated Integrated Review

Our report, “Ukraine Today, Taiwan Tomorrow”, highlighted the role the United Kingdom could play in building a credible deterrence. Meanwhile, our recent report, [‘Taiwan Respected’](#), looked at the legal reasons why the UK should respect the rights of the Taiwanese people to self-determination.

We argued that there needs to be as strong a diplomatic push to update the language of the United Kingdom’s relationship with Taiwan, with new words to reflect new realities, and which respects Taiwanese autonomy and right to self-determination.

It’s time for the UK to establish a coherent respectful policy towards Taiwan that reflects the reality of the situation Taiwan finds itself in today.

The core of ‘strategic ambiguity’ is the ‘acknowledge’/‘recognise’ axis. The UK Government will not and should not, at this time, risk a situation in which the PRC threatens to cut diplomatic

relations because the UK has unilaterally recognised the Republic of China or Taiwan. Such a move would benefit no party.

As we have seen, both 'recognise' and 'acknowledge' have specific and significant meanings in diplomatic relations and agreements between states, but it is possible for other words to be introduced that add more nuance to those parameters.

To that end, the Taiwan Policy Centre would advocate for the UK Government to rephrase its wording on its approach to the status of Taiwan as follows:

"The United Kingdom does not have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but the Government maintains a strong unofficial relationship based on dynamic commercial, educational, and cultural ties."

"The United Kingdom recognises that Taiwan has a complex historical relationship with its neighbours, which has left a number of unresolved cultural, legal, and constitutional legacies."

"The United Kingdom's respects the right of the Taiwanese people under international law to self-determination and believes that the future of Taiwan is matter for the Taiwanese people alone to decide without bribe, threat, or coercion from any other party."

"The United Kingdom will continue to engage with Taiwan on this basis and to work with our allies to promote Taiwan's participation in international organisations."

In this formulation, there is no change to UK policy towards Taiwan in terms of formally diplomatically recognising it by any name. This formulation does, however, respect Taiwan's self-determination, and it recognises the complexity of Taiwan's geopolitical situation. The penultimate sentence has the important function of identifying Taiwan's right to self-determination under international law.

As well as this rephrasing, there are other steps the UK Government could take to reinforce its position towards Taiwan. These include:

- **Nomenclature:** The U.K. Government should introduce rules to establish the 'correct' designation of Taiwan for use in all official communications. It should permit the Taipei Representative Office in the United Kingdom to rename itself either as the 'Taiwan Representative Office in the UK', or 'The Taiwanese Office', mirroring the name of the UK's British Office in Taiwan. This is a move similar to that undertaken recently by Lithuania.

The Government could also mandate that all public sector bodies replace any mention of Taiwan (Province of China) or 'Chinese Taipei' with 'Taiwan', on digital media and

paperwork that request country/territory information. It could also advise British-based businesses to make similar moves.

- **Protocol:** The UK Government should update rules for interactions between elected politicians between the UK and Taiwan to allow greater Government and Ministerial interaction, as other countries such as the USA already have.
- **Bureaucratic barriers:** Where Taiwanese citizens and diplomats experience bureaucratic barriers or obstacles as a result of the UK's lack of formal diplomatic relations, the UK Government should commit to doing everything possible to remove or lessen these barriers. Taiwanese diplomats should be granted diplomatic status in the UK and Taiwanese citizens and diplomats should be allowed to participate in domestic and international forums and events held in the UK under the name Taiwan or Taiwanese regardless of the opinions of delegates from other participating nations.
- **International Stage:** The Integrated Review committed the UK Government to defending the rights and democratic freedoms of people around the world. This must apply to Taiwan too, and the UK Government must campaign far more strenuously for Taiwan's participation (either in full or as an observer) in all international bodies where the 23 million citizens of Taiwan deserve representation.
- **Exchanges, Partnerships, Dependencies:** The UK government should seek to facilitate deeper exchanges and ties in education and business between institutions in Taiwan and the UK. At the same time, it should continue to be proactive about the UK's exposure to and dependency upon Chinese investment.

Conclusion

The update to the Integrated Reviews offers an ideal opportunity for the UK Government to correct the most glaring omission from the original document.

Members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee will be familiar with many of the issues around Taiwan from their dedicated sessions on the issue and recent visit to Taiwan.

If any further background information is needed, there are a range of briefing materials and other documents about Taiwan available on the [Taiwan Policy Centre website](#).

If there is one conclusion that the Committee reaches from its work on Taiwan and includes on this topic in its report on the update to the Integrated Review, it should be that the UK's current policy towards Taiwan is outdated, fails to address the current geo-political situation around Taiwan, and largely amounts to burying our heads in the sand on this issue.

The policy of strategic ambiguity is no longer a deterrent to the CCP when it comes to China. It is, therefore, time to follow the lead of allies like the USA and transition to a policy of strategic

clarity, whereby the UK is clear about its position on Taiwan and what action it will take in the event of a PRC invasion or blockade of Taiwan.

Both of the Taiwan Policy Centre's reports this year offer a recommended approach to this end. If the Committee requires any further information, the Taiwan Policy Centre would be more than happy to assist.

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