

## Written Evidence from Gray Sergeant (TIP0003)

### About the Author

Gray Sergeant is a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society's (HJS) Asia Studies Centre and Chair of Hong Kong Watch. He studied International Relations and History at the London School of Economics and went on to complete a Master's in the Politics of China at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Prior to joining HJS, he spent a year studying Mandarin in Taipei. His latest report 'Supporting Taiwan: A Calling for Global Britain' documents China's ongoing campaign to isolate and intimidate Taiwan, and outlines ways in which the rest of the liberal democratic world can counter such efforts.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

1. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has never ruled Taiwan, which is already an independent country, under the name the Republic of China (ROC). Whatever Beijing may claim, Taiwan possesses all the qualifications for statehood including a permanent population, a defined territory, government, and the capacity to enter relations with other states.<sup>2</sup>
2. Since the 1990s Taiwan has become a model liberal democracy. Freedom House has consistently scored Taiwan highly for both political rights and civil liberties. In 2021, the Economist Intelligence Unit singled out Taiwan as a "beacon for democracy in Asia".<sup>3</sup>
3. Extensive public opinion polling shows there is little to no desire amongst the Taiwanese public to be ruled by the PRC. In recent years there has been a steady decline in support for both immediate and eventual unification with China. While the preservation of the *status quo* remains the most popular choice support for independence has grown. Correspondingly, the percentage of people in Taiwan self-identifying as exclusively Taiwanese has reached record levels while the percentage of people identifying as Chinese has collapsed into single digits.<sup>4</sup>
4. The rhetoric from Beijing should not be overstated. The PRC's claim to Taiwan is longstanding and has been articulated by successive leaders. As too is the refusal to rule out the use of force, a position formalised in its 2005 Anti-Secession Law. Yet it is nevertheless concerning that Xi Jinping has tied the resolution of the Taiwan issue with his personal mission to rejuvenate the Chinese nation.<sup>5</sup>
5. The PRC has been developing its military with the taking of Taiwan, via force or coercion, in mind. The assessment of the United States (US) Department of Defense is that, falling short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan, the People's Liberation Army currently has the capabilities to impose an air or maritime blockade and successfully occupy Taiwan's offshore islands.

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<sup>1</sup> Sergeant, G., 'Supporting Taiwan: A Calling for Global Britain', *The Henry Jackson Society*, July 2021, available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/HJS-Supporting-Taiwan-Report-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 'Convention on Rights and Duties of States (inter-American); December 26, 1933', Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, available at: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/intam03.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp)

<sup>3</sup> 'Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health?', The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020, available at: <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>

<sup>4</sup> The Election Study Center at National Chengchi University has been polling on both these questions since the early 1990s. The findings of a 2020 survey showed the percentage of people advocating Taiwanese independence, if pressed to choose that or unification, had increased from 15.1% in 2018 to 27.7%. Those seeking unification accounted for 0.7%. The same poll found a record 67% of the population identifying as Taiwanese compared to 2.4% who considered themselves to be Chinese, please see: Po-hsuan, W. and Hetherington, W., 'Record number identify as "Taiwanese," poll finds', Taipei Times, 5 July 2020, available at: <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2020/07/05/2003739375>

<sup>5</sup> 'Highlights of Xi's speech at gathering marking 40th anniversary of Message to Compatriots in Taiwan', *Xinhua*, 2 January 2019, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/02/c\\_137715300.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/02/c_137715300.htm)

6. There are numerous reasons to suppose Beijing would not risk annexing Taiwan in the near future, least of all the fear of failure. Logistically, crossing the Strait will be difficult especially given the few landing sites available. The PLA will have to do this in the face of retaliations from the Taiwanese military and possibly an intervention from the US. Lastly, even if successful the PLA is likely to meet local resistance.
7. Since the re-election of President Tsai Ing-wen, in 2020, Beijing has stepped up the use of grey-zone tactics and shows of force to intimidate the Taiwanese people. Actions of this nature include incursions into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone by military aircraft, Chinese naval patrols, particularly along the main island's East coast, sand dredging around Matsu Island, and the sailing of aircraft carrier through the Strait.
8. The PRC has also used other mechanisms to punish the Tsai Administration. Since 2016, several of Taipei's few remaining, diplomatic allies have been enticed to switch recognition to Beijing. Meanwhile, Taiwan has seen its ability to contribute to international organisations narrow, with the country's ongoing exclusion from the World Health Organisation being the most notable example of this. Beijing has also sought to leverage Taiwan's economic dependency by restricting tourist trips there for PRC citizens and banning pineapple imports.
9. The future of Taiwan should be of concern to any country concerned with preserving the existing international order. Any attempt to take Taiwan using military force would be an affront to the principle of state sovereignty. It would also alter the balance of power in the Pacific which would both threaten Japan's security and give the PRC the ability to project its military further westwards. On the values front, the annexation of Taiwan would see a liberal democracy fall under the rule of an increasingly authoritarian regime. While, in terms of its impact on the global economy, the supply of critical semiconductors may be disrupted.
10. Despite Beijing's challenge to peace and stability across the Strait, Taiwan should not be viewed as a mere issue or problem, but a partner for a free and open Indo-Pacific and a fellow liberal democracy which has a lot to contribute to the rest of the international community.

### **Managing Cross-Strait Tensions**

11. The UK should not make commitments that are not credible. Any third-party intervention against an attempted invasion of Taiwan by the PRC would be US-led. Moreover, it should be remembered that, despite encouraging pro-Taiwan signals from both the Trump and Biden Administrations, the US's policy on this matter remains one of strategic ambiguity.
12. The UK's enhanced presence in the Indo-Pacific is conducive to Taiwan's security. The Royal Navy should continue freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and cooperation with the Japanese military as both signal opposition to PRC revisionism.
13. To deter and punish Chinese aggression against Taiwan the UK should:
  - a) **Directly call out China for its intimidating rhetoric and military manoeuvres.** Phrases, currently used by ministers, such as "any activity" and "all sides" give the impression both Taiwan and China are equally responsible for cross-Strait tensions at this moment in time.
  - b) **Publicly and privately urge Chinas to show restraint.** This includes putting an end to current grey-zone tactics. Recent joint statements, by amongst others the G7, have been welcome - but like UK ministerial statements, lack directness.
  - c) **Work with allies to prepare economic sanctions against China.** In the event of a Chinese invasion or economic blockade of Taiwan there should be coordinated sanctions against individuals and entities within the PRC. The scale of these sanctions, whilst remaining credible, should be large enough to disrupt the Chinese economy and thus threaten the Chinese Communist Party's rule.

- d) **Non-recognition of Chinese sovereignty.** If China takes Taiwan without the consent of the Taiwanese people it should be regarded as unacceptable. As such the UK government should not accept or recognise, and vow never to recognise, Chinese rule over Taiwan.

### **Strengthening Bi-lateral Relations and Supporting Taiwan**

14. The UK's "One China" policy is not the same as Beijing's "One China" principle. Rather than agreeing to China's claim to Taiwan. Britain, like other liberal democratic governments, merely acknowledges Beijing's position.<sup>6</sup> No attempt should be made to revise this position to bring it closer in line with the "One China" principle.
15. Bi-lateral relations between the UK and Taiwan, while still unofficial, have become more normal since the 1993 with the opening of the British Trade and Cultural Office, renamed in 2015 the British Office Taipei. Over the past thirty years the UK and Taiwan have developed stronger economic, cultural and people-to-people ties.
16. The UK's distinct "One China" policy and current ties with Taiwan should be better known across Whitehall departments to prevent policymakers from misspeaking or acting over cautiously when it comes to interacting with Taiwan and Taiwanese officials.
17. Developing UK-Taiwan ties further does not appear to be a question of resources. Obviously, China's position, and London's desire to maintain good relations with Beijing, is the factor which most restricts progress. As such the Foreign Office should avoid sending to Taiwan top officials with extensive experience in the PRC, who may have internalised a desire not to upset Beijing. The Representative of the British Office in Taipei, the UK's *de facto* ambassador, should be solely focused on promoting bi-lateral exchanges. The 2009 decision to lift visa requirements for short-term visitors from Taiwan, which took three years to be adopted due to internal fears of upsetting China, shows the need for determined leadership in Taipei.
18. On a wider level the UK government should take steps to enhance bi-lateral relations and in turn support Taiwan in the face of growing Chinese pressure. These actions need not overturn the UK's existing "One China" policy as many of them merely emulate other liberal democracies, who themselves have unofficial relations with Taiwan. These include:
  - a) **Loosen self-imposed restrictions on who can interact with Taiwanese officials.** The US and Japan have shown that even at the highest-level communication with Taiwan can happen. In the spirit of friendship, the prime minister and the foreign secretary should be more forthcoming in sending messages to Taiwan's leaders, to congratulate them on election victories, send condolences following natural disasters, and, as in the case of Taiwan's mask donations in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, thank them for assistance.
  - b) **Send a cabinet-level minister on a fact-finding mission to Taiwan.** While the UK has sent minister to Taiwan since the 1990s nobody higher than a Minister of State has visited from the UK government, despite the US doing so on numerous occasions. London could replicate Washington's most recent example by sending the Secretary of State for Health to learn about Taiwan's successful efforts in handling the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following that cabinet-level visits should become routine.

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<sup>6</sup> 'China (Exchange of Ambassadors): Volume 833: debated on Monday 13 March 1972', Hansard, UK Parliament, available at: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1972-03-13/debates/503bd4a8-3e89-4685-994f-2ba6fe0e0188/China\(ExchangeOfAmbassadors\)?highlight=taiwan#contribution-d18e975e-2e93-4dd9-b9b9-18101b0790d1](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1972-03-13/debates/503bd4a8-3e89-4685-994f-2ba6fe0e0188/China(ExchangeOfAmbassadors)?highlight=taiwan#contribution-d18e975e-2e93-4dd9-b9b9-18101b0790d1)

- c) **Work with allies to ensure Taiwan's participation in international organisations.** Such efforts should be aligned to Taiwan's own priorities, chiefly observer status at the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the WHO, as well as participation in the International Civil Aviation Organization and Interpol. Not only are these more obtainable, than full UN membership for example, but would provide Taiwan with both critical information affecting the well-being their citizens and the ability to contribute to the global good. If Taiwanese representatives continue to be excluded, then UK officials should meet with them publicly at side-meetings before and after main meetings.
- d) **Become a leading participant in the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF).** Recent engagement by officials from the British Office Taipei in this relatively new international forum is welcome. The GCTF, being Taiwan, Japan and US-led, provides a useful platform for discussing issues free from Beijing's veto. The UK has already co-hosted two workshops on disaster relief and Covid-19 vaccinations. Such efforts should be increased and sustained.
- e) **Explore ways to boost bi-lateral trade and support Taiwan's participation in the Comprehensive and Progress Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.** This is particularly important as Taiwan seeks to reduce its own economic dependency on China, at a time when Beijing is using its influence to exclude Taiwan from regional trading blocs and prevent other countries from signing free trade agreements (FTA). As well as exploring measures to enhance bi-lateral trade, the UK should formally agree to exploratory talks for an FTA with Taiwan. Aside from economic benefits, a deal would also allow Taipei to demonstrate its *de facto* independence and London its commitment to Britain's role as an outward looking, free trading nation in the post-Brexit era.

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