



India's Interest Driven Engagement Across the Taiwan Strait: Prospects for Soft Security Exchanges



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Abstract

Given the geopolitical reflex in the Indo-Pacific region, tensions across the Taiwan Strait is an interesting case to observe that compels any country to rethink power politics in the current interdependent world. As each side (China, Taiwan, and the US) asserts their interests in the Taiwan Strait, how to mitigate this tense state of affairs and avoid a potential Taiwan Strait crisis has been under intense scrutiny. Central focus is now shifted to the role, response, and dilemmas of other leading regional security players. Within the ambit of India's foreign policy, its stands and signals have been least understood or often misunderstood, even by its close security partners. In particular, ambiguity around India's 'interest based selective security engagement' with China and, at the same

Key Points

- India's strategic stance with respect to the changing cross-strait relations and China's rise, is quite balanced and moderate.
- India does not see Taiwan as a 'geopolitical card' against China; however, renewing soft security exchanges with Taiwan appears to be a much calculated and a natural move based on New Delhi's assessment of Taipei's increasing economic role in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Beijing's continued misadventures and unilateral actions, along the LAC and in the Indian Ocean Region, have compelled New Delhi to talk straight about militarisation of the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.
- On a related note, India's silence on China's "One China Principle" has been consistent with China's views on India's sensitivities.



time, limited soft security exchanges with Taiwan (Official Name: Republic of China {ROC}), requires renewed focus.

Prologue

In this deeply interconnected and heavily commercialised global order, Taiwan continues to remain an enigma for policymaking and diplomacy. Taiwan has been engaging with the world in profoundly ‘politicised norms based’ interactions imposed on it due to the supposed normalisation in US-China relations; thus, it presented limited options for Taiwan to expand its international space and participate in the Indo-Pacific balance. China’s President Xi Jinping appears to have strong determination towards the “Chinese Dream” – the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. Out of two stated goals[†] focussing on four comprehensives[‡] of the “Chinese Dream” [中国梦: *Zhōngguó Mèng*], the “(re)unification” [中国统一: *Zhōngguó tǒngyī*] of Taiwan is a more potent goal [case] to study for a spectrum of geopolitical consensus and norms. In response to political developments and geopolitical moves, China’s temptation to ‘use force’ to “liberate” appears strong, potentially triggering a cross-strait crisis. It is noteworthy to mention that Xi Jinping’s China has taken a sharp turn by dropping the word ‘Peaceful’ from “Peaceful National Unification” as also the keenness to use ‘soft hand, hard hand’ techniques.¹

Within this context, there appears less possibility for leading Indo-Pacific countries to have a high level security interactions with both sides [China and Taiwan] simultaneously. Agreeing that it is hard to undo past policies, in the absence of some unprecedented changes in the status quo, however, it does not mean that there is limited or no scope for creating something new. New developments in the Taiwan Strait, particularly political ones, seems like an attempt to change the conventional status quo. If India avoids association with such events, then, there will be greater scope for interaction with Taiwan as well as China separately.

[†] China’s two centenary goals are “moderately well-off society” by 2021 – the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and “developed nation” by about 2049, – the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

[‡] Four comprehensives are building a ‘moderately prosperous society’, ‘deepen reform’, ‘govern the country according to the law’, and ‘strict governance of the Party’.

This paper aims to correlate and draw a parallel of long employed ‘selective’ diplomatic measures with specific foreign policy tools that fits the ambiguous cross-strait relations. Taking the current scenario into account, tracking renewed stands and signalling, are useful to understand the strengths and limits of specific diplomatic methods, like persuasion, concessions, and maintaining open communication channels. At the same time, selective security engagement indicates a clear posture, consistent approach, and space for interpretations in larger foreign policy. This focused approach attempts to trace how far India’s engagements qualifies as ‘silent but active diplomacy’ in the virtue of intensified active power politics. From a strategic viewpoint, India is a bystander across the Taiwan Strait, but its selective response becomes relevant especially when bilateral relations with China are passing through a strained phase, and the prolonged absence of formal relations with Taiwan stands out as a key element to frame and exploit India’s interest driven interactions across the Taiwan Strait.

Irrelevant History in Geopolitics

History’s continued relevance asserts its strong foundation on intellectual origins and development of geopolitical thought — unfortunately, such broad acceptance makes other emerging variables somewhat destined to be irrelevant. In the rapidly evolving world, being fixated on a ‘constructed past’ would be challenging to ‘accept change’, ‘maintain consistency’ and, more importantly, ‘be relevant’. Varied interests are compelling reasons [variable] for flexibility and rigidity. In this era of transition, the Chinese Communist elite firmly believes in bringing back the centrality of ‘the Middle Kingdom’ and believes that China has to defend itself in the ‘anti-encirclement struggle’[§] imposed on it by competing regional and extra-regional players^{2,3}. As pressure mounts on China to engage with the international community in responsible and reasonable ways, the Chinese leadership contemplation ponders on their civilisational history – which has been a great source of inspiration. For the current leadership, ‘changing the order of the day’ may seem reasonable to achieve their strategic goals, but undoubtedly a challenging endeavour for consolidating hemispheric dominance and “take centre stage in the world”.⁴ As a result, pursuing revisionist intentions



and hegemonic aspirations through expansionist policies, have become very much part of China's global strategy.⁵

Apart from the celebrated civilisational links and troubled past, what matters most is being 'relevant', 'mutual respect' for others (domestic) sensitivities, and 'willingness' to forgo past and 'engage' in meaningful dialogue.⁶ As Beijing loses sight of how its determination and actions, to attain historical greatness, impact others' interests, it is bound to face resistance from concerned parties. For instance, India is often viewed as a habituated spectator in geopolitics; in contrast, it has stepped up to respond by keeping its strategic silence aside. Such a phenomenon is not limited to China's rise but also applies to any revisionist power. As we have seen in the case of Finland and Sweden, which are traditionally neutral states of Europe, even at the height of the supposed Cold War, they have broken the norm with their decision to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in response to Russian military advance into Ukraine.⁷ Indeed, it makes sense that unilateral actions, based on historical fantasy, could move bystanders to take a position in which they have little interest otherwise.

Though often 'overcited' in the world of politics and diplomacy, the expression that "*there are no permanent enemies, and no permanent friends, only permanent interests*"⁸ fits perfectly into the India - China - Taiwan equation. Under this prism, each state is entitled to choose their own path and pursue their interest in international politics.⁹ However, it is interesting to note as to whether states have the luxury to pursue their interests or their choices are bound by geography when their interests conflicts actively with neighbours' interests. Contextualising these issues, this section attempts to relook at some tools of silent diplomacy.

The interest driven foreign policy continues to hold its ground in diplomacy. Its relevance has been reflected in India-China, India-Taiwan, and China-Taiwan formats. An external policy, central to a historical and ideological position, has gradually lost relevance.¹⁰ An external approach based on pragmatism, non-confrontational position, cooperative engagement, and respect for domestic sensitivities may sound idealist. However, it is also well known that the consequence of not subscribing to the above factors will bring about tensions in the neighbourhood like happened with India on its stance on Russia-Ukraine conflict. Perhaps,



India has taken notes from Chinese classical realism, which essentially is about ‘avoiding’ direct conflicts and ‘engaging’ in security exchanges with each side, thereby picking the gains without putting up too much in a fight. Besides, India have not lost interest in sticking to the independent path in external relations, instead, such independent policy finds relevance in its foreign policy orientation of multi-alignment that is aligning its interest with multiple sides rather than aligning itself with any side.

As conventional wisdom suggests, in an anarchical international system, no power fights for anybody, therefore each nation is bound to protect and promote its own national interest and save its backyard. For New Delhi, finding a middle path seems compelling — avoiding being an outright enabler or disabler to those causing changes in the conventional status quo and also, at the same time, ensure that its own interests are not compromised. The strategic environment of the Taiwan Strait, accompanied by events highly motivated by domestic politics, appeals less to India. Therefore, moderate external schemes such as employing soft sanctions, revising trade agreements, continuing soft security exchanges (collecting information and gathering intelligence), maintaining select security engagements, and improving soft power capabilities have greater scope for new engagements with each side.

Distinguish between Political and Security Moves

India considers recent developments across the Taiwan Strait as largely politically driven, such as the visit of Nancy Pelosi — Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Taiwan’s Reception, and China’s response with military drills. A strong link could be drawn between Pelosi’s visit and the midterm elections in the US.¹¹ In contrast, the White House opinion conveniently argues that individual legislative leaders’ visits to contested areas do not necessarily represent or convey formal status.

For President Xi Jinping, saving face in front of the domestic audience is important as the upcoming October Congress of the CPC is slated to nominate the General Secretary of the Party.¹² Out of the two political norms, Xi removed term limits in 2018, getting nominated by Party, thus making way for him to become President for the third term in a row. On the other hand, China’s military exercises and live fire drills are seen as a form of military protest.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's 'willing' reception of US and other foreign leaders under President Tsai Ing-wen [from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)] is characteristically a political move, which is in sharp contrast to former President Ma Ying-jeou's [of the Kuomintang (KMT)] act of shaking hands with Xi Jinping in Singapore (2016). The nature of domestic politics in Taiwan is that DPP has a strong inclination towards improving external ties and increasing Taiwan's international space as opposed to KMT which leans toward 'unification' and follows the 1992 *consensus* with China.¹³

India's official response to events in the Taiwan Strait and its stand over the 'One China Policy' is consistent. India follows a consistent approach of having a 'non-confrontational' foreign policy posture towards external issues; thus, it frames non-conflicting views on tensions. Even if India intends to make a strong statement, it has to factor in bilateral equations and geopolitics. At the Weekly Media Briefing of the Ministry of External Affairs Shri Arindam Bagchi, the Official Spokesperson responded along the same lines to a question by a reporter from Xinhua News agency (Beijing) insisting on India's 'comment' and 'position' on the Taiwan Strait crisis.¹⁴

India's comment on tensions in Taiwan Straits were:

"We urge the exercise of restraint, avoidance of unilateral actions to change the status quo, de-escalation of tensions and efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region".

On 'One China Policy':

"India's relevant policies are well known and consistent. They do not require reiteration".¹⁵

India, although is very much aware of the politics surrounding Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and China's military exercises as a response, however, it does not see the move as detrimental to its own security or economic interests. Purely, the action from the US side and reaction from China's side is highly motivated by domestic constituencies. Thus, we see no proactive offer of dialogue or mediation, if not an active engagement, to call for stability from India.



India's 'spectator position' in the Taiwan Strait and maritime Northeast Asia has some advantages, as it gives enough time to keenly observe and distinguish between political and security moves. If the consequences of any temporal move, by one security actor, is brief and does not change the status quo, then India has the luxury of maintaining strategic silence. But, when an event adversely impacts India's security and economic interests, India should rightfully signal its dissatisfaction over 'unwanted' developments and reemphasise the targeted stands. India has occasionally, with reasonable diplomatic protest, signalled its opposition with any power who attempted to change the status quo.¹⁶

Select Security Engagement with China

Although there is merits in looking at each type of event, relation, and action independently, however, it is a fact that an action does not exist ideally but follows a series of precedents. The same applies to the nature and meaning of India's stands and signals towards China, Taiwan and vice versa. China's course of events & actions and associated behaviour are always reflected in India's stands and signals to Taiwan. A dose of history would help form a perspective. Ample evidence have been found in India's statements supporting this argument — India restrained from supporting Chiang Kai-shek's attempts to form an anti-Communist coalition against the PRC at the highest political level.

Further, India was proactive in recognising the PRC as the legitimate government on 01 April 1950 and brokering United Nations membership.¹⁷ The signal given in favour of the PRC and detachment from the Republic of China (ROC) is interesting to note. Even in current times, India continued the precedent by inviting China and Russia to the Indo-Pacific format at Shangri-La Dialogue and in Russia-India-China (RIC) consultations¹⁸ — it has not tried to distance itself or cosy up too much with China.

The ideas of global order have been in flux since the post Cold War. Deep rooted changes are a reflection of key geopolitical trends vis. the Asian Century, the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific, and China's 'New Ear'.¹⁹ Unlike the rules-based order, the 'interest based order' became a mirror of such reality. In contrast to China's official narratives of solidarity with the developing world, its sympathy towards an 'interest based order' starts with the criticism of 'rules-based international order' concerning the Pax Americana. On the bottom line, China,

too, has a soft corner for ‘rules-based order’ as it benefits from the choices of powerful states. However, Beijing has conflicting views, particularly its disregard for the ‘liberal international order’, which is inherently part of the ‘Global North’ philosophy.²⁰ The Beijing Consensus [北京共识: *Běijīng gòngshì*]^{**} is all about who should decide, rule and lead the general norms of the global order. For China, the question of Taiwan, including the South China Sea, is linked to the monolithic international order’s²¹ political and social development regimes^{††}.

Earlier silent stands of New Delhi, over events across the Taiwan Strait, could be understood from this viewpoint — the ‘studied’ silence over Taiwan Crisis.²² India is a leading stakeholder in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region. Out of 60 percent of maritime trade and 22 percent of global trade, one-third of global shipping passes through the SCS; India, thus, has significant economic and security interests in the region. If the place of tensions were above, in such a scenario, one may expect more from India. Rightly so, it is essential to note that post the Galwan clash, India deployed a warship to the SCS.

Moreover, India’s take on the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka — Qi Zhenhong’s ‘ill-informed and controversial remarks’ over alleged India’s pressure on Sri Lanka to deny China’s ballistic missile and satellite tracking ship’s docking facility at Hambantota Port, are few examples which justifies India’s clear stand as far as its national security is concerned. Interestingly, this is the first of its kind wherein the Indian mission took a stand far beyond their mandate, referred to other diplomats, related two different events or commented on pure geopolitics. The response was that China’s “Opaqueness and debt driven agendas are now a major challenge, especially for smaller nations” ... “militarisation of the Taiwan Strait”.²³

^{**} Three principles of Beijing Consensus are: (i) high degree of control for the state over market forces; (ii) political, financial and military autonomy or self-determination from external pressure; (iii) leading role of the party in China.

^{††} According to Johnston (2019) current international order is monolithic and comprised of multitude of regimes, such as constitutive, military, political development, social development, trade, financial, environmental, and information. China highly contests two out the eight orders.



Soft Security Engagements with Taiwan

New Delhi does not see tensions in the Taiwan Strait as an opportunity to develop formal relations with Taipei. On one hand, taking a firm stand on tensions in Taiwan Strait may enhance the trust of other security partners, in the region, on India, on the other hand, it also means that India will be engaging with China in a 'new' and 'least experienced' (Pacific) theatre. Meanwhile, being a bystander stakeholder, a military conflict in Taiwan Strait will have consequences for India's economic interests in Northeast Asia. For India, stability in the Taiwan Strait has a place in its national interest^{††} for various reasons. Conflict in the Strait will impact the freedom of navigation, international trade, and supply chains. More importantly, the Strait is in direct proximity to two theatres of China's maritime conflict vis. the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The above factors may have caused India to avoid discussion or issue a joint statement on tensions in the Taiwan Strait during the Quad meet, while the other three urged China to 'cease military exercises' on the margins of the 55th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Cambodia (2022).

With an independent stand and a balanced approach during the Cold War, India has learnt lessons on when to warm up and when to react with respect to countries in question. Specific to this event, warming up with the US, China, or Taiwan is unnecessary. Instead, India's focus is limited to taking notes on China's offensive capabilities concerning airspace control, blockade, sea target assault, and strike on ground targets. Moreover, India is keen to observe how China's territorial and sovereign claims play out to shape the national mood in US, China and Taiwan.

In contrast, India gave visible signals to US, China and Taiwan via three major incidents wherein its economic and security interests were at stake. *First*, India's subscription to the 'Indo-Pacific' format during the peak of US-China economic decoupling; *second*, post non-violent clashes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC)^{§§}; and *third*, the first violent clash at the

^{††} Economic security is essential part of national security interests, it is best served when a country considers economic security as the core element of national security strategy.

^{§§} The 2017 Doklam Standoff [June -August], 2020 Pangong Tso Incident [May – July], and 2021 Sikkim Minor Clash [January].

Galwan 2022 since the 1975 ambush.^{***} These reference points explain India's strategic viewpoint about Taiwan and its role in India-China relations. Bilateral relations with China have been a common denominator for India's 'clear and consistent' stands & signals to Taiwan and vice-versa.

India established the India-Taipei Association in Taipei in 1995, and Taiwan has the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC) in India. Besides, Taiwan regularly sends 'unofficial' military attaches to the TECC²⁴, and in reciprocity, India often sends senior military officers with regular passports. India undertakes regular parliamentary delegation visits and legislature-level dialogue with Taiwan, which was suspended in 2017. India has dedicated a street named Sun Yat-sen, the ROC Father of Nation, in Kolkata.²⁵ India had also sent Joint Secretary Gourangalal Das, a 'career' diplomat posted at the US division, to Taiwan amidst tension at the LAC.²⁶

India's trade, of about USD 600 billion, passes through the Strait. The diversification of its supply chains from China is very slow. India depends on the region for a range of products for which there is no immediate viable alternative, domestically or elsewhere.

Figure 01: India's top Export and Import Destinations in Northeast Asia (in USD Billions)

Exports	Imports	Total Trade Northeast Asia	Imports from Taiwan in Per cent	Imports from China in Per cent
US: 76.11	China: 94.16	China: 115	Electronics :27	Electronics: 32
China: 21.25	US: 43.31	Hong Kong: 34	Plastic :17	Nuclear machinery: 35
Hong Kong: 13.7	NA	Taiwan: 5.7	Nuclear reactors: 17	Vehicle parts: 25
		Japan: 15	Chemicals: 15	Medical tools: 11
		South Korea: 20	Iron & steel: 4	
		North Korea: 194(M)		
		Russian: 13		
		US: 119		

Source: Prepared by the Author using available data from the World Bank and CIA World Factbook

^{***}The last reported casualties of Indian soldiers in clash was in 1975, excluding the accidents. For additional information refer link: <https://theprint.in/india/1975-arunachal-ambush-the-last-time-indian-soldiers-died-in-clash-with-china-at-lac/442674/> .



Tensions in the region would considerably impact India's top exports from Northeast Asia. This rationale has favoured the reorientation of India's supply chain diversification by balancing imports and exports from China and Taiwan. Considering Taiwan's increasing role in supply chain management related to critical technologies, India started talks with Taiwan for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in December 2021 as part of India's Act East Policy. In contrast, concerns over the high volume of India's trade deficit with China compelled them to stall talks in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement in November 2019.

Meanwhile, there are other alternative markets for Indian exports. It is hence, premature to expect India to take a stand on the Taiwan Strait. However, in a hypothetical situation, regarding serious tensions in the Strait, one may expect India to take an approach that suits its interests. In comparison, Indian exports have found a place in Africa and Europe after the Russian advances into Ukraine. India has taken a relatively strong stand on protecting its energy interests against the US and Europe's wish to reduce energy imports from Russia.

China's suspension of military dialogue and security talks with the US²⁷, may provide India with an opportunity to increase its dialogue with the US on supply chain management, military exercises, and climate change. Furthermore, India's silence on Taiwan is driven by its commitment to settle disputes with Beijing; it also serves as a message that New Delhi is least interested in taking advantage of the crisis. As India shows confidence and priority in resolving outstanding disputes bilaterally and has been modest towards China's sensitivities, in return, Beijing should reciprocate instead of considering India's position a weakness.

Not taking a firm stand does not mean India is 'sitting on the fence', instead it sends a strong signal to parties involved showing India's discomfort about tensions. By taking a stand in favour of US action, Taiwan's reception or China's reaction, India can gain geopolitically, but the gains will be momentary. This posture explains India's serious attitude towards limiting the spill over of bilateral disagreements to other events.

India's Position: Between Stands and Signals

Knowing the difference between the 'One China Principle' and 'One China Policy' is important. From China's perspective, the 'Principle' has three conditions: PRC claims

sovereignty over Taiwan; considers it as the legitimate territory of China; and countries shall not maintain diplomatic relations with the ROC/Taiwan and PRC simultaneously.²⁸ As per China, when any country establishes diplomatic relations with PRC, it is understood that they follow the 'One China Policy' that is abiding all the three conditions. These provisions are aimed at effectively limiting Taiwan's international space and outreach.

Though, India maintains a position of itself, the US position ventures into a larger geopolitical context. Under the Three Communiqués (1972, 1979, and 1982), important formal acknowledgements of the US are: **(a)**, "all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China"; **(b)** the US 'recognizes' the government of the PRC as the sole legal government of China, and 'acknowledges' the PRC's position that Taiwan is part of China; and **(c)** the end of formal political relations with ROC/Taiwan, but non-political relations would be improved with both the sides and as far as the US arms sale to Taiwan is concerned, it would depend on the PRC's political and military posture towards Taiwan.

At the same time, under the 'Taiwan Relations Act' (1979)^{†††} and the Six Assurances (1982),^{†††} the US sell arms and defence systems to Taiwan with a long term aim of keeping Taiwan prepared to defend itself when (if) China attempts to 'reunify' it by 'use of force'. It is important to note that nowhere in the Three Communiques or in the 'Taiwan Relations Act' or the Six Assurances drafts, have mentioned the formal guarantee that the US would intervene militarily if China takes military action against Taiwan.

Former US Deputy Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, explained to the US Senate in a hearing that *"[W]e regard the English text as the binding text. We regard the word 'acknowledge' as the word that is determinative for the US"*. Thus, the US created strategic ambiguity in support of the status quo.²⁹

^{†††} This Act has background of multiple clarifications, out of which two administrations are important, the Reagan administration clarified through the Act that it offers [no] formal reorganising on PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan; and the Clinton clarified the non-binding nature, and declare the US would favour the "Taiwan Relations Act" over the three communiques had there been a confusion.

^{†††} "...[W]e did not agree to set a date certain for ending arms sales to Taiwan";

"...[W]e see no mediation role for the United States" between Taiwan and the PRC;

"...[N]or will we attempt to exert pressure on Taiwan to enter into negotiations with the PRC";

"...[T]here has been no change in our longstanding position on the issue of sovereignty over Taiwan";

"We have no plans to seek" revisions to the Taiwan Relations Act; and the August 17 Communiqué provides clarity that provisions of Act "should not be read to imply that we have agreed to engage in prior consultations with Beijing on arms sales to Taiwan".

India hardly attempted to recognise ROC as China since 1949. At the same time, India did not completely close engagement channels with Taiwan, which the PRC claims have 'rightful' ownership. The reason why India's stand has been open to interpretation is because its actions are in line with the 'One China Policy' but, at the same time, do not completely legitimise China's claims at any stage of 'bonhomie' (1950-1962), a 'Cold War freeze' (1962-1976), and 'diplomatic normalisation' (post 1976 to 2020).³⁰

Meanwhile, it has to be noted that, during the normalisation of relations, China repeatedly insisted on three conditions: *first*, 'the Indian official accounts should desist from depicting China as a threat'; *second*, 'India should not evolve diplomatic relations with Taiwan'; and *third*, 'the Indian media's coverage of China should be regulated'. It made sense for India to send positive signals to China and the Indian bureaucracy on two conditions, however, the constitutional constraints of India on the freedom of speech forced the government not to agree on the third condition.

China, however, insisted on following the three conditions post India's nuclear test in 1998 and during the visit of 1999 External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. China considers that it has failed to push India to regulate its media, but, in recent times, Beijing has become innovative on the third point. It has placed a special spokesperson at the Chinese Embassy in India to push its narrative and buy space for Chinese Government advertisements in Indian print media.

India fundamentally differs from the 'One China Policy'— China's policy interpretation also extends to sovereignty claims over Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. On a related note, Shaksgam Valley in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir was ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963. In comparison, Taiwan has a somewhat mixed response to border disputes — Taipei in the past openly rejected India's official reference to the McMahon Line³¹, once during the 1962 India-China conflict and then in 1995 while responding to India's deceleration of granting statehood to Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. Comments by Ambassador Pei-yin Teng to India in 1995 was the last Taiwan official reference to cartographic disputes.

The statements by Ministers of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the 'One China Policy' could be of particular interest as these explain the current thinking and reasoning behind such a posture. India's silence on the 'One China Policy' roughly started with China's statements on Arunachal Pradesh post-2008 general elections. Shri Pranab Mukherjee, had twice rejected China's claims and the 'One China Policy' in 2008 and 2010³² when China stapled visa stickers on Kashmiri's Indian Passports. In 2014, to Foreign Minister Wang Yi's emphasis on 'One China', MEA minister Shri Sushma Swaraj responded that China should also adopt the 'One India Policy'. Subramaniam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, has been silent on the 'One China Policy'. His two responses may lend some clarity and perfectly fit the current situation. India-China bilateral relations should be "sensitive to each other's core concerns"; and "China is well aware of India's consistent and clear position on this issue".³³

Assessment

In places wherein India's external interests faces conflicting sides, de-hyphenation means have to be explored rather than falling into confinement by adopting non-political means. In the soft security engagement model, the focus should be on non-binding meetings with government-to-government interaction. Though, external mediation is not an option, however, China would appreciate it particularly with respect to Taiwan's status. Traditionally, India, too, had expressed discomfort over the idea of mediation. The under-explored and under-exploited 'trilateral quiet diplomacy' could be a new start and make a case for India's interests across the Taiwan Strait. Testing and employing interest driven diplomacy would give a new context to India's aspirations for non-confrontational engagements in the Indo-Pacific. The results may positively contribute to outstanding bilateral disputes with China. If that is not the case, then improvement in soft security engagement with Taiwan itself could be seen as settling a score.

If we look back into a decade of bilateral relations between India and China, then we might think as to how were they perceived in the international system? The assessment suggests that, the nature of engagement between India and China is viewed as competing security players at home and cooperating overseas. The soft-security multilateral cooperation and coordination level between India and China significantly improved post-1962 conflict.

Multilateral coordination in the ADB (1966), RIC (2001), BRICS (2009), AIIB (2014), the Paris Agreement (2016), and the SCO (2017) are all examples of their energised multilateral cooperation.

Has China lost one of its key multilateral partners – India? Indeed, regular standoffs at the LAC are prime examples of looking for answers. They have adversely impacted the long-established multilateral partnership. However, India's outlook of a long-term strategic view of their multilateral partnership has not faded off completely.

India and China have cooperated, despite their differences and disagreements. India's stand on the 'One China Principle' is abstract, dynamic and open to interpretation. India's position over the 'One China Policy' has been kept on hold until China clarifies its 'One India Policy'. For Taiwan, India has signalled to China that tensions in LAC may affect China's interests elsewhere. Therefore, the state of bilateral relations with China will have an undeniable influence on India's position. Strengthening relations with Taiwan is a strong signal to China that it [China] has to respect India's sensitivities. From a political point of view, Nancy Pelosi's visit may be significant, but India will maintain its moderate posture towards tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

End Notes

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