



Report



EU-PACIFIC TALKS: TAIWAN AND THE SECURITY DIMENSION – LESSONS LEARNED, INDO- PACIFIC CONTAINMENT

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Introduction

During the first debate of the third season of the **EU-Pacific Talks**, hosted by the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, participants engaged in a lively debate encompassing various aspects of Taiwan's position, its implications for the Indo-Pacific region, and the potential for escalation involving multiple actors. The panellists discussed the economic, military, and value-driven reasons behind Taiwan's significance, addressing concerns about China's approach and lessons to be drawn from other global conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine.

Taiwan's Importance

Taiwan's geographical location in the Western Pacific Ocean, positioned at the crossroads of the East and South China Sea, has significant strategic implications. Taiwan holds a vital significance for China on several fronts, as it is perceived as an indispensable part of Chinese territory, with China firmly committed to its eventual reunification. The acquisition of Taiwan would not only fortify China's territorial integrity but also strengthen its strategic standing in the Western Pacific, affording it the potential to expand its military influence throughout the region. Beyond territorial and strategic considerations, the Taiwan conflict embodies an ideological clash between the autocratic governance of the Chinese Communist Party and the vibrant democracy and political freedoms championed by Taiwan.

The Battle of Values

The ideological battle between China and Taiwan represents a fundamental clash of values, with democracy, human rights, and national identity at the centre. In that sense, the proponents of democratic values, such as the European Union, Japan and the United States, often support Taiwan to counterbalance China's influence and to promote their vision of a liberal world order.

In the battle of values, the United States and European nations have strongly and publicly endorsed Taiwan. However, as **Jonas Parello-Plesner**, the Executive Director of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, argues, such support falls short of what is needed. He believes European countries should learn from the Ukraine war and not underestimate deterring China from any escalation, showing that the path Putin took led to economic consequences and international isolation. Due to China's effort to become a prominent geopolitical actor, international isolation caused by any escalation could be an effective deterrent.

China-Taiwan Complex

Delving into the dynamics of the relationship between China and Taiwan, **Bonji Ohara**, a Senior Fellow in the Security Studies Program at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, provides a perspective on the multifaceted nature of bilateral relations between China and Taiwan. Taiwan's stance on unification with China, as he notes, needs to be more one-dimensional. While most of the Taiwanese population opposes unification with the mainland, they also recognise the importance of not becoming completely isolated. This highlights their pragmatic approach, understanding that a degree of engagement with China is essential for their economic well-being and prospects. The interconnection between economic ties and the pursuit of a stable future underscores the difficult balancing act that Taiwan must navigate.

Furthermore, Mr. Ohara underscores the ever-present threat of conflict in the region. The ongoing tension and potential for conflict have been a constant backdrop for many Taiwanese citizens. This environment has shaped their perspectives, leading a significant portion of the population to believe that a full-scale invasion by China is not a realistic option. It showcases the resilience and adaptability of the Taiwanese people in the face of enduring geopolitical pressure.

Shared Security Challenges

Justyna Szczudlik, Deputy Head of Research and China Analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, has presented a thoughtful perspective on de-escalating the conflict. Her insights delve into the complexities of the situation, highlighting the interconnectedness of Indo-Pacific and European security while underscoring the striking similarities in the threats posed by China-Russia cooperation. One of the key elements of Ms. Szczudlik's approach is the call for increased awareness regarding the interplay between security in the Indo-Pacific and Europe and the interdependence of the regions in addressing security challenges. An especially compelling aspect of Ms. Szczudlik's analysis is her observation that the United States serves as a common security guarantor in both the Indo-Pacific and Europe. This shared reliance on the U.S. as a security provider underscores the need for a coordinated international response to mitigate the security risks emanating from this collaboration.

Moreover, Ms. Szczudlik raises significant concerns regarding the potential escalation of the conflict. Her focus on Central Europe's vulnerability to any military escalation, such as a naval or air blockade, underscores the profound consequences such actions could have. The disruption of global supply chains and trade stands out as a critical concern. In particular, the halt of trade could jeopardise the timely delivery of medications from Taiwan to Europe, posing a direct risk to public health in the region.