

# Allies in the Making: India's Strategic Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific Strategy

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*This research explores and analyzes India's evolving strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the context of increasing Chinese assertiveness and global geopolitical shifts. The current geopolitical landscape, marked by Chinese activities along the Indian border, in the Taiwan Strait, and throughout the Indo-Pacific, underscores the urgent need for cooperation among like-minded nations on regional and global issues. Central to this study is examining the significant transformations in India's foreign policy since the 1990s. This includes an analysis of the Look East Policy as India's strategic response to the post-Cold War era, its evolution into the Act East Policy, and India's emerging role on the international stage through active participation in the Indo-Pacific Strategy. These components collectively underscore India's strategic realignment and its broader implications on regional dynamics and global diplomacy. Subsequently, the research delves into the burgeoning strategic collaboration between India and Taiwan, focusing on initiating strategic dialogues and progressing from democratic partners to crucial collaborators in constructing the Indo-Pacific supply chain. Furthermore, the research will analyze India's strategic responses amid increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, exploring how it navigates the complex diplomatic and security challenges presented by its One China stance. This includes examining India's maneuvers within the broader geopolitical framework of the region, highlighting its efforts to balance national security interests with diplomatic engagements.*

**KEYWORDS:** Indo-Pacific strategy; BRI; One China policy; Taiwan–India relations.

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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a pivotal theatre in contemporary global geopolitics, characterized by dynamic shifts in power and influence. As the 21st century progresses, this vast maritime space, stretching from the east coast of Africa to the western shores of the Americas, has become the focus of intense strategic competition, with China's assertive rise at the forefront. For India, a nation with deep historical and economic ties to the region, the Indo-Pacific is not just a geopolitical concept but a space of vital national interest. The convergence of strategic imperatives has driven India to recalibrate its foreign policy, forming new alliances and deepening existing partnerships to ensure regional stability and security.

In recent years, India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific has been further catalyzed by the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy. This strategy, articulated by successive US administrations, envisions a region where sovereignty is respected, commerce flows freely, and disputes are resolved peacefully. For India, this aligns closely with its vision for the region, particularly in light of increasing Chinese assertiveness. China's activities along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India, its militarization of the South China Sea, and its growing presence in the Indian Ocean have all heightened security concerns in New Delhi. In response, India has sought to bolster its strategic partnerships, particularly with like-minded democracies, to counterbalance Beijing's influence.

One of the most significant yet underexplored aspects of India's Indo-Pacific engagement is its evolving relationship with Taiwan. Historically, India's relations with Taiwan have been constrained by its adherence to the One China policy. However, the growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, coupled with increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, has prompted India to reassess its approach. While India continues to officially recognize the One China policy, it has quietly deepened its economic and cultural ties with Taiwan. These developments reflect a pragmatic approach to diplomacy, where India balances its national security interests with its broader strategic objectives.

The collaboration between India and Taiwan is particularly noteworthy in the context of the global semiconductor supply chain. Taiwan, home to some of the world's leading semiconductor manufacturers, is a critical player in this sector. As India seeks to become a hub for high-tech manufacturing, collaboration with Taiwan presents a unique opportunity to integrate into the global supply chain, thereby enhancing its strategic autonomy. This partnership also has broader implications for the Indo-Pacific region, as it strengthens the economic and

technological linkages between two democratic nations that share concerns about China's rising influence.

Moreover, India's strategic calculus in the Indo-Pacific is influenced by its approach to the Taiwan Strait. The Taiwan Strait has long been a flashpoint in the region, with the potential to trigger a broader conflict that could disrupt the stability of the Indo-Pacific. India's position on this issue is delicate, as it must navigate the complex dynamics of its relationship with China while maintaining its commitment to a rules-based international order. In recent years, India has expressed concerns over any unilateral attempts to change the *status quo* in the Taiwan Strait, underscoring its interest in preserving peace and stability in the region.

As India continues to assert its role in the Indo-Pacific, its partnerships with regional actors, including Taiwan, will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the region. These partnerships are not merely a response to immediate security threats but are part of a broader strategy to ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains a region where sovereignty is respected, and international norms are upheld. In this context, India's evolving strategic relationships offer valuable insights into the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific and the emerging contours of global geopolitics.

This research aims to analyze the evolving partnership between India and Taiwan within the framework of the Indo-Pacific strategy, highlighting their emerging role as allies in this critical region. By examining the shifts in India's foreign policy, its deepening engagement with Taiwan, and the challenges posed by China, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the strategic significance of the India–Taiwan relationship. Through this lens, the research will underscore the importance of these emerging allies in addressing shared regional challenges and in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific.

## **Transformations in India's Foreign Policy Since the 1990s Look East Policy: India's Response to the Post-Cold War Era**

Although India inherited some colonial-era institutions and thinking, its ruling elite did not entirely follow a Western orientation and thinking after 1947. India's foreign policy was influenced by various factors, particularly the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The goal of NAM, which India co-founded, was to maintain independence in foreign affairs and avoid alignment with either of the Cold War blocs. This policy allowed India to pursue its national interests without the constraints of being part of a military alliance. India, under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, emphasized solidarity

with newly independent Asian and African countries and sought to promote peace and cooperation.

Economically, Southeast Asia was not an attractive trading and economic partner for India until the 1970s because the region was less developed than India. India's economic policies were insular and protectionist. Additionally, overland linkages to Southeast Asia were blocked. Myanmar closed itself off from the rest of the world in the early 1960s, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was not amenable to providing transit facilities. Political factors also played a role. India and Southeast Asian countries were on opposing sides of the Cold War divide (Baruah, 2019).

Despite these challenges, India sought to establish and maintain diplomatic and economic ties with Southeast Asian nations through NAM. The movement provided a platform for dialogue and cooperation, allowing India to engage with these countries on common issues such as decolonization, economic development, and resistance to superpower dominance.

India's economic and financial crisis of 1991 coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was India's valued economic and strategic partner. Both these developments compelled India to take a fresh look at its foreign policy. It was Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's strategic vision to quickly grasp the changed economic and strategic paradigms of international relations in the early 1990s. The world was no longer divided into Cold War blocs, and South Asia and Southeast Asia could no longer be treated as separate strategic theaters. Prime Minister Rao made a conscious decision to engage with the dynamic Southeast Asian region and launched India's Look East Policy, which was a resurrection and rejuvenation of India's traditional, cultural, historical and political ties with the countries in the Southeast Asian region. When India's Look East Policy was unveiled in the early 1990s, it coincided with India's economic reforms and liberalization, and as such, the policy has much to do with India's economic engagement with the region.

The Look East Policy primarily focused on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and economic integration (Mukherjee, 2019). In 1996, India became a dialogue partner of ASEAN, marking the beginning of deeper engagement with Southeast Asia. By 2002, this relationship had progressed to a summit-level partnership, reflecting mutual recognition of the benefits of closer collaboration. In 2012, the relationship was further upgraded to a strategic partnership, underscoring the importance both sides placed on enhancing economic, political, and security cooperation.

At the inception of the Look East Policy in 1992, trade between India and ASEAN was modest, amounting to just USD 2 billion. However, the strategic

initiatives and economic reforms introduced under this policy led to substantial growth in trade. The signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN in 2010 played a crucial role in this economic expansion, resulting in a remarkable increase in trade to USD 72 billion by the 2017–2018 fiscal year (Baruah, 2019).

India's proactive engagement in regional forums further solidified its position as a key player in Southeast Asia. By actively participating in platforms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), India demonstrated its commitment to regional stability and cooperation. These forums provided India with opportunities to collaborate on issues of mutual interest, ranging from economic development to security challenges (Ladwig III, 2024).

### **From Look East Policy to Act East Policy**

In 2014, India witnessed a significant change in government and faced a belligerent China under President Xi Jinping's leadership as CCP General Secretary. Recognizing the need for a more dynamic and strategic response, India transitioned from the Look East Policy to the Act East Policy. This shift was not merely a rebranding but a strategic shift to address the new geopolitical realities and expand India's influence in the Asia–Pacific region.

The Act East Policy was introduced to enhance India's engagement with Southeast Asia and beyond, aiming to build stronger economic, strategic, and cultural ties. Unlike the Look East Policy, which primarily focused on economic integration and relations with ASEAN countries, the Act East Policy sought to form a broader and more comprehensive partnership with key Asia–Pacific nations, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Vietnam (Gokhale, 2023).

This policy shift was driven by several factors, including the rise of a belligerent China and its assertive policies in the Indo-Pacific region. The Act East Policy thus became a cornerstone of India's strategy to counterbalance China's growing influence and to assert its own presence in the region. The policy also emphasized the importance of ensuring an open, inclusive, and free Indo-Pacific, aligning with broader international efforts to promote stability and security in the region.

Key initiatives under the Act East Policy include enhancing connectivity through infrastructure projects, promoting trade and investment, and fostering people-to-people exchanges. For example, India has been actively involved in developing the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway, which aims to boost trade and economic integration in the region. Additionally, India has increased its participation in regional forums such as the EAS and the ARF, which provide platforms for dialogue and cooperation on security and economic issues.

India has long discerned that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) diverges from its national interests. Leveraging the BRI, China has extended substantial loans and infrastructure support to nations neighboring India, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Pakistan. This has intensified India's concerns, invoking feelings of being encircled by a looming Chinese net.

In response, India has strategized with a layered approach towards the BRI. The Modi administration, in recent years, has amplified assistance to its neighbors, fortifying relations via regional frameworks like Neighborhood First, the Act East Policy, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). This is aimed at paralleling China's BRI influence. Key facets of India's strategy encompass forging ties with strategic allies, amplifying its geopolitical clout, and formulating targeted strategies for execution.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced the Make in India policy in 2014, aiming to boost industrialization and economic development within the country. Building on this initiative, India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific realm has further intensified. In 2015, Modi articulated the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision (Modi, 2016), which underscores the essence of regional unity and cooperation, offering a counter-narrative to the BRI model. To adeptly counter the BRI, India is actively meshing with regional cooperation mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Island Countries (IOIC). Such engagements accentuate India's SAGAR vision, promoting coastal connectivity and inland development, underpinning its commitment to fostering growth and intensifying its geopolitical footprint in the Indian Ocean arena. As Modi highlighted, "A new era of economic development, industrialization, and trade has begun in India. Externally, India's Look East Policy has become Act East Policy" (De, 2019).

### **India's Rise on the International Stage: Participating in the Indo-Pacific Strategy**

India's Indo-Pacific strategy has evolved over the years, starting with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighting the importance of the Indo-Pacific region in his speech at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, where he described it as extending from Africa's coastlines to North and South America. The Indo-Pacific region faces security and geopolitical challenges, with the United States amplifying its military presence in the area. India's unique approach to regional engagements is anchored in

five Hindi principles: respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace, and prosperity. Key takeaways from Modi's insights on the Indo-Pacific, as shared at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, include the following (MEA, 2018).

(1) Openness and Inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific:

India envisions the Indo-Pacific as a domain of freedom, openness, and inclusivity. Contrary to any notion of select elitism, India resists the idea of the region as being governed by an exclusive club of nations. Modi's words underline India's commitment to treat all nations in the Indo-Pacific with equity, irrespective of their power dynamics.

(2) Constructive Indo-Pacific Strategy:

India's stance towards the Indo-Pacific is both constructive and forward-leaning, designed to foster mutual growth and prosperity. Modi accentuated the nation's aspiration for regional freedom and openness, inviting collaboration with all relevant countries to realize this shared vision.

(3) Affirming Southeast Asia and ASEAN's Pivotal Role:

Highlighting the enhanced status of India's ties with ASEAN—from dialogue partners to strategic alliances—Modi spotlighted the centrality of Southeast Asia in the Indo-Pacific narrative. He voiced India's conviction that ASEAN holds the key to the region's destiny and affirmed support for ASEAN unity as the cornerstone of regional peace and security.

(4) Advocacy for a Rules-based Order:

India champions a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, predicated on respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equality among nations. Modi underscored that such an order should evolve through dialogue rather than imposition.

(5) Unhindered Navigation and Commerce:

Modi contended that the Indo-Pacific should safeguard the principles of freedom of navigation, unhindered trade, and the resolution of disputes in consonance with international law. These tenets, he stressed, are universally applicable, and devoid of biases towards size or might.

(6) Forging Harmonious Alliances:

Casting a spotlight on India's multifaceted relations with nations like the United States, Russia, China, and Japan, Modi clarified that India's strategic partnerships are holistic, not merely instruments of containment.

India views the Indo-Pacific as a region of growth, opportunity, and prosperity. The US approach to the Indo-Pacific has historical undertones and geopolitical considerations, with the Pivot to Asia advocated by US President Barack Obama and

the Indo-Pacific perspective under President Donald Trump. India's interpretation of the Indo-Pacific reflects its expansive vision and global contemplation. Modi's conceptualization of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region emphasizes ASEAN Centrality, focusing on Southeast Asia, East Asia, New Zealand, Australia, and South Asia. India is adopting a balanced stance, avoiding rigid strategies and focusing on tangible action plans and cooperative frameworks. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) aims to enhance collaboration across various domains, promoting an Indo-Pacific order grounded in rules, mutual trust, and shared prosperity. This not only underscores India's holistic engagement in the Indo-Pacific sphere but also illuminates India's aspiration to forge a new Indo-Pacific order anchored in rules, mutual trust, and collective prosperity.

(1) Free:

India's Prime Minister Modi emphasized India's commitment to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region during the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue. This statement was aimed at fostering collaboration and mutual respect among nations, promoting a level playing field for harmonious coexistence, unimpeded commerce, and equal participation in shaping the region's future. This aligns with India's broader foreign policy ethos, prioritizing the rule of law, sovereignty, and peaceful diplomacy. Modi has positioned India as a proactive architect in the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

(2) Open:

India's use of the term "open" in its foreign policy, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, is significant as it represents a commitment to transparency and open dialogue. This approach transcends mere political semantics and embraces the core values of democracy, diversity, and shared interests in international affairs. Modi's choice of the term "open" mirrors India's vision for the Indo-Pacific, championing democratic ideals while advocating for tolerance and collaboration.

(3) Inclusive:

India's commitment to inclusivity goes beyond acknowledging diverse political systems and cultural values. It envisions a holistic approach to security, including economic fortitude, energy assurance, and supply chain robustness. India's focus on supply chains is crucial for global manufacturing. The Supply Chain Resilience Initiative of 2020, a joint effort with Japan and Australia, aims to enhance regional supply chain resilience and economic equilibrium.

From Modi's address at Shangri-La, it is discernible that India essentially embraces the Indo-Pacific concept but refrains from labeling it strictly as a "strategy,"

nor does it view the Indo-Pacific as merely an abstract concept (NMF, 2019). To substantiate this standpoint, Modi's subsequent proposition of the IPOI aims to craft a concrete action plan and collaboration framework. However, his IPOI initiative focuses on ASEAN centrality, primarily focusing on Southeast Asia, East Asia, New Zealand, Australia, and South Asia. Modi launched the IPOI to focus on seven domains: (i) Maritime Security; (ii) Maritime Ecology; (iii) Maritime Resources; (iv) Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; (v) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; (vi) Science, Technology, and Academic Cooperation; and (vii) Trade, Connectivity, and Maritime Transport (ICWA, 2022).

Prime Minister Modi's nuanced approach to the Indo-Pacific showcases India's adeptness at maintaining diplomatic equilibrium. While aligning with the US vision for the region and subtly addressing challenges such as China's South China Sea posture, he also emphasizes the importance of India's enduring ties with Russia. This intricate balance underscores India's commitment to strategic autonomy, ensuring its policies evolve based on both national interests and broader global dynamics.

### **Allies in the Making: India and Taiwan's Strategic Collaboration India and Taiwan Initiate Strategic Dialogues**

Taiwan and India's unofficial relations, which began in 1995, have focused primarily on economic and cultural dimensions. Following Taiwan's introduction of the New Southbound Policy in 2016 and Prime Minister Modi's formal articulation of the Indo-Pacific concept at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, platforms like the Yushan Forum in Taiwan have become critical for fostering high-level dialogues and engagements.

For instance, distinguished personalities such as Sujeet Kumar, a member of India's Rajya Sabha from Odisha, have actively participated, representing a thoughtful and influential voice in the discussions. His involvement underscores the increasing focus and significance attributed to the Taiwan–India partnership in governmental and legislative arenas. Kumar's contribution to the dialogue is substantial. Throughout the Yushan Forum, he consistently emphasized the urgency of innovatively bridging the gaps in India–Taiwan relations. He articulated, "Given the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region, India and Taiwan must consolidate our partnerships. I envisage that this forum and my participation therein will lay foundational stones for such collaborative efforts in the future" (Lin, 2022).

Kumar highlighted the growing prospects of the India–Taiwan relationship. He meticulously aligned Taiwan's New Southbound Policy with India's Act East Policy

and SAGAR initiatives, advocating for a conducive Indo-Pacific environment that nurtures a mutually beneficial bilateral partnership. Topics such as a potential FTA, Taiwanese investments in India's semiconductor industry, and a bolstered annual bilateral trade nearing ten billion USD were key points that he underscored, elucidating a vision of a robust India–Taiwan partnership amidst contemporary global scenarios. Utilizing his role in the Indian parliamentary system, Kumar has been proactive in promoting enhanced India–Taiwan relations, focusing on Taiwan's significance in various sectors, notably semiconductors, within India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy. His advocacy and enriched dialogues at the forum have played a vital role in enhancing discussions towards a fortified informal, yet substantial, strategic and economic partnership between Taiwan and India.

In a similar vein, New Delhi, traditionally cautious on the China–Taiwan issue, appears to be taking a more assertive stance. This change is signified by the visits to Taipei by Admiral Karambir Singh, General M. M. Naravane, and Chief of Air Staff R. K. S. Bhadauria—former heads of the Indian Navy, Army, and Air Force, respectively. Their attendance at the Ketagalan Forum's 2023 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue goes beyond mere symbolism, highlighting India's intent to convey its stance through these distinguished military figures (Sagar, 2023). The participation of these retired Indian military leaders at the Dialogue represents a pivotal moment in Taiwan–India relations. This development underscores India's commitment to deepening its track-two engagements with Taiwan. Free from the restrictions of formal diplomatic channels, such dialogues offer a valuable opportunity for open discussion and the sharing of strategic insights, particularly given the intensifying situation in the Taiwan Strait. China's rising military assertiveness towards Taiwan has not gone unnoticed in the global arena. For India, which has its own set of geopolitical challenges with China, this has triggered a reassessment of its response strategies. The increasing militarization of the Taiwan Strait has implications that extend far beyond the immediate region, potentially impacting the broader stability of the Indo-Pacific. A palpable sentiment is emerging within India that suggests a more pronounced support for Taiwan could serve as a strategic counterbalance to China's burgeoning assertiveness.

The visit by the retired Indian generals is emblematic of this shift. Their presence in Taiwan has not only ignited discussions within policy circles but has also spurred broader public discourse about India's potential recalibration of its stance on the Taiwan Strait situation. Furthermore, the shared challenges both nations face from China underscores the importance of fostering deeper strategic cooperation. For Taiwan and India, this moment presents a unique confluence of interests. Both nations,

cognizant of the shifting geopolitical landscape, recognize the imperative of mutual collaboration to navigate the complexities of the present-day Indo-Pacific.

### **From Democratic Partners to Building the Indo-Pacific Supply Chain**

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure, the "Make in India" initiative significantly enhanced interactions with Taiwan, particularly in the areas of economic and technological cooperation. This policy aimed to attract foreign investment, strengthen manufacturing capabilities, and promote comprehensive economic development in India. Within this context, India and Taiwan concluded several agreements covering trade, investment, technology, education, and labor cooperation.

The bilateral trade between India and Taiwan reached unprecedented levels, surpassing USD 10 billion. This growth reflects the deepening economic cooperation and diversification in areas such as electronic products, machinery, and chemicals. Notable agreements include the "Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Cooperation" and the "Memorandum of Understanding on Trade Promotion," which facilitated increased trade activities and investments (TECC, 2024). Additionally, significant agreements such as the "Agreement on Economic Cooperation," the "Memorandum of Understanding on Small and Medium Enterprises Cooperation," and the "Memorandum of Understanding on Agricultural Cooperation" have been signed to bolster economic ties further (TECC, 2017). Taiwan's investments in India, particularly by companies like Foxconn, played a notable role in the local economy. Foxconn established multiple manufacturing facilities in India, including smartphone assembly plants, creating numerous job opportunities and supporting the modernization of India's manufacturing sector.

In the realm of education and talent development, Taiwan established several Taiwan Education Centers (TEC) in India. These centers aimed to promote academic exchanges and cooperation between the two nations. They offered language courses and cultural activities, enhancing Indian students' understanding of Taiwan. Collaborative efforts between universities and research institutions from both countries intensified, resulting in joint research projects and scholarship programs that supported the development of young talents and academic research.

A significant milestone was achieved with the signing of the "MOU on labor force cooperation" in 2023 (TECC, 2023). This agreement aimed to facilitate labor exchanges and cooperation, including the exchange of professional talent and cooperation in technical and skills training. The agreement not only addressed the labor market needs of both countries but also provided critical support for economic development and technological innovation.

In the field of technology cooperation, India and Taiwan signed several agreements to promote collaboration in information technology, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things. These agreements, such as the “Memorandum of Understanding on Technological Innovation and Development,” fostered joint research and technology transfer, driving technological advancement in both nations. The cooperation between Taiwanese companies and Indian technology institutions ensured that both countries remained competitive in the global technology landscape.

These efforts not only elevated bilateral trade and technological cooperation but also reinforced strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. The accomplishments during this period laid a solid foundation for the future development of India–Taiwan relations, showcasing a deep partnership and shared vision in addressing global challenges.

### **Social Media Diplomacy: India–Taiwan Interactions**

Social media has played a significant role in shaping diplomatic relations between India and Taiwan. Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has utilized social media platforms to express condolences and support for Taiwan during times of calamity, marking a unique development in India–Taiwan relations. For instance, after the devastating earthquake in Taiwan in April 2024, PM Modi posted on X (formerly Twitter) his condolences and support, which was unprecedented for an Indian Prime Minister and highlighted the deepening ties between the two nations.

Additionally, the interaction between Indian and Taiwanese leaders on social media platforms has further highlighted the growing awareness and mutual respect between the two nations. Following his re-election, PM Modi received congratulations from Taiwanese Vice President Lai Ching-te on X. Lai expressed his congratulations and emphasized the importance of enhancing the Taiwan–India partnership, focusing on collaboration in trade, technology, and other sectors for the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. Modi responded by thanking Lai for his warm message and expressed his eagerness to work towards mutually beneficial economic and technological partnerships. This exchange, dated June 5, 2024, underscored the increasing visibility and warmth in bilateral relations.

According to reports from [The Hindu \(2024\)](#), China’s response to these interactions has been critical, with Beijing lodging protests against Modi’s comments that suggested a willingness to deepen ties with Taiwan. This reflects the sensitive nature of cross-strait relations and India’s cautious yet progressively open stance towards Taiwan.

Moreover, the general awareness about Taiwan in India has significantly increased. This is reflected in the heightened engagement and discussions on social

media platforms, demonstrating a broader public interest and understanding of Taiwan's strategic importance to India. The role of Indian officials posted in Taiwan has been crucial, but the amplified public discourse and interaction on social media indicate a deeper, more widespread recognition of Taiwan among the Indian populace.

These social media interactions are not only symbolic but also contribute to the soft power dynamics between India and Taiwan, reinforcing the strategic partnership and mutual goodwill. As digital diplomacy continues to evolve, these engagements on social media platforms are likely to play a crucial role in shaping the future trajectory of India–Taiwan relations.

## **The Breaking Point: India's One China Stance amidst a Taiwan Strait Crisis**

### **India's Strategic Positioning Amid Taiwan Strait Tensions**

As the Indo-Pacific region braces for a shift in its geopolitical equilibrium, the issue of Taiwan emerges as a significant point of contention. For the PRC, which is aiming for global prominence, a unification with Taiwan would be more than just territorial consolidation; it would be a symbol of Beijing's meteoric rise to dominance. This bold stance was evident when, on the eve of the recently concluded G20 summit, China unveiled a new map, brazenly marking contested territories as its own. China's increasing boldness, evident not only in the Taiwan Strait but also on India's borders, adds layers of intricacy to India's geopolitical considerations (Saha & Yadav, 2023).

Scholars have often speculated that when tensions rise between India and China, India might naturally lean towards enhanced cooperation with Taiwan, potentially charting a strategic direction. For instance, Raja Mohan (2024) suggests that India's growing apprehensions about China's assertive policies could drive New Delhi to seek closer ties with Taiwan as a counterbalance. Similarly, Pant & Joshi (2019) argue that strengthening India–Taiwan relations might be viewed as a strategic maneuver in response to Beijing's aggressive stance in the region. Furthermore, Smith & Lee (2019) have observed that India's reluctance to reiterate the One China policy since 2010 could be seen as a calculated move to avoid giving China additional leverage in their bilateral disputes. However, this assumption may oversimplify the intricate dynamics and constraints that New Delhi imposes on itself. While it is true that New Delhi has refrained from publicly reiterating its One China policy since 2010, attributing this to a direct causality between strained India–China relations and warming India–Taiwan ties might be an oversimplification.

India's decisions, more often than not, grow from a comprehensive evaluation of its national interests rather than a mere reactionary stance against Beijing. For instance, India is concerned that reiterating the One China policy could weaken its position on the Sino-Indian border disputes. By not explicitly supporting the One China policy, India avoids giving China leverage that could be used against its interests in the border conflicts (Panda, 2014).

To see India's approach towards Taiwan merely as a counterbalance to its ties with China would be to overlook the broader geopolitical and economic considerations that New Delhi takes into account. In essence, India's interactions with Taiwan should be viewed within the larger canvas of its foreign policy objectives, ensuring that the nation's holistic interests are always at the forefront of any engagement. New Delhi's recent statements on Taiwan can be seen as India's latest stance on the One China policy, which is rare and significant in the context of India's diplomatic history.

India's approach to the Taiwan issue is driven by its national interests, particularly the stability and security of supply chains. India does not seek to interfere in the future of cross-strait relations. The primary concern for New Delhi regarding Taiwan is the potential impact on the stability and security of global supply chains in the event of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Conversely, any Indian blockade of China in the Indian Ocean would similarly affect China's supply chains and transportation routes. Therefore, India aims to ensure that any unforeseen incidents in the Taiwan Strait do not disrupt its own interests, rather than becoming directly involved in cross-strait issues.

India is deeply concerned about the possibility of a confrontation between China and the United States over Taiwan. This concern has prompted the Indian government to engage diplomatically with both parties. India aims to avoid another Asian flash-point that could disrupt peace and stability and impact India's diplomatic ties with both nations (Gokhale, 2023).

For India, the implications of an escalated Taiwan Strait situation are grave. Although it is challenging to pinpoint what the exact economic consequences would be, the pervasive influence on India's various sectors is undeniable. In his speech on India's 77th Independence Day, Prime Minister Modi announced his ambition for India to ascend as the world's third-largest economy within five years. India, with its expansive interests in the Indo-Pacific, finds itself ensnared in this challenge. Given this vision, it is implausible for India to remain a mere spectator to the evolving Taiwan Strait crisis (Gokhale, 2023).

The Taiwan Strait is not just another geopolitical issue; it is the key to the first island chain, and if broken there will be no pause to China's further belligerent plans.

This will be the end of the United States being the dominant power in the world. If such a clash occurs then the aftershocks will not be limited to these two giants: it will resonate globally, altering the power dynamics around the world. As the shadow of a potential Taiwan confrontation grows, India stands at a juncture where passivity is no longer a viable option. As a formidable actor in the Indo-Pacific, India's role in molding the region's destiny is inescapable. It is imperative for New Delhi to proactively engage and ensure its economic and strategic interests are firmly secured.

### **Navigating Complex Cross-Strait Relations**

India's discernment regarding the One China principle goes beyond a mere superficial understanding. New Delhi recognizes that beneath the veneer of this principle lies a labyrinth of intertwined sovereignty disputes, not limited to Taiwan. By consciously navigating around this intricate policy maze, India avoids becoming ensnared in Beijing's strategic trap.

Within this broader framework, India's stance on Taiwan has become even more nuanced. The convergence of India's position on Taiwan is delicately balanced between two extremes. At one end of the spectrum lies India's consistent position on the One China policy, reflecting a diplomatic continuity that it has maintained over the years, even if it prefers not to voice it overtly in public forums. Yet, at the other end, India's threshold of tolerance is firmly rooted in the security implications surrounding the Taiwan Strait. The sanctity of peaceful resolutions and the abhorrence of force, as championed in its Indo-Pacific vision, serve as guiding principles. In essence, while India's diplomatic acknowledgments to China remain steadfast, its commitment to regional stability and security, especially concerning the Taiwan Strait, cannot and should not be underestimated.

The visit of then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August 2022 became a significant event. China reacted with aggressive military maneuvers resulting in the international community's realization that China's "peaceful rise" was at an end. This reaction only pushed China into a corner and sparked debate as to how countries would react in case China tried to use its military might to annex Taiwan. In India, a study was sanctioned by the armed forces to study the consequences for the world and India of such a conflict (IMPRI, 2023). During a press briefing on August 12, 2022, two Indian media houses posed consecutive questions to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson.

*World Is One News* (WION) asked, "What's India's reaction to the ongoing events in the Taiwan Strait? We've observed China's military exercises, which remind

us of the assertive actions India faced in 2020.” This was followed by a question from the *Hindustan Times*: “Given India’s concerns about China’s attempts to change the *status quo* on the northern frontiers, how does India view Taiwan’s comments suggesting China’s actions aim to shift the *status quo* and that their ambitions go beyond that region?” (MEA, 2022).

In response to these questions, *Xinhua News Agency* reminded the Indian spokesperson of Beijing’s One China principle, saying, “Following US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, over 170 countries have supported the One China principle. Yet, India hasn’t commented. What is India’s position on this, and what are your thoughts on Pelosi’s visit?” (MEA, 2022).

Facing this intense exchange, the spokesperson for India’s External Affairs Ministry stated, “Like many countries, India is concerned about recent developments. We urge restraint, discourage unilateral actions that could change the *status quo*, and advocate for peace and stability in the region. India’s stance on this matter is consistent and clear, and there’s no need for further clarification” (MEA, 2022).

Thus, India voiced its position at the earliest opportunity. Drawing from its nuanced understanding of the 1950s Taiwan Strait dynamics and the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict, India’s MEA issued a statement emphasizing the call for “restraint” and opposing any “unilateral actions that could alter the existing *status quo*.”

While India recognized the PRC in 1949 and agreed not to establish formal ties with the ROC or to support Taiwan’s representation in the United Nations, there was no mention of the One China policy (Gokhale, 2023). This policy was first introduced in the 1996 Sino-Indian joint statement during Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s state visit to India. It was likely aimed to reassure Beijing about India’s non-official representative office established in Taipei in 1995 (Gokhale, 2023). However, after its inclusion in joint statements at least four times over a decade, India had ceased mentioning One China altogether by 2010, in response to China’s unwillingness to show sensitivity to Indian concerns. In 2014, India’s then-Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj stated, “For India to agree to a One China policy, China should reaffirm a One India policy” (Panda, 2014). This stance aligns with India’s original position in 1949, emphasizing no need for further clarification. Thus, India refrained from referencing the One China policy in future declarations, whether jointly or alone.

The One China concept calls for an in-depth examination to ascertain if there is a shared comprehension between India and Taiwan. Properly grasping this notion could better position India within Cross-Strait relations, potentially bolstering its influential role when warranted. Two scenarios prominently stand out: the unification of the two sides of the strait, and Taiwan independence. These scenarios reflect the ideologies of

Taiwan's major political parties. India's aspiration is to hold the middle ground, avoiding alignment with either ideology—a perspective that goes beyond merely considering the One China policy and is indicative of its circumspect dealings with Taiwan.

Staying true to India's traditionally judicious foreign policy stance, while it hasn't openly advocated the One China principle, if we break down China's stance into its foundational pillars, they read as follows (MFA, 2022).

- (1) There is but one China in the world.
- (2) Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory.
- (3) The government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China.

The second assertion, about Taiwan's status, emerges as a significant concern for India, especially when juxtaposed against the backdrop of Sino-Indian border contentions. The essence of this matter might underscore India's reticence to re-embrace the "One China" position unreservedly. Any affirmation by India of the One China policy could inadvertently allow China to juxtapose the principle's second tenets against the Sino-Indian border situation, potentially trivializing India's interests and stand. Notably, China has recurrently employed the One China principle in various contentious frameworks, such as the Tibet issue and the South China Sea disputes (Usanas Foundation, 2021). There's even speculation it could be used in prospective China–Russia territorial disagreements. Such maneuvers accentuate India's recent reservations about China's weaponization of the One China policy (CTA, 2023).

## Conclusion

It has been nearly three decades since Taiwan and India established unofficial bilateral relations in 1995. The relationship between Taiwan and India has always been a secondary and indirect strategic choice for each other. It seems that both sides do not want to be excessively dependent on China and compete with each other. Since the limitations of bilateral relations outweigh the opportunities for cooperation, when explaining bilateral relations from the perspective of national policies, there is often a lack of strong, irrefutable arguments. The relationship between Taiwan and India is indeed a beautiful landscape, but it is also as far away as the two nations are on the map. When we say that the Act East Policy and the New Southbound Policy are the key points for finding connections with each other, as many times the two parties are

heading in the right direction, but with little convergence. The closeness between the two sides needs to be strengthened. Fortunately, the discussion of Taiwan–India relations always seems to be very progressive and powerful.

The Indo-Pacific strategy is undoubtedly an important link between the Act East Policy and the New Southbound Policy. India's free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region has given equal importance to every member of the Indo-Pacific region's rank. Taiwan also needs a similar discourse to better emphasize its role and contribution in the Indo-Pacific region. The advantage of doing so is that members of the Indo-Pacific region can better understand Taiwan's position, especially in the context of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. After each proposed a different version of the Indo-Pacific strategy, Indonesia, South Korea, ASEAN, the European Union, etc. have also launched similar reports. Taiwan has not yet published an official Indo-Pacific strategy document, but it is scattered at the level of dialogues and forums, making it hard for the outside world to discern Taipei's commitment to Indo-Pacific concept.

Examining India's Indo-Pacific strategy from a micro perspective, it appears favorable for Taiwan. Within this broad framework, it minimizes the challenges presented by the lack of formal contact between Taiwan and India, thus enhancing the prospects for both sides to maximize their collaboration. It is noteworthy that, since 2010, India has refrained from reiterating the One China policy. In circumstances evocative of the Taiwan Strait tensions, the tenor of India's Taiwan policy appears to have gravitated from a tacit adherence to the One China doctrine to a more calibrated stance of "resisting unilateral alterations to the extant *status quo*." This departure marks a novel diplomatic trajectory since 2010.

During an interview with India Today, Former Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu asserted that "Taiwan has not been any part of China and that is beginning from the day that the People's Republic of China was established. The two sides are separate" (Wu, 2020). He delineated the dynamics of the Taiwan–India bilateral relationship proactively touched upon the topic of supply chain realignment, and expressed Taiwan's aspiration to contemplate collaborative endeavors with the Quad nations, subtly highlighting common concerns about China. Thus, the mutual narrative shared by Taiwan and India primarily centers around the themes of Taiwan never having been ruled by the PRC, and the avoidance of any unilateral actions to change the *status quo*, rather than the One China policy or the question of Taiwan's reunification or independence.

Drawing from the overarching canvas of the Indo-Pacific strategy, it is discernible that India's perception of Taiwan has undergone a thoughtful recalibration. The Indo-Pacific, as a conceptual paradigm, advocates for an open, inclusive, and rules-based

order, emphasizing the importance of the sovereign equality of nations, irrespective of their size. Within this framework, India's evolving stance on Taiwan can be perceived as an embodiment of the principles that the Indo-Pacific strategy champions.

Furthermore, as India continues to navigate the intricate corridors of regional geopolitics, its engagement with Taiwan emerges as a subtle yet profound affirmation of the commitment to a balanced and multi-aligned foreign policy. While the statement does not flagrantly challenge existing norms, it indicates a gentle but firm repositioning, underpinned by the tenets of the Indo-Pacific vision. This synthesis of strategic thought and diplomatic articulation is emblematic of the transformative nature of contemporary geopolitics and the potential it holds for reshaping regional dynamics.

India, drawing from its past experiences with Taiwan Strait crises, has come to realize that the stability of this region is closely intertwined with its own national stability. India understands that remaining silent during a Taiwan Strait crisis could embolden China to pursue its expansionist ambitions more aggressively. However, this recognition does not imply that India views the Taiwan Strait as a primary area of concern for its maritime interests. The Western Pacific, in particular, remains even more distant from India's immediate strategic focus. From a maritime perspective, India considers the Taiwan Strait more significant than the Western Pacific, but this significance is largely confined to maintaining stability in the strait. India does not seek to involve itself in the future of cross-strait relations. Rather, India's main interest in Taiwan centers on the Indo-Pacific supply chain and the economic and trade cooperation between India and Taiwan, which are the key factors driving its concern for Taiwan and the stability of the Taiwan Strait.

The increasingly clear axis between India and Taiwan, as emerging allies, is the strategic shift of supply chain cooperation to India, with a focus on viewing Taiwan Strait stability as integral to supply chain stability. Unlike past bilateral economic and trade cooperation, the collaboration between India and Taiwan in the semiconductor supply chain adds a new dimension of strategic material stability to considerations surrounding the Taiwan Strait. In this context, the stability of the Taiwan Strait directly correlates with the stability of the semiconductor supply chain. Thus, in this sense, the Indo-Pacific alliance between India and Taiwan has taken shape, with both parties now considering each other's geopolitical security as essential to ensuring the stability of strategic materials.

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