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by Margaret McCuaig-Johnston

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POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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Enhancing Taiwan's Role in International Organizations

Diplomats in the Western world have watched with mounting concern as China has taken on leadership roles in international organizations. Yet this is exactly what Xi Jinping directed his officials to do starting in 2014, so that China could lead standard-setting, rule-making, agenda-setting and global governance. In the process, Beijing has been able to rely on its Belt and Road Initiative partners to vote with it in international forums, and United Nations organizations now have 30 MOUs with China's BRI program.

China has now moved into the leadership of four of the 15 United Nations affiliated bodies – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNDIP). Other nations lead only one at a time. The head of INTERPOL too was a Chinese official until Beijing detained and recently convicted him. And China came very close in 2020 to taking over a sixth UN body, the World Intellectual Property Office (WIPO). The U.S., EU and others were successful in electing another candidate, rather than have a country with a record of IP theft manage WIPO.

China also holds senior, influential positions in dozens of other important organizations, from the International Court of Justice to the International Organization for Standardization, from the International Monetary Fund to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Human Rights Council – the result of rising in the ranks as Xi directed.

This is raising concerns that the Beijing regime's geopolitical interests will be front and centre in these organizations, while legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party's form of government. As the U.S. State Department put it in a policy paper on the China challenge in November 2020: "the CCP views international organizations as an opportunity … to gradually adjust global norms, standards, and institutions to socialism's tenets."

One of the key measures that China ensures in its leadership roles is that Taiwan is excluded from membership. Its position is that Taiwan is not an independent nation, but rather a province of China. But as we well know, Mao Zedong did not follow Chiang Kai-shek across the Strait of Taiwan in 1949 to take control of the territory to which Chiang had escaped – territory that its own Indigenous peoples already occupied. The CCP has never occupied the territory of Taiwan.

This country of 23.5 million is one of the most progressive, modern nations in the world with advanced education, medical systems and cutting-edge industries that are supplying the world with strategic products such as semiconductors. Its population health system is a model for other countries in the way that it contained and reduced the risks of COVID-19, with only 909 cases (795 imported) and eight deaths as of January 30, 2021 in contrast to almost every other country on the planet. Its best practices include a central epidemic command centre, early border and quarantine procedures, a health declaration pass, travel history stored on health-insurance cards, a tiered system for testing and a rationing system for mask purchases.

However, Taiwan has been stymied by its UN status, which China demanded when it joined in 1971. The PRC's One China Principle is that there is one China, of which Taiwan is a part. However, Canada and numerous other nations adopted different policies. Canada's approach recognizes the PRC's government but only "takes note" of China's position on Taiwan, taking no Canadian position on its status. Instead, Canada interprets that we can set the parameters of our relations with Taiwan, which we now do in a sustained way in many fields. However, it is China's position that is influencing UN organizations. A few examples will demonstrate this.

In the case of ICAO, the secretary general since 2015 has been Fang Liu who had previously held senior positions at the General Administration of Civil Aviation of China (CAAC). Taiwan's exclusion from meetings of ICAO's assembly would not be important if there were no significant airports in Taiwan. But Taoyuan International Airport is one of the world's 10 busiest airports, so excluding Taiwan risks lives and is therefore unconscionable. Any serious accident would be fully on the heads of ICAO members who have supported Taiwan's exclusion. The fact that one has not yet occurred speaks to the technological expertise of Taiwan's air industries workers, controllers and others in the sector. ICAO now designates Taiwan as a "province of China", something that China has been trying to persuade international airlines to do for some time. Air Canada had tried to negotiate a joint venture with Air China for five years, but once it changed its website in 2018 to read "Taipei, Taiwan, CN", the joint venture was negotiated, signed and announced within two weeks.

Canada has supported Taiwan's meaningful participation in ICAO meetings numerous times over the years. However, not only was Taiwan excluded, but ICAO blocked some critics of its policy from the agency's Twitter feed. ICAO refused to unblock them unless they reversed their comments publicly in what one characterized as a self-criticism – a classic technique in China. Qining Guang, formerly of China's CAAC and now communications officer to Liu, handled the social media accounts, demonstrating that even lower-level appointees can adversely affect Taiwan.

The same issue of Taiwan's participation has arisen at the WHO. During the 2008-16 détente between Beijing and Taiwan's Kuomintang government, Taiwan was an observer at the World Health Assembly (WHA) to which the WHO is accountable. But when President Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016, and with China's Margaret Chen as director general, Taiwan was excluded. This demonstrates a cavalier attitude on China's part towards the health of the Taiwanese people, not to mention others travelling in and through Taiwan. Moreover, by acquiescing to the change, other member countries shoulder part of the blame.

In 2017, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was China's pick to replace Chen, with Beijing lobbying BRI nations for his appointment. Throughout the global pandemic, Taiwan has provided its virus data to the WHO but the agency has not provided those statistics to member countries. Instead, it has reported misinformation provided by China under China's data, and further muddied the waters by referring to Taiwan's COVID-19 cases at various times as "Taipei and its environs", "Taiwan, China" and "Taipei" within China's tally. The nation wants to be known as "Taiwan", a separate country – that should not be so problematic. In the meantime, other countries are being

deprived of the experience of Taiwan's pandemic teams which have had tremendous success in minimizing the number of cases. These WHO policies should not be acceptable to other nations, as it compromises the data and best practices provided to all.

The U.S. proposed that Taiwan be permitted to attend as an observer at the WHA, as did Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in January 2020. And in May, then-minister of Foreign Affairs Francois-Philippe Champagne proposed that Taiwan be permitted to participate in a meaningful way in international forums and in global discussions on health. However, the minister then departed from Canada's historic position on Taiwan by saying: "We believe that Taiwan's role as a non-state observer in the World Health Assembly meetings is in the interest of international health." Such status as a "non-state" anything would come as a great surprise to the citizens of Taiwan who have for years participated in democratic elections to vote for their national government. This is a significant departure from Canada's past policy, and an affront to a fellow democracy. It is important that new Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau not repeat the "non-state" terminology.

Further, this reinforces Taiwan's assigned status as only a "non-governmental organization" at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties, despite Taiwan making great strides on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Taiwan exports advanced renewable energy products around the world, and contributed US$80 million to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Green Energy Special Fund to advance green energy technologies. Other organizations provide more constructive models in which Taiwan participates as "Chinese Taipei", such as the World Trade Organization, the Olympics and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

Yet as counterproductive as Taiwan's exclusion from global governmental organizations is, China now appears to be reaching down another layer, influencing non-governmental international organizations to expel Taiwan from groups in which it has participated for years. This has included the completely innocuous organization BirdLife International, which works to "conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity". In September 2020, the Taiwanese member was suddenly cancelled as a partner organization to which it had contributed since 1996. BirdLife had wanted the Taiwan member to sign documents "formally committing to not promote or advocate the legitimacy of the Republic of China or the Independence of Taiwan from China". The Taiwan member said "we are not political actors, we are conservationists" and as such it would be inappropriate to sign such a document. A name change was also required, which Taiwan members were willing to discuss. But Taiwan was removed before there could be any discussion at a general meeting. If they were aware, the Taiwan Whistling Thrush, Taiwan Barbet, and Taiwan Rosefinch would no doubt be surprised and disappointed.

Academic conferences too have been impacted. In December 2020, due to "UN rules", Taiwanese researchers' attendance was turned down at a virtual biology conference hosted by the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP). While UNESCO is one of the founding partners of the ICTP, it has other substantive partners, and this should not be a reason for the exclusion of scientists of a particular country. Furthermore, Taiwan has world-class physics

facilities such as the National Synchrotron which welcomes scientists from many countries. International scientific research organizations should not be excluding Taiwanese researchers, who are among the brightest in the world. It is hoped that this is not the beginning of an effort to use geopolitical pressures to exclude Taiwan from contributing to global research challenges. Participants from other nations must be primed to intervene in such cases.

To exclude the governments and citizens of one nation at the insistence of another is not acceptable. Beijing is using its economic clout to persuade other countries to exclude Taiwan. Its long-threatened takeover of Taiwan would be facilitated if it could demonstrate that Taiwan is not a member of international organizations, so therefore nations recognize that it belongs to China. It does not. The reality of 2021 is that Taiwan is its own nation with a vibrant society and a democratically elected government. Other nations must come together to retain or re-institute Taiwan's membership in international organizations.

The key dynamic must be for like-minded countries, including Canada, to develop an action plan and strategies to enhance Taiwan's role in, and contributions to, global wealth and well-being, including digital expertise, advanced technologies, climate change, air safety and pandemic response. The D-10 group of democratic countries – the G7 plus Australia, South Korea and India – is an appropriate initial forum for such discussions given its planned focus on how to deal collectively with a more aggressive China.

The Biden administration demonstrates early indications of leading more collaborative efforts, and the U.S. State Department and think tanks have prepared advice on how the administration can engage more proactively in support of Taiwan. In addition, the U.S. now has the *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act* that establishes American policy to advocate for Taiwan's membership in organizations in which statehood is not a requirement and for Taiwan to be granted observer status in other organizations. Canada can mirror those objectives in our own actions, partnering with like-minded countries.

Canada should undertake specific actions in collaboration with other governments. For example, and until longer term measures are taken, we can ensure that Canadian or other officials brief Taiwan representatives in advance of, and after, meetings of the international organizations from which Taiwan is currently excluded – and in some instances convey information at meetings regarding Taiwan's experience or perspective on these subjects. This is a short-term measure while governments collectively consider ways to invite Taiwan to attend all or parts of important meetings of these organizations.

On the research front, it is more effective to retain Taiwan's status than to try to recover it after it is lost. Statements by presidents of university granting councils and research institutes should remind researchers that attendance at scientific and industrial international meetings should include Taiwanese representatives, for Taiwan has made significant contributions over the years to the world's innovations and its body of scientific knowledge.

Finally, with its principle of inclusion, the Canadian government will want to contribute through quiet diplomacy to reforming the governance of international organizations so as to facilitate

Taiwan's membership in some cases, and participation in others, speaking regularly of the importance of Taiwan's presence in the room. Indeed, our "take note" model may be a useful construction for some international organizations.

It is in the interest of all nations' citizens for the smartest people in the world to participate in addressing our major global challenges. Many of those smartest people are citizens of Taiwan. Canada's own interests are best served by working with Taiwan's democratically elected government in co-ordination with other nations, to help position Taiwan to make the significant contributions to international organizations which we know it is capable of doing.

About the Author

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston *is a Senior Fellow with the Institute of Science, Society and Policy at the University of Ottawa. She had a 37-year career in government and is now writing about China's technology systems and human rights issues. She has a master's of international relations with majors in China and international organizations.*

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