

## Taiwan's Role in the U.S. Pivot to Asia

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The U.S. pivot to Asia was both inevitable and necessary for strategic, economic, and political reasons. Despite criticism, it has accomplished more than is generally acknowledged. Most Asian countries have welcomed increased U.S. involvement in and reassurance to the region. The pivot is principally a U.S. response to the growing economic and military preeminence of China in the region. The potentially dangerous consequences of this rise are most clearly evident in China's increasingly aggressive policies in pursuit of its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas.

Taiwan is rarely mentioned in the context of the U.S. pivot but it can and should play a key role. Taiwan's economic importance, strategic significance, longstanding friendship and shared values with the United States, and its own territorial claims in the East and South China Seas all require its involvement in achieving the goals of peace, security, and prosperity that the U.S. pivot is intended to maintain and foster. This is demonstrated in the statement submitted by Assistant Secretary Daniel Russell to the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian Affairs on April 3, 2014, the 35th Anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act: "Strengthening our relations with Taiwan and our longstanding friendship with the people on Taiwan remains a key element of the U.S. strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific."

Nonetheless, since the announcement of the pivot over three years ago, Taiwan has largely stood on the sidelines. Taiwan has vastly improved its relations with China over the last six years

and thus has become increasingly economically dependent on the mainland and bound by its cross-strait relationship. At the same time, Taiwan's military budget has declined year-by-year and President Ma Ying-jeou's clear defensive priority is maintaining a stable relationship with the mainland.

Taiwan's ambivalence toward the U.S. pivot is also reflected in the contradictions of its policies toward settling Asian maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, which are a key aspect of the U.S. pivot to Asia. Although the manner in which China and Taiwan address their claims is very different in some respects, Taiwan's territorial claims have the effect of reinforcing those of China. Both China and Taiwan claim in effect the entire South China Sea based on the so-called "nine-dash line" (nǎn jǐ duàn xiàn) first published in a map with eleven dashes by the Republic of China on December 1, 1947. It is not at all clear that neighboring countries were even aware of the existence of the map at that time.

The U.S. Government has publicly expressed skepticism about using the line as a basis for territorial claims. Taiwan should abandon the never explained or justified "nine-dash" map and instead claim territory in the South China Sea on the basis of its possession of Taiping and Pratas Islands and related shoals and the International Law of the Sea. Taiwan has already provided a model of how Asian neighbors should interact in its negotiated settlements of fishing disputes with Japan and the Philippines. On August 5, 2014, the second anniversary of his East China Sea Peace Initiative,

President Ma urged that the fisheries agreement with Japan serve as a framework for the peaceful resolution of territorial claims in the South China Sea. There are, however, two major obstacles to applying the bilateral solutions reached with Japan and the Philippines to the South China Sea. The first is that there are overlapping multilateral claims to the South China Sea, making any negotiated agreement much more difficult. Even more important, as Harvard University fellow Holly Morrow argued on August 4, 2014 in *Foreign Policy*, “It’s Not About the Oil -- It’s About the Tiny Rocks”: “. . . there are far easier ways to procure energy in the 21st Century than occupying territory or starting conflicts with one’s neighbors.” Her pessimistic conclusion is that “China’s energy exploration efforts are about demonstrating sovereignty and control, and not vice versa.”

On May 21, 2014 in Shanghai, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for a new “Asia Security Concept” which would exclude anyone outside of Asia. The substance of China’s proposal of the new type of “strategic relationship” is that the United States should get out of Asia and both concede to, and facilitate, the strategic dominance of the PRC in Asia. There is no point in denying that the U.S. and Chinese visions of Asia are fundamentally at odds. It is therefore encouraging to see an occasionally tougher tone in what top Obama Administration officials say about China. A secure Taiwan is a principal requirement of a stable and secure Asia. The United States must do more to get Taiwan the weapons it needs for self-defense, especially asymmetric defense systems like submarines and improved missile technology. More frequent and higher-level military dialogue is also required.

The United States should also be much more proactive in supporting Taiwan in trade. After all,

there has always been a political component in most U.S. decisions about the countries with which it has chosen to negotiate free trade agreements. It is in the U.S. economic and strategic interest to bring Taiwan into the Trans-Pacific Partnership. If that is too difficult given the U.S. partners in the TPP on whom China can exert pressure, the United States should seek a separate bilateral free trade agreement with Taiwan, perhaps beginning with a bilateral investment agreement.

American values and interests demand that the United States more actively demonstrate its support for Taiwan, especially in defense cooperation and trade. Taiwan also needs to make efforts to secure progress in both areas, including a stronger commitment to its defense budget and greater liberalization of its economy. **BT**

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