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Taiwan and the International Community

Introduction

Taiwan, the self-governing Asian democracy that formally calls itself the Republic of China (ROC), has struggled to maintain “international space” for itself in the world. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has never controlled Taiwan, but claims sovereignty over it and has vowed to “unify” with it, potentially by force. As part of its effort to pressure Taiwan to accept unification, the PRC has spent decades seeking to isolate Taiwan internationally. Congress and the executive branch have supported Taiwan’s efforts to maintain strong links to the international community.

U.S. Policy

The United States terminated diplomatic relations with the ROC on January 1, 1979, in order to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. Following this diplomatic break, Congress passed the 1979 *Taiwan Relations Act* (TRA, P.L. 96-8; 22 U.S.C. §§3301 et seq.), which provides a legal basis for unofficial relations with Taiwan. Section 4(d) of the act states, “Nothing in this Act may be construed as a basis for supporting the exclusion or expulsion of Taiwan from continued membership in any international financial institution or any other international organization.”

Since 1979, the U.S. government has taken no position on Taiwan’s sovereignty. Since 1994, U.S. policy has been to support Taiwan’s membership in international organizations for which statehood is not a requirement for membership, and to encourage “meaningful participation” for Taiwan in organizations in which its membership is not possible. The Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-135), as amended by the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA; Title LV, Subtitle A of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2023, P.L. 117-263) states that it is U.S. policy to advocate “for Taiwan’s membership in all international organizations in which statehood is not a requirement and in which the United States is also a participant,” and “for Taiwan to be granted observer status in other appropriate international organizations.” Although the United States does not itself recognize Taiwan diplomatically, the TAIPEI Act as amended states that it is U.S. policy “to support Taiwan’s diplomatic relations with governments and countries.”

Joint statements issued by the U.S. government and its partners regularly highlight the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. In February 2025, President Donald Trump and his Japanese counterpart also “expressed support for Taiwan’s meaningful participation in appropriate international organizations.” U.S. government efforts to expand Taiwan’s international relationships are driven in part by the assessment that broader and deeper international support for Taiwan could help deter the PRC from seeking to absorb Taiwan by force.

UN General Assembly Resolution 2758

The ROC retained the “China” seat in the UN General Assembly and on the UN Security Council after its government retreated from mainland China and relocated to Taiwan in 1949. In 1971, however, UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 2758 (XXVI) recognized representatives of the PRC as “the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations,” and expelled “the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek,” the ROC’s then-president. The PRC cites Resolution 2758 in its arguments against Taiwan’s participation in UN bodies, even as an observer, asserting that the resolution gave the PRC the right to represent Taiwan. The PRC also has persuaded countries to cite Resolution 2758 when breaking diplomatic ties with Taiwan as the ROC, downgrading unofficial ties with Taiwan, and expelling Taiwan from non-UN international organizations.

A statement of congressional findings in the TERA states that UNGA Resolution 2758 “does not address the issue of representation of Taiwan and its people at the United Nations, nor does it give the PRC the right to represent the people of Taiwan.” In March 2025, a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department stated that Resolution 2758 “puts no limits on any country’s sovereign choice to engage substantively with Taiwan,” and “does not preclude Taiwan’s meaningful participation in the United Nations system and other multilateral fora.” The spokesperson accused the PRC of “[i]ntentional misuse and mischaracterization” of the resolution “to isolate Taiwan from the international community.” Since 2024, parliaments that have passed motions challenging the PRC’s interpretation of Resolution 2758 include those of Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Parliament.

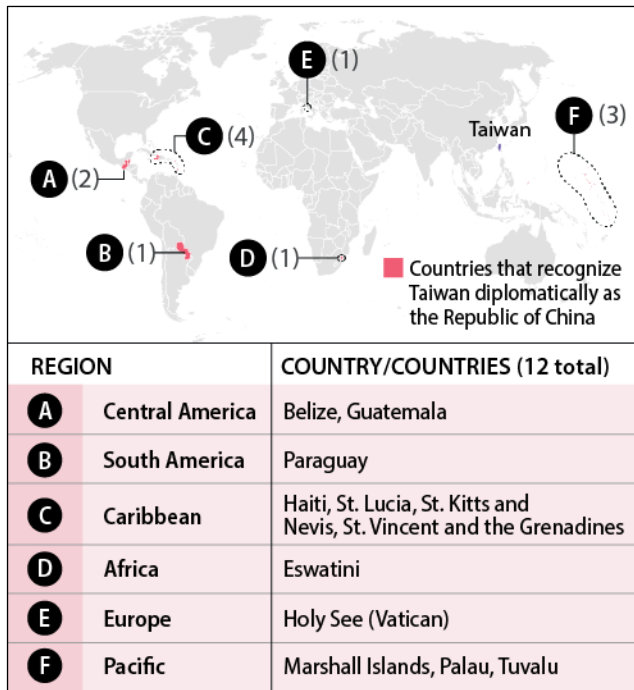
Taiwan’s Diplomatic Partners

As a condition for establishing diplomatic relations, the PRC requires its diplomatic partners to agree not to maintain official relations with Taiwan. Currently, a dozen countries have chosen to forgo diplomatic relations with the PRC in order to recognize Taiwan diplomatically as the ROC (see **Figure 1**). Between December 2016 and January 2024, the PRC persuaded 10 of Taiwan’s diplomatic partners to switch diplomatic recognition to the PRC: São Tomé and Príncipe (2016), Panama (2017), Dominican Republic (2018), Burkina Faso (2018), El Salvador (2018), Solomon Islands (2019), Kiribati (2019), Nicaragua (2021), Honduras (2023), and Nauru (2024). An eleventh partner, the Gambia, broke relations with Taiwan in 2013 and established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 2016.

Taiwan relies on its diplomatic partners to advocate for it at the UN and in other international fora from which it is absent. Taiwan’s diplomatic partners also provide opportunities for Taiwan’s leaders to make official trips

abroad—and transit visits through the United States on the outbound and inbound legs of such journeys. (See CRS In Focus IF12371, *Taiwan Presidents’ U.S. Transit Visits.*)

Figure 1. Taiwan’s Diplomatic Partners, as of 8/25/25



Source: CRS graphic by Mari Y. Lee.

Since the first Trump Administration, the United States has sought to dissuade Taiwan’s remaining diplomatic partners from breaking relations with Taiwan. The second Trump Administration has publicly thanked some countries that retain such ties. U.S. efforts to assist Taiwan in retaining its diplomatic partners have included joint U.S.-Taiwan development assistance and financing to promote private sector investment in these partner countries’ economies.

Taiwan’s Unofficial Relations

Taiwan maintains unofficial representative offices in 58 UN member states plus the self-declared republic of Somaliland. The PRC often has pressured governments over the names and locations of unofficial Taiwan offices in their countries. Under pressure from the PRC, for example, South Africa in 2024 ordered Taiwan to move its office out of the capital to Johannesburg, and in 2025 unilaterally renamed the “Taipei Liaison Offices” in Johannesburg and Cape Town to be “Taipei Commercial Offices.”

U.S. government efforts to support Taiwan’s unofficial relationships include the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF), a platform for Taiwan to share its expertise with global partners through training workshops in Taiwan and abroad. Launched in 2015, GCTF now counts Australia, Canada, and Japan’s unofficial offices in Taiwan as co-administrators. In 2024, GCTF organized 21 workshops in 17 countries. Congress made available no less than \$4 million for GCTF in FY2024 (P.L. 118-47) and FY2025 (P.L. 119-4).

International Organizations

The PRC has sought to exclude Taiwan from participation in international organizations, particularly UN specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). With PRC assent, Taiwan attended the World Health Assembly (WHA)—the governing body of the WHO—as an observer from 2009 to 2016. After 2016, the PRC objected to Taiwan’s WHA participation and invitations to Taiwan stopped. In 2013, the PRC acquiesced to Taiwan’s attending the ICAO triennial assembly as a guest of ICAO’s president. Taiwan has received no invitation to the assembly since. In 2023, the six-country Central American Parliament, known as Parlacen, voted to expel Taiwan from the permanent observer role it had held since 1999, and to invite the PRC to join in that role.

Taiwan is a full member of some international bodies, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). At the PRC’s insistence, it does not use the name “Taiwan.” In the WTO, it is the “Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu,” known for short as “Chinese Taipei.” In the ADB, it is “Taipei, China.” In APEC it is “Chinese Taipei.”

Related Legislation in the 119th Congress

The Taiwan International Solidarity Act (House-passed H.R. 2416/S. 2224) would, in part, amend the TAIPEI Act to direct that a report to Congress include information on PRC attempts “to undermine Taiwan’s membership or observer status” in international organizations and Taiwan’s relationships with other countries.

The Taiwan Non-Discrimination Act of 2025 (House-passed H.R. 910/S. 1900) would require the U.S. governor of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to “vigorously support” Taiwan’s admission to the IMF, which currently confines membership to “countries.” (According to the U.S. State Department, “The United States does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state.”)

The Taiwan Allies Fund Act (H.R. 2559/S. 1216) would authorize \$40 million in annual appropriations (FY2026-FY2028) to support countries that “maintain official relations with Taiwan or have meaningfully strengthened unofficial relations with Taiwan” or have been subject to PRC pressure due to their relations with Taiwan.

The Taiwan Relations Reinforcement Act of 2025 (S. 1588) would, among other things, require that certain existing congressionally mandated reports incorporate reporting “on China’s efforts to block Taiwan’s meaningful participation and inclusion at the United Nations and other international bodies, and recommend appropriate responses.”

S.Res. 86 and H.Res. 148 would include “resolved” clauses encouraging the U.S. government to work with partners on efforts “to counter China’s false narratives about Resolution 2758” and support countries in continuing official relationships or strengthening partnerships with Taiwan.

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