



## **The Never-Ending Civil War: China's Efforts to Delegitimize Taiwan**

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Great powers never rest in advancing their interests. With the spread of COVID-19, [great powers](#) like China, Russia, and the United States all rushed to use “vaccine diplomacy” to achieve political aims. The soft power element of “vaccine diplomacy” recently become relevant to the complicated world of Cross-Strait relations. In particular, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) attempted to use lucrative vaccine offers to [entice Paraguay](#), one of Taiwan’s few remaining official allies, to switch its alliance from Taipei to Beijing. While Paraguay [refused](#) the offer, China showed how it can use soft power tools like medical support and development aid to poach Taiwan’s official allies. Considering China’s use of these practices, questions emerge over why China engages in this type of behavior and how these activities impact both Taiwan and Cross-Strait relations.

Cross-Strait tensions are rooted in conditions that developed during the Chinese Civil War. Facing imminent defeat, Chiang Kai-Shek [moved the Republic of China government to Taiwan](#) with hopes of eventually reclaiming the Mainland. Even though the Republic of China government continued to operate, the PRC [refused to acknowledge the legitimacy](#) of the ROC in Taiwan. The emergence of the One China Principle and the Once China Policy have only given Beijing more ways to assert its claim over Taiwan. The [One China Principle](#), which states that both Mainland China and Taiwan belong to a single Chinese entity, has been used by Beijing to perceive any official diplomatic activity between Taiwan and other states as an infringement on Chinese sovereignty. Like the One China Principle, the [“One China Policy,”](#) if accepted by a state, requires states to recognize that there exists only one Chinese state. This makes it so that states cannot recognize both Taiwan and Mainland China. Under these conditions, China can use its economic and political power to influence how states interact with Taiwan. Considering how most of the nations that have official diplomatic relations with Taiwan are [developing states](#), economic tools have proved to be useful in [enticing these states](#) to switch their diplomatic recognition to Beijing. The desire to poach Taiwan’s allies has [grown stronger](#) since the Democratic Progressive Party returned to power in 2016, as the party has historically [refused](#) to abide by the idea that Taiwan is a part of one China.

Important political aims lie behind Beijing’s efforts to poach Taiwan’s remaining allies. For one, influencing the international activity of other states provides the PRC with the opportunity to shape international norms that suit their interests. Aside from exerting political and economic influences over other states, efforts to poach Taiwan’s official allies aim to influence how Taiwan views the prospect of unification. Much like the People’s Liberation Army-led [sieges](#) that led Chinese cities



to surrender without a fight during the Chinese Civil War, there is hope that depriving Taiwan of international recognition will eliminate Taiwan's will to resist unification. With this, there is a psychological aspect to delegitimization efforts, as it forces Taiwan to face the prospect of eventually lacking the recognition that is afforded to most states. From the perspective of the PRC, these acts play an important role in forming conditions that are conducive to unification.

Rather than creating conditions that are conducive to unification, pressure on Taiwan has only increased [negative views](#) of the PRC in Taiwan. The existence of these negative perspectives shows that isolating Taiwan can be counterproductive by [rallying](#) Taiwanese citizens around their current government and contributing to existing [identity differences](#). Economic engagement, whilst being more benign, also cannot guarantee peaceful unification. In fact, the economic cooperation that followed the election of Ma Ying-jeou in 2008 created fears that Beijing was using economic means to slowly [absorb](#) Taiwan. The fears over this engagement resulted in the 2014 [Sunflower Movement](#), which emerged to protest a free trade agreement between the two sides. The harsh truth for Beijing is that Taiwan will not give up on its goal to protect its sovereignty. The most peaceful option for Cross-Strait relations, which would involve Beijing recognizing the independence of Taiwan, is unimaginable due to Beijing's unwavering territorial [claims](#) and the importance of Taiwan to Chinese [nationalism](#). With this, Taiwan has truly become a "problem from hell" for China, as engagement and pressure bring it no closer to unification. This reality creates an unstable situation where several evolving dynamics can lead to a desperate and increasingly [nationalistic](#) Beijing initiating conflict. The consequences of this conflict would not only influence Beijing and Taipei, but also Washington and its future in East Asia.