

Taiwan: No Longer Alone in a Globalized World



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Kicker:

Geopolitical tensions step beyond the veil of diplomacy to take center stage on the Olympic podium. How have the Olympic Games provided insight into a united East Asian against an increasingly aggressive China?

At the Tokyo Olympic medal ceremony for the badminton men's double, victorious players watched as a flag was raised, an emblem that bore only a passing resemblance to their nation's. They stood as a song blared into the mostly empty venue, a tune that was not their anthem. It was a moment that many Taiwanese watched with immense pride. The win by duo Lee Yang and Wang Chi-lin was seen as an opportunity to subtly assert Taiwanese nationhood with the nation's first-ever badminton gold in the Olympics, a sport predominantly dominated by China. By prevailing over Chinese duo Liu Yuchen and Li Junhui, Taiwan, long marginalized and isolated to the fringes of the international community, achieved Olympic glory, albeit a victory mired in controversy. The concerted campaign by Beijing to remove any reference to Taiwanese sovereignty from world affairs was on full display at the Games as Taiwanese athletes were forced to participate under the

label Chinese Taipei. China's state owned broadcaster cut Taiwanese athletes out of the opening ceremony program and medal presentation ceremonies.

China did not stop there: Chinese diplomats and citizens took to online platforms to further regulate mentions of Taiwan. Japanese broadcaster NHK faced intense criticism for showing an "incomplete map" of China during its Olympics broadcast that did not include Taiwan.

Chinese athletes who failed to win, especially against Taiwan and Japan, were subjected to a storm of online abuse from rising nationalism Chinese citizens calling them "trash" and a "shame to the country". Liu, among them, issued a tearful apology for "letting them down". Celebrities who celebrated the historical wins of Taiwanese athletes online were met with online hate and Chinese brands cutting ties with them in retaliation.

China's severe reaction to losing ping-pong events to Taiwan and Japan highlights the growing potential for conflict. The complex history between the three nations played out on the world stage - where China's attempts to isolate the smaller island nation has been met with a globalized world intent on fairplay.

The dispute at the Tokyo Olympics highlights geopolitical tensions that date back to China's Qing dynasty. Taiwan was administered by China from 1683 until 1895 when Japan won the first Sino-Japanese War, and took control of the territory, until the Japanese defeat in WW2 prompted its return to China. Shortly after the return of Taiwan to Chinese governance, however, civil war broke out; the then leader Chiang Kai-Shek fled to Taiwan (1949) with his remaining allies after suffering losses to Mao Zang's Communist armies. Chiang's Kuomintang

(KMT) government proceeded to control Taiwan's political sphere for many years to come, ruling Taiwan separately from Mainland China. Then, during the global "third wave" of democratization that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan gradually peacefully transitioned from authoritarian rule to the democracy it is today.

While Taiwan has continuously maintained its stance as an independent country, and rejected proposals such as the "one country, two systems" approach that China uses for Hong Kong, reunification continues to be China's core objective. For decades China has run a successful diplomatic campaign to isolate and prostrate the Taiwanese nation. Only fifteen countries officially recognize Taiwan as a country, and even America, one of Taiwan's greatest allies, opts to officially recognize Beijing whilst doing informal agreements with Taiwan, leaving Taiwan in an ambiguous status.

China views the self-governing island as part of its own territory and has never renounced the possible use of force to bring it under Beijing's control. Implementation of a sweeping national security law in Hong Kong in response to protests over China's increasing influence were widely seen as a sign that China was becoming more assertive in the region. China appears to be continuing to escalate the situation with Taiwan: China's military sent 28 warplanes into Taiwan's air defense identification zone on June 13—the largest-known incursion to date—including 14 J-16 and six J-11 fighter jets and four H-6 heavy bombers, which are capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

Enter Japan, a nation that has held true to its pacifist constitution since WWII, and a nation that, in the build up to the Tokyo Olympic Games, has begun military posturing of their own, issuing increasingly assertive declarations to stand by

Taiwan. In their annual defence report issued in April, Japan touched on the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait for the first time. The addition of Japan's self defence forces would combat China's current advantage in arms as well as serving an important context geographically. US forces that would be the first to reach Taiwan, in less than an hour, would be from army bases in Okinawa, Japan.

Additionally, public support for Taiwan is very high in Japan: 74 percent of the Japanese public support the government being engaged in the pursuit of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, a **Nikei** and **TV Tokyo** poll has found.

The Washington summit held in April between President Biden and Prime Minister Suga in which they made a joint statement on the importance and continued cooperation in ensuring peace in the Taiwan strait, was a first in 70 years. It was also the first in person meeting with a foreign diplomat, showing the importance they place on the relationship and peace in Taiwan.

As Taiwan becomes the focal point of rising tensions between two superpowers, an escalation of the conflict has the potential to be disastrous for both: any loss of face for the United States could further signal a weakened US military to the world following its withdrawal from Afghanistan, leaving allies to question their trust in the United States whilst an outright attack by China could threaten domestic support for the Communist government.

Indeed, it is in the vested interests of the world to find a peaceful solution. Perhaps this is where the lesson of the Games can truly be felt. Soft diplomacy such as sports and education, as well as economic disincentive may stave off catastrophe. A military escalation in Taiwan would wreak havoc

on world trade and affect global technology supply chains: the world relies on Taiwan for the creation of semiconductor chips, which are a necessity in making products with built-in electronics, including iPhones, personal computers and cars for companies such as Apple. Taiwan continues to be the unmatched leader in the global semiconductor industry with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), which accounts for more than 50 percent of the US\$527 billion global market, having 90 percent of its production take place in Taiwan.

And yet, while Taiwan has many trading partners, it has historically had very few international friends, at least not ones easily prepared to stand beside it publicly in fear of retaliation from China. Only time will tell, as China focuses more than ever on reunification with Taiwan, if America and Japan will stay true to their promises of support.