

# Should Australia go to war with China in defence of Taiwan?

## Polling on defence and security issues in Australia and Taiwan

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*Australia fearful of attack but opposed to war.*

Discussion paper

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# Summary

In April this year, Australians were warned by no less an expert than the former Minister for Defence, Christopher Pyne, that they may need to engage in a 'kinetic' war with China in the next five to ten years.<sup>1</sup> This warning was followed up by a senior member of the national security bureaucracy advising Australians, in terms more ominous than bureaucrats normally use, that "the drums of war beat".<sup>2</sup>

To illuminate these issues, The Australia Institute surveyed nationally representative samples of both Australians and Taiwanese about their views on a series of questions regarding each nation's security and relationship with China.

The results suggest that Australians are very fearful of China but that only around one in five Australians is prepared to commit to war in support of the people of Taiwan.

Several key themes emerged from the results:

- Australia's geographical distance from China notwithstanding, Australians and Taiwanese are equally fearful of China.
- A similar number of Australians think China will launch an armed attack on Australia (42%) as on Taiwan (49%)
- Taiwanese people do not want to be governed by China or to be a part of China.
- Around half (49%) of Taiwanese people are in favour of independence, regardless of the consequences.
- Taiwanese do not expect an imminent attack, but expect one at some point in the future.
- Australians expect China to launch an armed attack on Taiwan sooner than Taiwanese do.
- Taiwanese people are clear-eyed that war with China would be unwinnable without international assistance, and would likely only be a draw even with US help.
- Australians are sympathetic to Taiwanese aspirations for independence with two-thirds agreeing that Taiwan should still become a new country, even if China decides to attack after Taiwan declares independence.

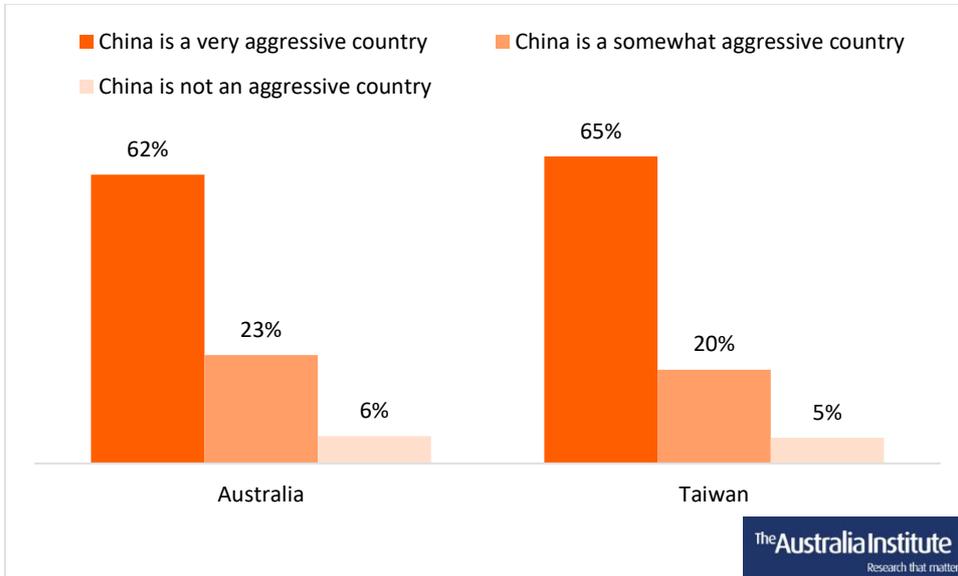
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<sup>1</sup> Greene (2021) *Former Defence Minister Christopher Pyne warns of potential war with China in the Indo-Pacific region*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-12/christopher-pyne-potential-conflict-china-politics/100064226>

<sup>2</sup> Pezzullo (2021) *The drums of war are growing louder*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/the-drums-of-war-are-growing-louder/news-story/bf29fb3cf94b89f84eaeb22fd32d9724>

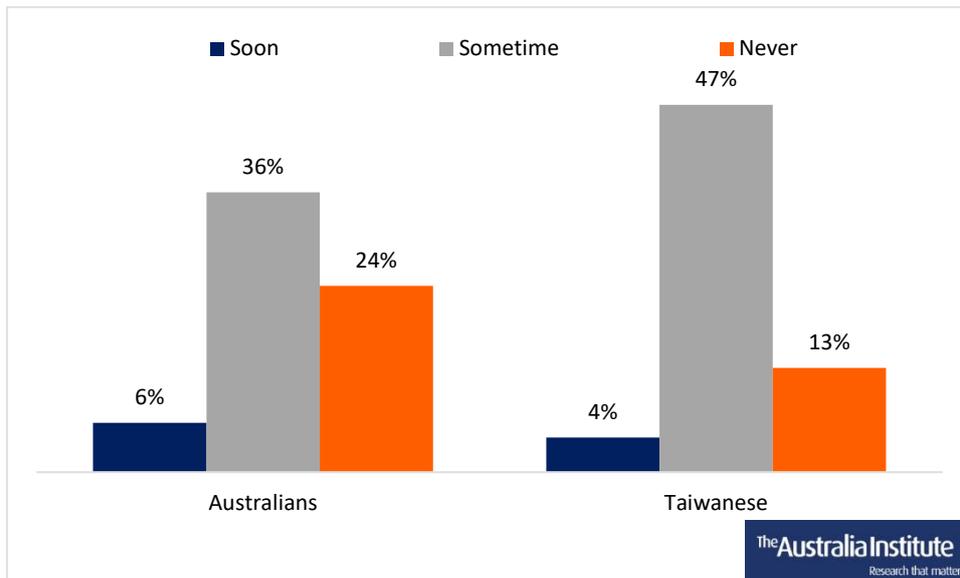
- There is a strong age correlation in Taiwan, with young people supporting independence and measures to achieve it, and fearing China, to a greater extent than older people.

**Figure 1: Views on whether China is an aggressive country**



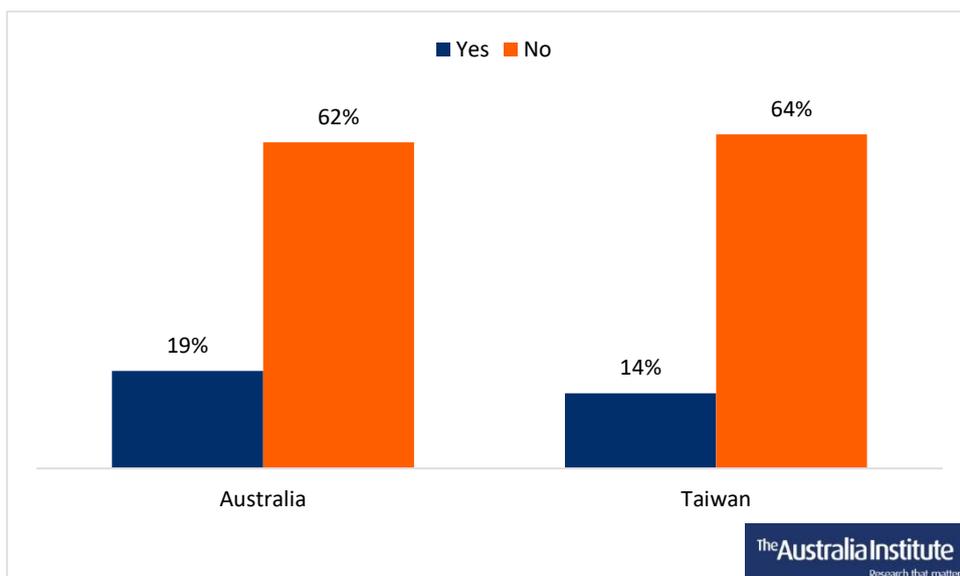
Both Australia and Taiwan see China as being a very aggressive country (over 60 percent in both cases). Taiwanese are nearly twice as likely (43 percent) as Australians (25 percent) to regard the US as very aggressive but most Australians and Taiwanese agree that the US is *at least* somewhat aggressive (74% and 75% respectively). A significant proportion of Australians think that China will attack Australia soon or sometime (42%), with the proportion of Taiwanese that think that China will attack Taiwan at only slightly higher levels (51%). Given the great differences of geography and history, the convergence of threat perception is noteworthy.

**Figure 2: Do you think China will launch an armed attack on your country...**



Nearly one in five (19 percent) Australians think that Australia could defend itself against China without international support, whereas only 14 percent of Taiwan’s citizens think that they could defend themselves unaided. Interestingly, only 15 percent of Taiwanese think that the people of Taiwan are willing to go to war against China for Taiwan’s independence; this suggests that despite their own pro-independence views they are concerned about their compatriots’ resolve.

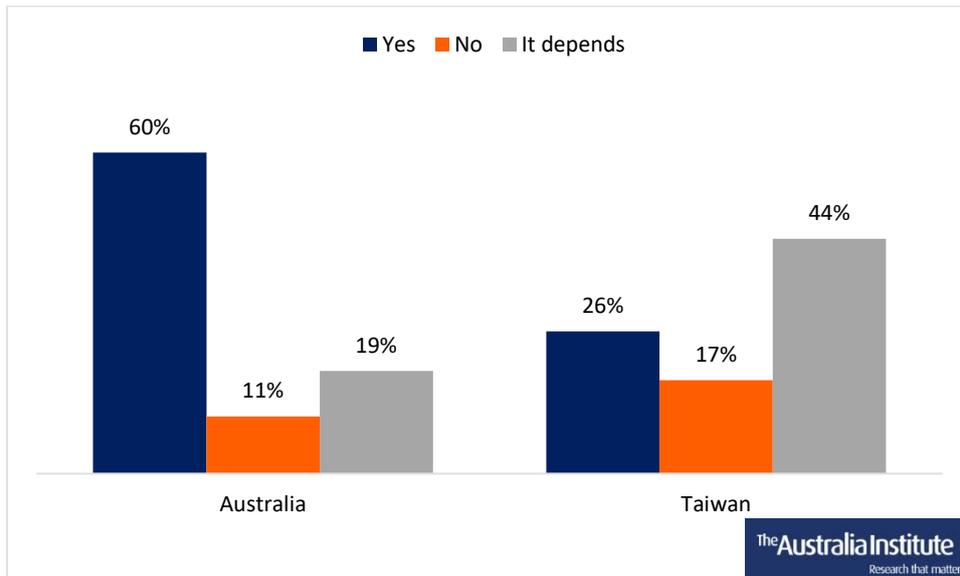
**Figure 3: If China attacked, could your country successfully defend itself without international assistance?**



Confidence in the preparedness of the US to come to Taiwan’s and Australia’s assistance varies considerably, with 60 percent of Australians thinking that the US would defend Australia, against 26 percent of Taiwanese thinking that the US would

commit its armed forces to the defence of Taiwan. Many more Taiwanese appreciate the conditionality of the US commitment to their defence – only 19 percent of Australians think “it depends”, whereas 44 percent of Taiwanese people think “it depends”.

**Figure 4: If China attacks your country, do you think that the United States will commit its military forces to fight a war against China?**



Several factors may intersect in these results:

- Taiwanese citizens may have a greater appreciation of what would be at stake in a kinetic conflict with China.
- Similarly, Australians may have less appreciation than Taiwanese of the consequences and implications of armed conflict. War and its consequences remain real for the Taiwanese.
- A long history of uncritical belief in the ANZUS treaty as a security guarantee may influence Australian thinking.
- Anti-China sentiment has generated fear and insecurity in the Australian community.

The Australia Institute’s poll results are generally consistent with other recent polls.

The Lowy Institute poll, published on 23 June 2021, records that trust in China has fallen to new record low, with only 16 percent of Australians expressing trust in China, compared with 52 percent only three years ago.<sup>3</sup> Over 60 percent of Australians now see China as a security threat. These views are supported in large measure by the recent survey released by the Pew Research Center, which records that unfavourable

<sup>3</sup> Kassam (2021) *The Lowy Institute Poll 2021*, <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/report/2021/>

views of China are at or near historical highs in most of the 17 advanced economies surveyed.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the Pew survey records more Australia (78 percent) as entertaining a negative opinion of China than Taiwanese people (69 percent) do. According to the Pew survey, Taiwan's view has not changed over two decades, while Australia's has practically reversed.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the outlier here is Singapore, where six in ten view China favourably.

On Taiwan, in the 2021 Lowy Poll a majority of Australians rated a military conflict between the US and China over Taiwan as a critical threat to Australia. But in the event of a military conflict between China and United States, 57% think Australia should stay neutral. The last time they were asked, in 2019, 43% of Australians supported deploying military forces, even in the clearest possible case where China invaded Taiwan and US decided to intervene.

The two questions asked by The Australia Institute on this subject are not directly comparable to those in the Lowy poll, however in both cases support was lower for deployment of Australian forces against China than in the Lowy poll. Only 21% of Australians agreed that the Australian people are prepared to go to war to help the Taiwanese people gain their independence from China, with 40% against and 39% undecided. When the Australia Institute asked "if China incorporated Taiwan, do you agree or disagree that Australia should send its defence forces to Taiwan to fight for their freedom?" 37% agreed, 29% were against and 34% were undecided. It is possible that public support may be declining due to talk of war as the decision feels more real.

Polling in Taiwan is consistent with other surveys which show that most Taiwanese do not want to be part of China, with around two-thirds preferring independence if peaceful relations with China could be maintained and a slim majority preferring independence even if it might lead to a Chinese attack.<sup>6</sup>

The Australia Institute's polling results suggest that the defence of Taiwan is a live issue in the Australian electorate. It is also an issue that lacks a contemporary policy context. The question is: what should that policy context look like?

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<sup>4</sup> Silver et al. (2021) *Large Majorities Say China Does Not Respect the Personal Freedoms of Its People*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/06/30/large-majorities-say-china-does-not-respect-the-personal-freedoms-of-its-people/>

<sup>5</sup> Kassam (2021) *The Lowy Institute Poll 2021*, <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/report/2021/>

<sup>6</sup> Rich and Dahmer (2020) *Taiwan Opinion Polling on Unification with China*, <https://jamestown.org/program/taiwan-opinion-polling-on-unification-with-china/> and Pan (2020) *Independence support spikes: survey*, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/06/23/2003738708>

# What should inform Australia's policy response?

Taiwan presents a set of wicked problems the negotiation of which will require extreme care on Australia's part.

The position of Taiwan is not just a matter of ending a domestic dispute, whether by negotiation or armed force, in the aftermath of an ongoing civil war that has never been resolved. It is not just Taiwan's future that hangs in the balance, because the interests and prestige of both China and the US are engaged – as well as of neighbouring states, especially Japan.

As a determined and vociferous barracker from the geographic bleachers, Australia may be willing itself into the consequential dimension of Taiwan's political future. But it is a situation where, although Australia may have preferences, it is not a major actor. Perhaps a good analogy would be another historically complex situation: that of the Korean peninsula. There, Australia has long maintained a carefully nuanced policy that balances a sympathetic strategic appreciation with not creating expectations.

However, that does not mean that Australia cannot be caught in the crossfire. At a minimum, the economic consequences of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait that disrupted trade would be severe.<sup>7</sup> A crisis over Taiwan could pose Australia with a difficult decision: to get involved and become a direct combatant and thus a Chinese military target; or, if Australia refuses a US request to come on board in defence of Taiwan, to deal with the implications for Australia's alliance with the US.<sup>8</sup>

The Australia Institute's polling results suggest that many in Australia believe that Australia will become a belligerent in support of the US. But what kind of war would it be, and what would be its consequences?

Here are some principles that need to be kept in mind for Australia's Taiwan policy.

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<sup>7</sup> Uren (2021) *What if ...? Economic consequences for Australia of a US-China conflict over Taiwan*, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/what-if>

<sup>8</sup> Dupont speaking at Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria (2021) *The Taiwan Test: How to Keep Democracy Alive in Asia*, <https://aiiavic.tidyhq.com/public/schedule/events/35733-the-taiwan-test-how-to-keep-democracy-alive-in-asia>

# THERE IS NO EASY SOLUTION TO THE STATUS OF TAIWAN

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There can be a tendency to try to paint the situation as simple when it is anything but.

Taiwan is not an independent country like any other. But equally Taiwan is not a part of China like any other. Former foreign minister Gareth Evans put this well when he wrote:

Taiwan is a special case. Whether comfortable to acknowledge or not, it is not a sovereign independent state like any other.... It prefers now to be independent, but does not formally claim to be, and is not recognised as such by more than a handful of states.<sup>9</sup>

The current situation is a relic of the 1940s when the Nationalists and Communists fought for control of China.<sup>10</sup> The Nationalists lost the civil war and retreated to Taiwan. In theory the government in Taiwan – officially the Republic of China – claims all the territory of China while, in reality, it just governs Taiwan. Given that both claim the same territory, countries have had to decide which government to recognise; not surprisingly, almost all have chosen the People’s Republic of China, with now only 15 countries recognising the Republic of China.

The 1972 Joint Communiqué establishing diplomatic relations between Australia and China makes Taiwan’s legal status crystal clear: “The Australian Government recognises the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China, acknowledges the position of the Chinese Government that Taiwan is a province of the People’s Republic of China.”

For China, the status of Taiwan is unfinished business. It regards Taiwan as a break-away province and has explicitly said it reserves the option of using force. It is important to recognise the intensity of the issue for Beijing which sees vital interests at stake: the unity of the nation and the credibility of its government. No Chinese leader can afford to be the one that lost Taiwan. For China, Taiwan is a first-order issue and the centrepiece of its military planning.<sup>11</sup> In a recent speech celebrating the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party, President Xi Jinping described reunification

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<sup>9</sup> Evans (2021) *Talking up war over Taiwan flouts reason, fact, judgment and Australia’s national interest*, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/05/09/talking-up-war-over-taiwan-flouts-reason-fact-judgment-and-australias-national-interest/>

<sup>10</sup> Conley Tyler (2021) *What you need to know about the status of Taiwan*, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-status-of-taiwan>

<sup>11</sup> Porter and Mazarr (2021) *Countering China’s Adventurism over Taiwan: A Third Way*, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/countering-china-s-adventurism-over-taiwan-third-way>

as “a historic mission and an unshakable commitment” and stressed “No one should underestimate the resolve, the will, and the ability of the Chinese people to defend their national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”<sup>12</sup> He has said that the Taiwan issue should not be passed down generation after generation.

But in practice, Taiwan has had more than 70 years of functioning as an independent and separate society, albeit unrecognised. While deprived of the status of independent state and membership of the United Nations, it has a democratically-elected government and boasts a thriving economy, vibrant civil society and media debate.

## TAIWANESE WANT TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN FUTURE

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Taiwanese have a distinct identity. Around two-thirds identify themselves as “Taiwanese”.<sup>13</sup> This is a significant shift from 1992 when almost half identified as “both Taiwanese and Chinese” and a quarter as “Chinese”. Today only 3% view themselves as Chinese.

They are entitled to want not to be citizens of the People’s Republic of China, even if that may lead to war.

The Australia Institute’s polling results confirm other surveys which show that most Taiwanese do not want to be part of China, even under ideal economic, social and political conditions.<sup>14</sup> The desire for independence is strong, even if it might lead to a Chinese attack.

Polling also shows that, unlike perceptions in Australia, Taiwanese are not expecting a Chinese attack soon.<sup>15</sup> This may mean that they think it is more likely that China will continue its “grey zone” coercive tactics.<sup>16</sup> It shows they are not at all clear about what would happen if there were an attack. This is a complex political issue for Taiwan.

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<sup>12</sup> Xi (2021) *Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China*, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c\\_1310038244.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm)

<sup>13</sup> National Chengchi University Election Study Center (2021) *Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese 1992-2020*, <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961>

<sup>14</sup> Rich and Dahmer (2020) *Taiwan Opinion Polling on Unification with China*, <https://jamestown.org/program/taiwan-opinion-polling-on-unification-with-china/>

<sup>15</sup> Pan (2020) *Independence support spikes: survey*, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2020/06/23/2003738708>

<sup>16</sup> Jakobson (2021) *Why should Australia be concerned about... rising tensions in the Taiwan Straits?*, <https://chinamatters.org.au/policy-brief/policy-brief-february-2021/>

Ultimately, it is for the people of Taiwan to determine their status, though they will not do so without China's involvement.<sup>17</sup> It is a matter for other countries to decide whether and how to support Taiwan.

## AUSTRALIA MUST CONSIDER ITS OWN INTERESTS

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For Australia, involvement in a Taiwan Strait crisis would be a war of choice. This needs to be clear in debate: "Much of the recent discussion of Australia's next war portrays it as something that would happen to Australia, rather than the result of a decision which Canberra would make."<sup>18</sup>

Proponents and opponents must be very clear about what they are willing to go to war for and why. It is not sufficient to say that Australia should automatically follow the US. But it is also not sufficient to say Australia should not do so based on past imperial wars.<sup>19</sup> The decision must be made on the merits of the specific case.

**Taiwan is not an ally of the US.** When the US established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Republic of China, in force since 1955, was abrogated. This was upheld in a legal challenge. In its place, the US Congress enacted the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The TRA explicitly recognises that any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means would be a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area. It authorises the provision of arms "of a defensive character" and declares an explicit policy of the US "to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardise the security, or the social and economic system, of the people on Taiwan". The TRA does not provide for automatic military engagement by the US in defence of Taiwan, not does it preclude such military assistance. The US does, of course, provide significant military support to Taiwan through its military sales and training for Taiwanese military personnel.

**The ANZUS treaty would not be automatically invoked by a crisis in the Taiwan Strait.**<sup>20</sup> This was publicly recognised by Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer

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<sup>17</sup> Hass and Kapetas speaking on Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2021) *Policy, Guns and Money: Is Alarm on Taiwan Wrong*, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/policy-guns-and-money-taiwan-climate-change-and-the-cost-of-defence/>

<sup>18</sup> Scott (2021) *Australians need clarity on war or peace*, <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/australians-need-clarity-on-war-or-peace-20210506-p57pg1>

<sup>19</sup> Harrison (2021) *Australia's dangerously inadequate Taiwan policy debate*, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-dangerously-inadequate-taiwan-policy-debate/>

<sup>20</sup> Blaxland (2021) *China does not want war, at least not yet. It's playing the long game*, <https://theconversation.com/china-does-not-want-war-at-least-not-yet-its-playing-the-long-game-160093>

in 2004.<sup>21</sup> Nor does the treaty address the relationship between Taiwan and the US. It is critically important that people who invoke the ANZUS treaty actually read and understand it and appreciate the deep historical background of the ANZUS treaty.<sup>22</sup>

**Taiwan is also not an ally of Australia.** It is thoroughly specious to suggest that because Australia is an ally of the US, US actions to uphold the security interests of Taiwan would necessarily involve Australia. Because of regional and global strategic consequences, Australia and the US would consult in any situation in which China were to threaten or use military force against Taiwan. But such consultations would not reflect any obligation to Taiwan pursuant to the ANZUS treaty.

**Australia's direct strategic interests are not engaged in Taiwan.** Australia and Taiwan do not share deep strategic interests relating to individual or mutual defence.

Australia's defence priority as set out in the *Defence Strategic Update* is on its immediate region "ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific."<sup>23</sup> This does not include Taiwan.<sup>24</sup> The *Strategic Update* explicitly states that actions outside this region – such as in North Asia – remain possible, but "any such wider contributions must be based on specific national interests."

The argument for Australian involvement would be a systems argument – that Australia does not want an order where China sets all the rules — rather than one based on direct strategic interests. But it does not follow that Australia has to choose a military response.

It is important to guard against reducing the strategic complexity of the Taiwan issue to a simplistic values argument focused on the imperative that democracy must be defended everywhere and at all times. Australia clearly benefits, both economically and strategically, from the continued prosperity, stability and security of Taiwan, just as Taiwan benefits from Australia's economic strength and security. Linda Jakobson is correct that Australia should care about Taiwan's fate because "Taiwan typifies the kind of vibrant, free and democratic society that Australia wants to see flourish across

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<sup>21</sup> The Age (2004) *Downer flags China shift*, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/downer-flags-china-shift-20040818-gdyh62.html>

<sup>22</sup> Behm (2020), *ANZUS and Australia's Security*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/anzus-and-australias-security/>

<sup>23</sup> Department of Defence (2020) *Defence Strategic Update* p. 21, <https://www1.defence.gov.au/strategy-policy/strategic-update-2020>

<sup>24</sup> Scafton (2021) *Not the war over Taiwan again!*, <https://johnmenadue.com/not-the-war-over-taiwan-again/>

the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that both are democracies does not necessitate military support should one or the other come under threat.

A decision by China to integrate Taiwan into China forcibly, abrogate its parliament and enforce Chinese law would have profound implications for Asia, its cohesion, and its security. The use of force always has such implications.

One implication is that a forcible seizure of Taiwan would weaken China: “The PRC would likely suffer huge losses in the process and spend years pacifying Taiwan, militarily and politically; it would be depleted, not energised for further conquest.”<sup>26</sup> It is one of the few things that can derail China’s national rejuvenation.<sup>27</sup> The status quo is in China’s interests, even if it does not recognise this. Equally, it is not obvious that a war would assist America in maintaining its regional leadership; instead it may destroy America’s strategic leadership in Asia.<sup>28</sup>

There is a danger that a sense of inevitability will be created about Australian military involvement in any Taiwan crisis. This must be resisted.

Above all, what Australia should not do is send signals to Taiwan that it will help if that is not true. It would be morally reprehensible to give Taiwanese false hope and then betray them. Some of the “tough talk” from Canberra might give Taiwanese the impression that they can rely on Australia. Given the precipitous decline in the relationship between Australia and China, there has been a tendency to talk up the prospects of war. Public commentators amplify what they deem to be the drum-beats of war, normalising anxiety and apprehension.

But any decision to be involved will be made at the time and will depend on a host of factors. The high number of undecideds in the polling figures on public support suggest that it would be unwise to assume it would be an easy or popular decision. The honest answer would be: we do not know what we would decide until the circumstances requiring a decision are clear.

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<sup>25</sup> Jakobson (2021) *Why should Australia be concerned about... rising tensions in the Taiwan Straits?*, <https://chinamatters.org.au/policy-brief/policy-brief-february-2021/>

<sup>26</sup> Porter and Mazarr (2021) *Countering China’s Adventurism over Taiwan: A Third Way*, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/countering-china-s-adventurism-over-taiwan-third-way>

<sup>27</sup> Jakobson speaking on Lim and Gyngell (2021) *Australia in the World* <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/episode-73-china-and-chinese-politics/> and <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/episode-73-china-chinese-politics-and-finlandisation/>

<sup>28</sup> White (2021) *A war over Taiwan would be nothing like Afghanistan*, <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/morrison-may-have-to-decide-on-war-or-peace-20210422-p571en>

It is important for Taiwan not to mistake Australia's anti-China sentiment for unqualified support.

## WAYS AUSTRALIA CAN HELP TAIWAN WITHOUT COMMITTING TO WAR

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Focusing on the military aspects of a possible future crisis blinds us to what Australia can do to support Taiwan right now.

Australia can continue to clearly and consistently state its expectation that the situation can only be resolved by peaceful means. Taiwan's overriding fear is of abandonment: it does not want the issue to be seen as something for China and Taiwan to 'solve by themselves'.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Australia can support US efforts to internationalise the Taiwan Strait issue. As Biden reaches out to rebuild relationships with partners, he has been creating wider support for Taiwan as a security problem for the Indo-Pacific. Australia supported this when – for the first time – peace and security across the Taiwan Strait was mentioned at the Australia–Japan Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, along with the G7, US–Japan and US–South Korea summits.<sup>30</sup>

In doing so Australia assists deterrence. In particular, a calculation by Beijing that Australia would be likely to be involved in economic sanctions raises the costs to China of aggression. "This approach is designed in part to intensify the stakes of the choice China would confront in attacking Taiwan – to make clear to Beijing that it can either have 'national rejuvenation' or take Taiwan by intimidation or force."<sup>31</sup>

At this point, economic sanctions may be more of a factor for China than military deterrence given China's growing military confidence,<sup>32</sup> seeing itself becoming more powerful while the US is in decline.<sup>33</sup> Chinese commentators are aware that the "United States and its allies can effectively isolate China economically, diplomatically and militarily... [to] make China a pariah in the international community and prevent it

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<sup>29</sup> Conley Tyler (2021) *Taiwan's View of the Trump Administration*,

<https://melbourneasiareview.edu.au/taiwans-view-of-the-trump-administration/>

<sup>30</sup> Conley Tyler (2021) *Biden wins over Taiwan*, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/29/biden-wins-over-taiwan/>

<sup>31</sup> Porter and Mazarr (2021) *Countering China's Adventurism over Taiwan: A Third Way*,

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/countering-china-s-adventurism-over-taiwan-third-way>

<sup>32</sup> Mastro (2021), *The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force*,

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-06-03/china-taiwan-war-temptation>

<sup>33</sup> Kassam (2021) *Closer Taiwan-US ties are stabilising the region, not the opposite*,

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/closer-taiwan-us-ties-are-stabilising-region-not-opposite>

from achieving its modernisation goals.”<sup>34</sup> In case of military action, Australia’s contribution would be welcome but not likely to be decisive. But if the response is to impose economic sanctions, Australia can be an important actor. For example, cutting off supplies of iron ore to China would be significant blow. The economic consequences for Australia would also be significant.

And on the economic front, given that one way China attempts to deter Taiwanese independence is through economic coercion,<sup>35</sup> Australia can continue to promote trade with Taiwan. This helps both countries diversify their trade. A trade agreement with Taiwan is not out of the question and would not involve recognising Taiwan as independent; Australia already has a trade agreement with Hong Kong.

Australia can also support Taiwan in its campaign for more international space, including its continuing push for observer status at the World Health Assembly, something Australia supports. Australia works with Taiwan through the Global Cooperation and Training Framework to host international workshops to enable Taiwan to share its knowledge and expertise with other countries from a position of equality with other participants, sidestepping its limited diplomatic status.<sup>36</sup> This could be used to progress discussions on anything from energy security, space, countering misinformation and cyber threats.

Finally, as Taiwan grapples with its first large-scale outbreak of COVID-19, it would happily accept Australian-produced Astra Zeneca vaccines. While Australia rightly has a range of priorities for its vaccine diplomacy – including the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia – it is worth considering putting Taiwan on the list. Even a relatively small number of vaccines donated could have an outsize symbolic effect.

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<sup>34</sup> Lei (2021) *Mainland China is in no position to take Taiwan by force*, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/02/26/mainland-china-is-in-no-position-to-take-taiwan-by-force/>

<sup>35</sup> Conley Tyler (2021) *How Australia can help Taiwan tackle global issues*, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-australia-can-help-taiwan-tackle-global-issues/>

<sup>36</sup> Conley Tyler (2021) *How Australia can help Taiwan tackle global issues*, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-australia-can-help-taiwan-tackle-global-issues/>

# Conclusion

War, particularly one that might conceivably raise the spectre of nuclear annihilation, is not a rational option where there are alternatives. Australia's national interests – which at the very least include the security of the nation, the prosperity of its people, the stability of the region and the pursuit of constructive internationalism as a means of maintaining global stability – are not served by clarion calls to war. As the Australia Institute's polling demonstrates, most Australians are not convinced that Australia should go to war to help the Taiwanese people gain their independence. While almost 40 percent of Australians are uncertain about going to war in defence of Taiwan, 40 percent are opposed, with just over 20 percent in favour. This suggests that most Australians do not consider that war is an inevitability and are not stirred to action by the 'drums of war'.

## Method

The Australia Institute surveyed 603 people in Australia and 606 people in Taiwan between 11 and 27 June 2021, online through Dynata polling, with nationally representative samples by gender and region.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is 4%.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives, or the Legislative Yuan. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other.

Detailed results are available at [australiainstitute.org.au](http://australiainstitute.org.au).