

TO: David Cameron, UK Foreign Secretary

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RE: Rising UK-China tensions and Defence Ties between the UK and Taiwan

Summary

Tensions between the UK and China have been escalating because of the former's defence ties to Taiwan, consequently affecting diplomatic relations between the UK and China. As such, there is an urgent need to not only understand the issue but also formulate effective policy interventions for ensuring that the relations do not continue to deteriorate. Centrally, promotion of multi-lateral dialogues as the foundational policy recommendation to get a resolve on the tensions of UK-China. The purpose of this memo is to provide you with the general information about how the nature of UK's defence ties to Taiwan and how stakeholders should approach the issue from a policymaking perspective.

Background

UK's defence ties with Taiwan has resulted in tensions with China owing to the sensitivity of the relationship between China and Taiwan. Specifically, China does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign nation, but rather, as an extension of its territory. An article by Reuters states that in a recent address, China cautioned Britain against continuing to strengthen ties with Taiwan, as the country is part of the Chinese Federation. Furthermore, the Chinese embassy stated that Britain should adhere to the One-China principle, which insists that Taiwan is an inalienable part of one China to be unified one day (Blanchard, 2023). Thus, UK's defense is a concern, as China views it as a meddling of its affairs and a violation of its sovereignty.

The tensions have been rising because the UK has been consistently deepening its engagement with Taiwan through defense cooperation activities like joint drills and training as well as the provision of advanced weapon systems (Blanchard, 2023). In response, China has increased its military drills near Taiwan to depict its strength while also imposing economic and diplomatic pressure on countries that deepen the engagement with Taiwan. Thus, the tensions have serious implications for relations between the UK and China, especially considering that the UK has been promoting its interests in the Indo-pacific region as its post-Brexit strategy. Nonetheless, the tensions could limit the potential for the UK to effectively develop beneficial diplomatic ties with China. The issue also reveals the roadblocks that the UK is facing in an effort to balance its economic interests.

Policy Options

Promote multilateral dialogue: The UK should engage in active dialogues with China in order to de-escalate the tension between the two countries. For instance, the UK can advocate that regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or United Nations bring stakeholders together as a means for discussing the extent that Taiwan should receive defence support by the UK. Furthermore, dialogues should bolster confidence-building interventions, crisis management, as well as conflict resolution frameworks (Kaul, 2020). Thus, multilateral dialogue gives better understandings to each party and has the potential for showing that the UK is committed to maintaining beneficial relations, and that its defence ties are aimed at improving security in Taiwan as opposed to ousting China's

grip on the country. However, decision-making can be slow in a multilateral setting, with the need to accommodate diverse interests and reach consensus.

Robust Defense Partnership Review: The UK should review and assess the nature and extent of its defense partnership with Taiwan to ensure that it aligns with strategic objectives, regional security dynamics, and the evolving global geopolitical landscape. Engaging in a comprehensive and periodic analysis of the partnership will enable the UK to adapt policies based on evolving regional dynamics while maintaining meaningful relations with both China and Taiwan. The drawbacks are evident. Initially, political factors might impact the review process, potentially resulting in prejudiced evaluations or the omission of crucial matters. Additionally, the review process may reveal differing opinions or conflicting priorities, potentially causing tensions among the involved parties.

Expand economic cooperation with China: Economic cooperation provides the opportunity for serving as a platform for reducing tensions while maintaining beneficial relations with Taiwan concurrently. The UK could explore opportunities for expanding trade and investment ties with China by implementing policies that address sectors which align with China's developmental priorities. Deepened economic cooperation exhibit UK's interest in mutually beneficial exchanges (Uygun & Pekcan, 2022). Such an approach could also involve facilitating dialogue on issues of common concern, including climate change and global public health. Expanding economic cooperation can provide a space for fostering goodwill and enhancing understanding between the UK and China that will mitigate the tensions in both the short and long term. Meanwhile, it may lead to trade imbalances, with some countries importing more from China than they export, potentially affecting domestic industries. This is also need to be considered.

Policy Recommendation

Promote multilateral dialogues: China is arguably indispensable to the UK, as it is a major manufacturing powerhouse and a predominant player in geopolitical phenomena in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. Therefore, it is imperative that the UK addresses the concerns emanating from the tension between the two countries or risk losing out on many opportunities that are available like business, scientific, and cultural opportunities. Given that the defence ties between the UK and Taiwan are extensively rooted in economic relations as opposed to diplomatic efforts that seem to facilitate the sovereignty of the latter, multilateral dialogues can clarify on the underlying motives of the UK. Multilateral dialogues will allow the UK and China to raise their concerns and come up with amicable and beneficial solutions, consequently easing the tension. The dialogues will guarantee a space for healthy discussions because each country's representatives will be able to give different viewpoints. Aviel (2018) notes that multilateral dialogues allow parties to identify commonalities, discuss differences, and learn from one another's experiences, meaning that acknowledgement of different approaches and priorities allow parties to facilitate a shared understanding. It is pivotal for the UK to come up with a means for the dialogues due to the high stakes involves, as military tensions could escalate into conflicts that harm not only the UK and China but also Taiwan. Multilateral dialogue also has the capacity for promoting regional stability, which will act as beneficial to both the UK and China. The tensions resulting from the UK's defense ties with Taiwan transcend bilateral relations and have repercussions for the broader region. The UK will prove its dedication to peaceful coexistence and its determination to avoid any destabilizing actions. Subsequently, such a demonstration will create a positive

ripple effect that will encourage other nations pursue diplomatic avenues to resolve conflicts and prevent further escalations.

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