



OPINION

OTHER VOICES

A commitment to peace, parity, democracy for strength ... and ties to 'minds that bind' Taiwan ... and how to stay free

Within the framework of our ongoing research and knowledge cooperation with Reconnaissance Research, the **Arab Times** publishes a special and exclusive interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan, Joseph Wu, conducted by Abdulaziz Al-Anjari, Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research.

The interview reflects the importance of shedding light on different world issues, while expressing our pride in the principle of freedom of opinion and scientific research that are guaranteed in the State of Kuwait in accordance with Article (36) of its Constitution.

We hope that this exclusive interview aids in anticipating the future of the geopolitical environment from various angles.

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Question: Can you give us a quick snapshot of Taiwan's history and what the status of the island is today?

Answer: The Republic of China (Taiwan) is a sovereign, independent nation with a thriving democracy. Taiwan has leveraged its democratic strengths to develop its economy, trade, and national competitiveness. In 2020, its purchasing power parity reached US\$55,078, the International Monetary Fund ranked it the world's 21st-largest economy, and the World Trade Organization listed it as the 17th-largest trading nation. In addition, Taiwan achieved eighth place for competitiveness in the 2021 World Competitiveness Yearbook published by the Swiss-based Institute for Management Development and was named the second-freest country in Asia by the 2021 Freedom in the World report.

Cross-strait relations are influenced by a complicated history and international political factors. They also have important implications for democracy and freedom in the face of authoritarianism and dictatorship. Against the backdrop of this complex international environment, our government has remained staunchly committed to ensuring peace across the Taiwan Strait. President Tsai Ing-wen has reiterated on numerous occasions that the government's policy on cross-strait relations is based on peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue. She has also emphasized that Taiwan is willing to engage in cross-strait dialogue on an equal basis. However, China has deliberately shut down cross-strait communication channels. Moreover, it shuttered the Hong Kong Economic, Cultural and Trade Office in Taipei in May and closed the Macau Economic and Cultural Office in June. In addition, China now requires personnel at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Hong Kong and in Macau to sign a written commitment to the "one China principle" before being granted a work visa or visa extension. Such unreasonable actions do nothing to contribute to the positive development of cross-strait relations.

Q: How is the relationship with mainland China?

A: The Chinese government has spread the false narrative of the "one China principle" to bolster its claim that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, whether from the perspective of history, international law, or the current reality of cross-strait relations, the PRC has never—not even for a single day—governed Taiwan and has no right to represent Taiwan in the international community. Only the Taiwan government can represent the 23 million people of Taiwan internationally.

Unfortunately, China refuses to regard or handle cross-strait relations in a pragmatic manner. Instead, during the pandemic, it has deployed disinformation to manipulate and polarize Taiwanese society in an attempt to undermine people's confidence in the government. Furthermore, the Chinese government has significantly ramped up military intimidation against Taiwan. From January 1 to June 26, 2021, China sent a total of 354 military aircraft on 114 incursions into Taiwan's southwestern air defense identification zone. It also conducted a number of military drills and resorted to various other means in an attempt to intimidate Taiwan. China's unilateral disruption of the status quo is the main impediment to the improvement of cross-strait relations. In the international arena, China has continued to suppress Taiwan's participation in mechanisms and meetings of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, and the International Criminal Police Organization. This represents a loss not only to Taiwan but to the rest of the world as well, denying other countries the benefits they could gain from Taiwan's experience.

Q: What about the relationship with the United States?

A: The United States has long been Taiwan's staunchest ally and strategic partner. It has further deepened its comprehensive bilateral partnership with Taiwan in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances, as well as numerous Taiwan-friendly acts passed by the US Senate and House of Representatives in recent years. These include the Taiwan Travel Act, the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018, and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019. In addition, the United States signed a memorandum of understanding with Taiwan in March this year to establish a coast guard working group. Since January 2021, President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and other US officials have publicly expressed staunch support for Taiwan on various occasions. The US commitment to Taiwan's security is rock solid. In April, the US Department of State issued new guidelines for US government interactions with Taiwan counterparts, lauding Taiwan as a model of democracy and encouraging US government agencies to strengthen engagement with Taiwan so as to further broaden and deepen bilateral relations.

The international community has come to recognize that China's authoritarian expansionism poses serious challenges to the current rules-based international order, and it has begun considering countermeasures. For example, through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the United States, Japan, India, and Australia have expressed serious concerns on numerous occasions regarding the impact of China's military expansionism on security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, over the past few months, joint statements and joint communiqués issued at multiple international summits have, for



Undated photo shows Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Wu. Inset: Abdulaziz Al-Anjari, founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research during his exclusive interview with Taiwan's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

the first time, emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. These events included the US-Japan Summit, the US-South Korea Summit, the EU-Japan Summit, the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Meeting, the Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations, the G7 Leaders' Summit, and the EU-US Summit. This demonstrates that the Taiwan Strait issue is not only a cross-strait or Indo-Pacific regional issue, but has become the focus of worldwide attention.

Taiwan will staunchly safeguard the shared values of freedom, protection of human rights and rule of law, and will continue to cooperate with like-minded nations to jointly maintain peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. Taiwan is pleased that the United States, the European Union, Japan, and other like-minded partners have continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

Q: What is the current political status/relationship between Kuwait and Taiwan?

A: Although Taiwan does not have formal diplomatic relations with Kuwait, Taiwan's representative office in Kuwait aims to promote comprehensive exchanges and enhance bilateral business and technological cooperation. Over the years, Taiwan and Kuwait have worked to strengthen substantive cooperation and mutual assistance for mutual benefit. Recently, we have produced concrete results in the domains of trade, tourism, education, and public health.

In 2020, Taiwan-Kuwait bilateral trade amounted to approximately US\$2.64 billion, making Kuwait our 26th-largest trading partner. Economic and trade activities centered on crude oil, but Taiwanese industries such as machine tools and information and communications technology (ICT) have great potential for bilateral cooperation.

In addition to trade, people-to-people exchanges between our countries have become increasingly closer. In 2018, the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University enrolled the first Taiwanese student in its master's program. In 2019, the first Kuwaiti student was awarded the Taiwan Scholarship by the Ministry of Education. Also in 2019, Taiwan's Tourism Bureau hosted the Taiwan Tourism B2B Workshop in Kuwait and encouraged Kuwaiti citizens to visit Taiwan.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan has cooperated with the Kuwaiti government and civil society to organize a number of bilateral video conferences on disease prevention and medical technology. Moreover, Taiwan has donated over 60,000 medical masks, 1,000 protective gowns, and other anti-pandemic supplies to support frontline workers in Kuwait, which was recognized and lauded by all sectors of society. In the future, we hope to see further cooperation in the domains of public health and smart healthcare.

Q: What is Taiwan's presence like in the Arab world?

A: In addition to Taiwan's representative office in Kuwait, Taiwan also has offices in Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai). Taiwan continues to actively explore opportunities for collaboration with Middle Eastern governments and people and is committed to maintaining close ties with the region.

Q: How many countries today still recognize Taiwan instead of the PRC? And how do you see that in the future?

A: China wields its political and economic clout, as well as its influence in the United Nations and other international organizations, to relentlessly suppress Taiwan's international presence. It pressures its diplomatic allies to abide by the "one China principle" and to refrain from engaging Taiwan in formal interactions. It also resorts to threats, enticements, and other tactics to pressure or lure Taiwan's diplomatic allies into establishing official ties with Beijing and terminating diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Taiwan currently enjoys official diplomatic relations with 15 countries, including four in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), one in South America (Paraguay), four in the Caribbean (Haiti, Saint Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), four in the Pacific region (the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tuvalu), one in Africa (Eswatini), and one in Europe (the Holy See).

Taiwan faces formidable challenges arising from China's persistent diplomatic suppression. However, in addition to its 15 diplomatic allies, numerous other like-minded nations, including the United States, Japan, and European countries, have shown tremendous support for Taiwan. They maintain close, friendly, and substantive relations with Taiwan and endorse its participation in international organizations. Taiwan currently has 112 overseas missions in 72 countries, including in Kuwait. Among these, 15 are embassies and two are consulates general. Taiwan will continue to proactively expand substantive partnerships with countries worldwide through cooperation and exchanges at all levels and in all domains, such as diplomacy, the economy, trade, culture, education, agriculture, science and technology, health care, and humanitarian assistance.

Q: What are Taiwan's main areas of focus in the Arab world?

A: The strategic location of the Middle East and its role in the energy supply landscape are of vital importance to Taiwan. Kuwait has long been our second-largest crude oil supplier. In recent years, China has demonstrated its strategic global ambitions, both political and economic, through the Belt and Road Initiative. Against this backdrop, Taiwan hopes to promote academic exchanges between think tanks in Taiwan and the Arab world and establish a dialogue mechanism to promote mutual understanding and trust.

In response to global climate change, Taiwan has been committed to developing renewable energy sources and green energy technologies in recent years. Kuwait's 2035 Vision also includes the development of affordable renewable energy. Our countries could explore cooperation in the field of green energy and work together to help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Kuwait plays an important role in supporting regional humanitarian aid, and Taiwan has likewise been active in the region. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Taiwan has cooperated

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中華民國外交部
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)



editor's choice

