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## Israel in the Mirror of Taiwan

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### Introduction

Was there any specific significance in the statement of US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in August 2021, in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, that “our commitment to Taiwan and to Israel remains as strong as it’s ever been”?<sup>2</sup> Why didn’t he say that US commitment to its allies in general would remain the same? Why was there particular reference to Taiwan and Israel?



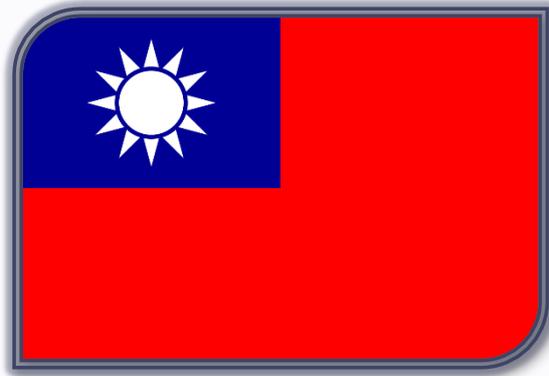
**Jake Sullivan**

In a previous article, we referred to the discrepancy among countries in security scale,<sup>3</sup> as each has three levels of security: state security, which means preserving geography and resources; community security, which means ensuring the continuation of social security and the development of all sectors; and regime security, which means that the ruling regime remains unaltered. Each country works to ensure these three dimensions yet with different perception of the priority of each.

Both Israel and Taiwan have the same security perspective as they are the most concerned among all countries about the survival of their political entity since the legitimacy of their existence is the subject of continuous discussion, which makes the security and survival of the state the highest value in their security scale. They are aware that the US position constitutes one of the guarantees of their survival on the international stage; however, the shock caused by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan has triggered concerns for both countries that the future might involve a US abandonment of them; hence, Sullivan’s statement comes to reassure them.



Taiwan is fully aware that China is working by all means to strip it of its independence. It has achieved a great deal in this field. After Taiwan had occupied the Chinese seat at the United Nations (UN) and enjoyed the veto right in the UN Security Council throughout 1945–1971, it was replaced by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and the US cancelled its diplomatic recognition in 1979. The “One China” slogan became a strategic principle of the PRC towards building Greater China which includes mainland China, Hong Kong, the Macau Islands and later Taiwan.



Israel has the same security perspective in terms of the priority of state security and survival, as it realizes that it is an entity established with Western support (like Taiwan), that it is a forced exclusion of a geographical area from its historical regional environment (like Taiwan). Its survival depends on the support of the old and new colonial powers (like Taiwan), and the majority of the population of the region in which it is located rejects it and sees it as a mere settler colonial entity, regardless of the orientations of some leaders in the region (as is the case with the majority of the Chinese people, who reject Taiwan as an independent entity). The aforementioned stands behind the US security adviser’s statement regarding US commitment to Taiwan and Israel, and it has urged an Israeli writer to entitle his article “Taiwan: The Israel of the Far East.”<sup>4</sup>

Israeli intellectual elites believe that the withdrawal from Afghanistan will reflect on Israel through security threat, as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- ▶ 1. The armed popular resistance forces will be encouraged to exploit this decline and the shaken US image, which paves, in the medium and long term, for the possibility of a new domino theory in the Middle East.
- ▶ 2. The withdrawal from Afghanistan may be followed by a withdrawal from Syria and Iraq, and perhaps other areas of the Middle East. This frees Iran from the burdens of US presence and pressure, which constitutes a source of serious concern for Israel.



- ▶ 3. The withdrawal indicates that the possibilities of US involvement in major military confrontations in the Middle East, similar to what happened in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, have declined to the extent that prevents Israel from employing US power the way it used to do.

**First: The US-Taiwan Relation and its Implications for Israel**

It is necessary to note that Israel has not recognized Taiwan, but it has recognized the PRC since 1950, especially in 1949–1955, when the Chinese perception—that of Mao Zedong in particular—of the Arab position on Israel was negative. Chinese media in that period even referred to Arabs as “the allies of Britain who sought to eliminate the Zionist movement as a liberation movement.” Yet, the Chinese position later changed radically, especially after the Bandung Conference in 1955.<sup>6</sup>



**Mao Zedong**

The US policy towards Taiwan from 1971 until now, has made Israel have concerns about the extent of US pragmatism. For Israel has realized that the exchange of Chinese aid to Vietnam for the US position on Taiwan, in the Richard Nixon/Mao Zedong negotiations, may be repeated in other regions including the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the US abandoned Afghanistan and left the Afghan elites, who cooperated with it lost and unable to determine future directions. It has also abandoned the Shah of Iran after the Iranian revolution in 1979, and the Arab leaders from 2010 to 2021, not to mention its policies in Latin America or with some minorities, as happened with the Kurds in several situations.<sup>8</sup>



**Richard Nixon**

**Second: US-Taiwan versus US-Israel Relations**

Comparing Taiwanese and Israeli economies indicates that Taiwan has more economic weight than Israel, which reinforces the tendency of US pragmatism and increases Israeli concern.<sup>9</sup>



- ▶ 1. Taiwanese Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is \$759.1 billion, compared to \$446.8 billion for Israel, which means that Israeli GDP is only 58.9% of the Taiwanese.



- ▶ 2. The volume of US trade with Taiwan is equal to \$105.9 billion, compared to \$33.9 billion with Israel, meaning that Israel's trade with the US is only 32% of the latter's trade with Taiwan.
- ▶ 3. Israel is ranked 20 with power index score 0.3464 on the scale of military strength compared to Taiwan which is ranked 22 with power index score 0.4154,<sup>10</sup> noting that Israel is a nuclear state, while the US did not enable Taiwan to have nuclear weapon capabilities.

- ▶ 4. US President Joe Biden's document on his strategic vision for the coming period<sup>11</sup> clearly emphasizes the priority of the Pacific region over the Middle East, in light of the increasing competition in the Pacific. This signifies an increase in the strategic value of Taiwan in that region at the expense of the countries of the Middle East, including Israel. especially with the increase of US studies that refer to Israel as a strategic burden rather than an asset.<sup>12</sup>



**Joe Biden**

- ▶ 5. The difference in conventional power metrics (area and population); as the population of Taiwan is about 24 million, compared to approximately 9 million for Israel, noting that social homogeneity is much higher in Taiwan than in Israel. Also, the area of Taiwan reaches 36 thousand square kilometers compared to about 21 thousand square kilometers for Israel.
- ▶ 6. Taiwanese pressure groups are among the most powerful active pressure groups in the US, and some of them have great influence, such as the Gephardt Group Government Affairs. Some studies indicate a significant influence of these pressure groups on US politics, however, they were unable to prevent the withdrawal of US recognition of Taiwan and its expulsion from the UN.<sup>13</sup> The bipartisan bicameral Taiwan Caucus (the Republican and the Democratic Party) is the second largest group in the Congress, with 139 members. The caucus focuses its activities exclusively on improving US relations with Taiwan. PRC experts have noted that apart from Israeli lobby groups, it is likely



that pro-Taiwan groups have spent the most money to influence US foreign policy.<sup>14</sup>

- ▶ 7. Israel and Taiwan have almost the same rates of globalization (the degree of involvement in international life politically, socially and economically...etc.). Taiwanese globalization rate is 78.6, relatively ahead of Israel whose globalization rate was 77.86 in 2020.
- ▶ 8. In terms of political stability and democracy, throughout 2010–2020 Taiwan has had an advanced status in terms of democracy scoring 7.52 and 8.94, compared to 7.28 and 7.84 in Israel. A big difference in favor of Taiwan appears regarding political stability with Israel scoring –1.34 and –0.83 points, compared to Taiwan +86 and +77 points.<sup>15</sup>

This means that Taiwan may need less international aid without being a burden like Israel, which ranks first in the world in receiving US aid. A report by Wu Tzu-li, a researcher at Taiwan’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research, suggested that the “US should consider helping Taiwan build an indigenous defense industry to boost its qualitative military edge (QME), amid rising threats from China, similar to what the US has done for Israel.”<sup>16</sup>



### **Third: The Difference Between the US-Taiwan and the US-Israel Relations**

The difference between the US-Taiwan and the US-Israel relations is as follows:

- ▶ 1. Taiwan’s adversary, the PRC, represents one of the central world powers, and it has its strategic decision which is both unified and independent, unlike the Arab side which lacks these qualities in its struggle with Israel.
- ▶ 2. The Jewish Lobby continues to be one of the most important pressure groups in the US. A comparative study of the lobbies of both countries in the US indicated the following:<sup>17</sup>
  - a. The Taiwan lobby is increasingly influencing US foreign policy, as evident in the continuation of the US-Taiwanese relations in all fields without



diplomatic ties, except for representative offices serving as de facto embassies.

b. Intercultural relations between Israel and the US, especially the religious one with the American evangelicals and an important segment of Republicans and Democrats, is stronger compared to Taiwan.

c. The ability of the Jewish lobby to invest in the US presidential and parliamentary elections, while elections are not found in the propaganda of the Taiwanese lobby.

d. Compared to Taiwanese issues, Israeli issues are an essential part of the US presidential or congressional debates.



e. The American media is more concerned with Israeli than with Taiwanese issues.

- ▶ 3. The religious relationship, especially with the evangelicals in the American society, makes the degree of bias towards the US high. Yet, most US public opinion polls indicate that the Jewish lobby has been facing continuous criticism from US intellectual elites, and that the US public sympathy with Israel has declined, especially among the youth who will lead the US in the future.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ 4. Israel has an advantage over Taiwan as the number of countries recognizing it is 164, compared to 15 countries recognizing Taiwan. Yet, there have been times when Israel was not recognized by a large number of countries, especially after 1967 and 1973; nonetheless, it sought to expand the scope of its recognition, including in the Arab region.
- ▶ 5. Israeli relationship with Taiwan poses an Israeli predicament, for it satisfies the US but angers China, which refuses to have relations with countries dealing with Taiwan. This means that Israeli cooperation with Taiwan enhances the US-Israeli relations, but it constitutes a provocation to China with which Israel seeks to develop relations.<sup>19</sup> Taiwan has recognized Israel since its establishment, while Israel has avoided recognizing Taiwan. Israel was the first in the Middle East to recognize the PRC and rejected to recognize Taiwan, and this remained the case until 1992 after Beijing recognized Israel. It is noted that in the following year, Taiwan and Israel exchanged trade representation offices. The number of Israeli-Taiwanese agreements has reached about 30 commercial agreements covering government cooperation, technology,



water, agriculture and drones.<sup>20</sup> It is noticed that the development of Taiwanese relations with Israel was linked to two other developments:

- a. The growing pragmatic tendency in Chinese foreign policy to invest in the relation with Israel to obtain Western technology, and to ensure its support in the US through the Jewish lobby, which means that the Taiwanese-Israeli relations are subject to Israeli-Chinese bargaining.
- b. The beginning of the official Arab recognition of Israel reassured Taiwan that its relations with the Arabs would not be affected by the development of its relations with Israel. It also weakened any Chinese embarrassment from developing relations with Israel.

#### **Fourth: Taiwan and Israel Invest in Trump's Policies**

The Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan, the most secessionist party from mainland China with the support of 57% of the population of Taiwan, took advantage of the term of President Donald Trump to expand the recognition of the Taiwan movement internationally, by joining some international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO). When the Taiwan Travel Act was passed by the US Congress on 16/3/2018, the US-Taiwan relations have become more official and at a high-level. The two sides have since signed a consular agreement formalizing consular functions on 13/9/2019.<sup>21</sup> This is similar to what Israel has done to obtain US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights.



**Donald Trump**

But Biden's strategic plan, which we referred to, enhanced Taiwan's position due to its importance in the Pacific conflict, while it has put less priority on the Middle East, evident by the withdrawal from Afghanistan. This has triggered, as we mentioned, Israeli concerns the strategic importance of Israel to the US, in light of the shift towards the Pacific, not to mention the scenarios of the Ukrainian crisis and the US's preoccupation with it.



## Conclusion

- ▶ 1. The US pragmatism is a source of concern for both Taiwan and Israel.
- ▶ 2. The nature of the China-US relations represents an obstacle to Taiwanese and Israeli relations with both Beijing and Washington.
- ▶ 3. Taiwan and Israel have existential concerns that make them cooperate and exchange their experiences in international relations.
- ▶ 4. Both Israel and Taiwan have increasing chances of encountering severe crises in their relations with the US and China, where Taiwanese crisis may be more severe than the Israeli one.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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