

An Analysis of the Diplomatic Opportunities and Challenges of Vaccine Donations

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Abstract

As U.S. President Joe Biden attempts to bring democratic states into regional alliance networks, the effort raises the question of whether democratic regimes are more likely to form close alliances to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. By listing the unknown propositions related to regime types and health governance, the author attempts to explain why the U.S., Japan, and central and eastern European countries have shown great determination to donate vaccines to Taiwan during the vaccine shortage. Taiwan may consider taking this chance to play the role of responsible stakeholder by actively participating in the security community along with other democratic member states, and reciprocally contributing to efforts in public health, transmissible diseases, and high-quality medical services to the international society. It will add strength to Taiwan's foreign policy decision-making with more diversified elements and characteristics.

Keywords: COVID-19, Vaccine Diplomacy, Hub-And-Spoke, Democracy, Alliances

I. Introduction

The international community has experienced the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus starting in February 2020, and Taiwan has not been excluded from the battle. As Taiwan is not a member of the World Health Organization (WHO), the government has managed the pandemic with a well-organized medical system, and compared to other countries, it has done relatively well in its attempt to control the outbreak. Scholarly work claims that the early warning system, forward-looking actions, transparent information sharing, the technology to analyze big data, and online platforms in Taiwan are the key factors in containing the pandemic.¹ People also agree that the

facial mask policy and medical care are the major reasons for Taiwan's success in preventing the spread of the virus domestically.



Figure 1. The 46th President Joe Biden

Source: "What You Need to Know About the 46th President: Joe Biden was Elected to the Presidency on His Third Try." *ABC News*, January 20, 2021, <<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/joe-biden-entering-2020-field/story?id=61078936>>.

Nonetheless, the Tsai administration's efforts to purchase vaccines encountered tremendous difficulties in 2021, forcing the government to continuously send strong signals to the international community in its efforts to procure different brands of vaccines. In order to respond to Taiwan's shortage of vaccines, the U.S. and Japan have provided generous support in their response to Taipei's appeals. To date there have been three waves of vaccine donations from Japan to Taiwan, amounting to 3.34 million doses. The U.S., for its part, has delivered 2.5 million doses to Taiwan. Several countries in Europe have since joined the effort, with 20,000 doses of the AstraZeneca (AZ) from Lithuania, 10,000 doses by the Slovakian government through the European Civil Protection Mechanism, and 30,000 doses from the Czech Republic.

1. Hilton Yip, "Fear of China Made Taiwan a Coronavirus Success Story," *Foreign Policy*, March 16, 2020, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/16/taiwan-china-fear-coronavirus-success/>>.

This article elaborates on the reasons for Taiwan's ability to receive immediate vaccine assistance from the international community despite an acute global vaccine shortage. It then attempts to shed some light on potential strategic plans as the Taiwanese government investigates how to implement practical and efficient foreign policies under the U.S.-led alliance. Combining the discussions on regime type with alliance formation can help us pave the way for understanding the strategic characteristics of the U.S. "hub-and-spoke" framework during the pandemic and post-pandemic period.

II. U.S. Strategic Policies with Regional Allies

1. Sino-U.S. Trade Competition During the Pandemic

Although the United States attempted to wage a trade war against China during the Trump presidency, Washington has not seen major benefits from the great power competition. In the post-Trump era, the trade deficit with China is still as high as US \$300 billion. This shows that Trump's trade war against China was not only unsuccessful, but rather a loss for both sides. U.S. exports to China have suffered considerably, with sectors such as agriculture, energy, aircraft, and education particularly hit. President Trump had attempted to adopt Section 301 Tariff Action Regarding China to counter China, but this ended up having a serious impact on U.S. exports and American consumers.

The U.S. economy and trade conditions have not improved under the trade barriers and tariff war initiated by the Trump administration. Rising metal prices have made manufacturing costs from motor vehicles to washing machines higher than any other products. In addition, Trump's policy of "Make America Great Again," which encouraged the return of manufacturing industries, did not meet initial expectations. On the contrary, it caused the U.S. to accelerate its decoupling from its Asian economic and trade partners.

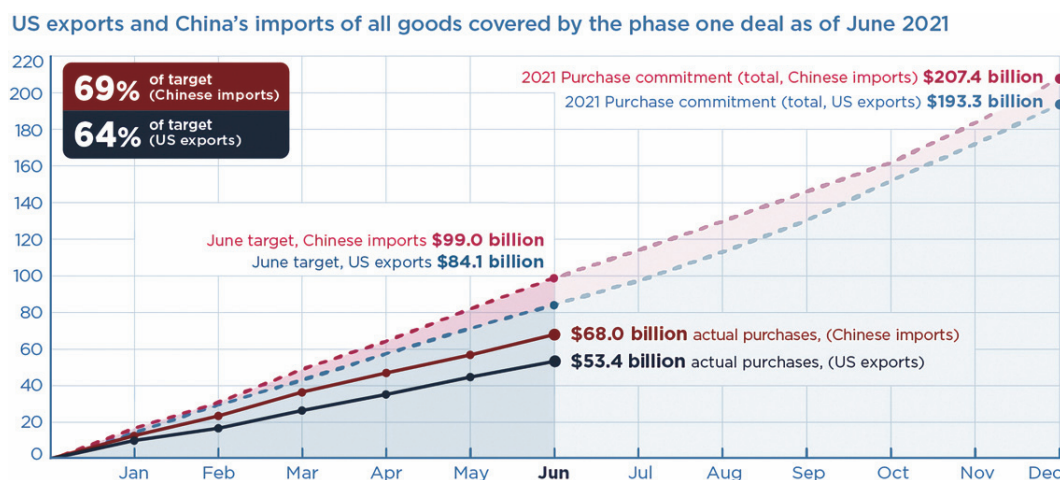


Figure 2. China's Purchase of US Goods in 2021

Source: Chad P. Bown, "US-China Phase One Tracker: China's Purchases of US Goods," June 26, 2021, *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, <<https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/us-china-phase-one-tracker-chinas-purchases-us-goods>>.

The first phase of the U.S.-China trade war culminated with an agreement on January 15, 2020. Beijing agreed to reduce tariffs and promised to purchase US\$207 billion worth of American products. However, this agreement was not implemented as expected. According to an analysis by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, as of November 2020, Beijing had only purchased one-third of all the products it had agreed to purchase (see Figure 2). The overall trade dispute therefore has yet to achieve the hoped-for results for the U.S.

In the security arena, the U.S. still maintained its "one China" policy to assuage China's concerns that Taiwan would declare *de jure* independence from China, but at the same time Washington also warned Beijing that military action against Taipei would not be tolerated. China has been deterred from launching an unprovoked attack on Taiwan due to the huge costs involved in a potential war against the U.S. Similarly, the U.S. has attempted to persuade Taiwan not to provoke China while also providing a security guarantee to defend it against a possible Chinese attack. The exact nature of the U.S. security commitment to Taiwan, however, is not clearly defined.

Among all the security concerns highlighted in the Asia Pacific, the vaccine issue has persistently been raised as the most urgent concern for U.S.-Taiwan relations.

Taiwan has suffered from a vaccine shortage since May 2021 due to a sudden outbreak of COVID-19 here. Even though the outbreak was not a new issue for most Taiwanese, who had seen its effects worldwide over the previous year, the vaccine shortage nevertheless created strong uncertainties and anxiety across Taiwanese society.

The Tsai administration has faced vaccine boycotts from Beijing because her government refuses to acknowledge the “1992 consensus.” One of the most critical cases affected by the “1992 consensus” was the purchase of BioNTech SE vaccines (BNT) from Germany. The Tsai administration had launched the process of purchasing the BNT vaccines and received authorization for their delivery once they were proven safe in Phase 3 clinical trials. However, the contract with the German company faced external pressure, with consistent requests for the removal of Taiwan as a “country” from the contract list. The deal was eventually cancelled in late 2020, due to a lack of full authorization for the representative company TTY Biopharm and its chairman, Lin Chuan, who oversaw the negotiations with the health authorities on the precise quantity, delivery time, and price of the vaccine. Political pressure from Beijing reportedly dominated the whole process of negotiations.

2. Vaccine Support from the International Community

After taking office, President Biden repeatedly announced that he would replace Trump’s unilateralism with a multilateral approach and declared that the U.S. would return to the international community, aiming to strengthen cooperation with its traditional allies. Biden has emphasized internal unity within American society, and prioritized issues related to the epidemic, race, immigration, and foreign trade.

The top priority of Biden’s foreign policy is to rejuvenate U.S. leadership not only in the whole world, but specifically in the Indo-Pacific region.² He intends to consolidate traditional allies and to deepen cooperation with regional partners in economic, diplomatic, and security areas based on the existing “Indo-Pacific strategy.” In terms of the “hub-and-spoke” framework, Washington serves as the “hub” while

2. Joseph R. Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World,” February 4, 2021, *White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>>.

all other allies form the “spokes,” which altogether closely deepen cooperation among allies. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated during a joint visit to Asia in early 2021, the 2+2 form of cooperation has prompted Tokyo, Seoul, and Washington to discuss a wide range of potential political and military coordination.

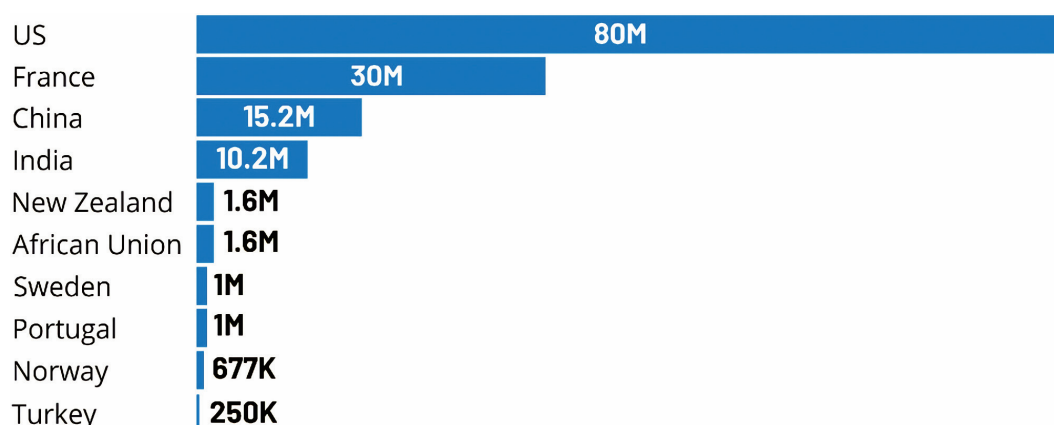


Figure 3. COVID-19 Vaccine Donations

Source: Josh Michaud, Anna Rouw, and Jennifer Kates, “Putting U.S. Global COVID-19 Vaccine Donations in Context,” *KFF*, May 25, 2021, <<https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/putting-u-s-global-covid-19-vaccine-donations-in-context/>>.

During Biden’s 2020 presidential campaign, he wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that “America must lead not just with the example of power, but also with the power of our example.”³ Biden attempted to fulfill his promise at the virtual meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) in March 2021, and concluded that his administration will collaborate to assist countries in the Indo-Pacific with vaccines, mainly through international institutions such as the WHO and COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX).⁴ From Figure 3, we can see that Washington has agreed to send approximately 80 million doses of vaccines to the international community.⁵

3. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 2020, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again>>.

4. “Fact Sheet: Quad Summit,” March 12, 2021, *White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/fact-sheet-quad-summit/>>.

Meanwhile, Beijing has repeatedly insisted that China will not be left behind in the competition for vaccine donations, and agreed to provide 2 billion vaccines by the end of 2021.⁶ Beijing has so far delivered 15.2 million doses, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that Beijing will donate additional Chinese vaccines to more than 100 countries in future.

Followed by the U.S., Japan has joined vaccine diplomacy efforts to assist Taiwan, with the hope that other democracies would speed up vaccine donations to help Taiwan deal with its COVID outbreak. The critical factor that prompted Japan to donate vaccines to Taiwan was the relatively stable state of Taiwan-Japan relations. In the past decade, Taiwan had provided Japan with more than US\$240 million in foreign aid assistance, largely as part of the response to the devastating Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011.⁷ The Tsai administration also gave 2 million facial masks to Japan during the early stages of the global COVID outbreak. The friendly diplomacy has been greatly appreciated by the Japanese government. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi referred to it at a press conference when he announced the donation of AZ vaccines to Taiwan in return for Taiwanese largesse. Polls show that nearly 80 percent of Japanese have a positive impression of Taiwan.

More importantly, China's assertive geopolitical behavior in the Indo-Pacific region has compelled Japan to make donations. Samuel Ramani argues that through such policies Japan can not only burnish its image as an advocator of humanitarian aid, but also strengthen its geopolitical clout to counter Beijing's influence.⁸ That

5. "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Unveils Strategy for Global Vaccine Sharing, Announcing Allocation Plan for the First 25 Million Doses to be Shared Globally," June 3, 2021, *White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/03/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-unveils-strategy-for-global-vaccine-sharing-announcing-allocation-plan-for-the-first-25-million-doses-to-be-shared-globally/>>.

6. Huizhong Wu, "China pledges 2 billion vaccines globally through year's end," *Associated Press*, August 6, 2021, <<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-health-china-coronavirus-pandemic-7b3a7e0f5949b6976d4cf7f69bba71d0>>.

7. Yu-chen Chung, Su-ping Yeh, & Emerson Lim, "Japan, Taiwan laud friendship on 10th anniversary of 2011 quake," *Focus Taiwan*, March 11, 2021, <<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202103110019>>.

8. Samuel Ramani, "Vaccines Are Japan's New Tool to Counter China," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2021, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/23/vaccine-diplomacy-covid-japan-china-competition/>>.

being said, the diversified format of vaccine diplomacy is not just about winning “hearts and minds” from regional countries, but also reshaping the geopolitical situation in the region. Simultaneously, the U.S. along with other allies have cautiously considered recruiting Taiwan as a key partner in counterbalancing rising Chinese influence in the region.⁹

In addition to the U.S. and Japan, three other central and eastern European countries — Lithuania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic — have sent vaccines to Taiwan to express their appreciation for Taiwanese friendship. Taiwan launched its “mask diplomacy” in April 2020, donating around 10 million masks to its diplomatic allies and European countries. The Tsai administration provided Lithuania and Slovakia with 100,000 and 700,000 masks respectively.¹⁰ Taiwan also donated five mask-production lines to the Czech Republic, which ensured medical protection for 120,000 Czech civilians.¹¹

However, it was China’s assertive behavior that played the key role in encouraging European countries to donate vaccines to Taiwan. Diana Mickeviciene, the Lithuanian ambassador to China, mentioned that due to the less-than-expected trade benefits, Lithuania had decided to withdraw from the China and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, better known as the “17+1” cooperation mechanism.

9. Koji Sugimoto & George Yin, “With Vaccine Diplomacy to Taiwan, U.S. and Japan Steal March on China,” *The National Interest*, June 28, 2021, <<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/vaccine-diplomacy-taiwan-us-and-japan-steal-march-china-188739>>.

10. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China, Taiwan, “Vaccine donation from Lithuania touches down in Taiwan,” *Taiwan Today*, August 2, 2021, <<https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=2,6,10,15,18&post=205398>>.

11. Keoni Everington, “Taiwan donates 5 mask production lines to Czech Republic,” *Taiwan News*, September 3, 2020, <<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4000913>>.



Figure 4. The COVID-19 Vaccines Donated from Lithuania

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China, Taiwan, 〈立陶宛捐贈我國 2 萬劑 AZ 疫苗已順利運抵台灣，外交部誠摯感謝〉, July 31, 2021, *MOFA, Taiwan*, <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=96&s=96210>.

The warming ties between Lithuania and Taiwan originated from historical developments. The Republic of China (Taiwan) offered substantial assistance for recognizing Lithuania as an independent state during the Cold War. Taipei had consistently stated its non-recognition of the occupation of the Baltic trio by the Soviet Union, and neighboring Latvia responded by hosting Taiwan's only representative office in the region. Building upon the shared values of democracy and the exceptionally effective handling of the COVID outbreak and the assistance Taiwan provided to Lithuania, Taiwan and Lithuania have agreed to set up reciprocal representative offices before the end of 2021. Lithuania has become the first UN member state in Europe where Taiwan has established a representative office using "Taiwanese" in its title.

Both Slovakia and the Czech Republic have attempted to move closer to Taiwan through vaccine donations. Slovakia announced its donation as a "thank you" note after Taipei donated masks in 2020. In fact, Slovakia has switched from its zealous

attitude toward China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to a lukewarm position, and been more skeptical of the purported economic benefits of the BRI. President Zuzana Čaputová has actively criticized China's serious human rights violations since she was elected and assumed office in 2019. The Czech Republic also promised to donate vaccines to Taiwan. This bilateral relationship has grown over the past two years, reaching its peak when Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil led a delegation to Taiwan in September 2020.

3. China's Public Health Strategy as a Conduit for the Belt and Road Initiative

China's vaccine diplomacy and health assistance have not only been part of Beijing's grand strategy, but also an expedient tool in response to the global disease control. In recent years, a trend can be observed whereby China has adjusted its aid focus towards a more diversified approach, aiming to contribute to the development of local and international health systems. That shift occurred during the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, where China's leadership learned from its errors and faulty disease control. One of the most prominent lessons learned by the Chinese government was that health threats can move in several directions, and China can export infectious diseases such as COVID-19 to other countries.

More importantly, it is widely recognized that China's health assistance has not always been used for overall development or human assistance, but was instead largely driven by foreign policy considerations. Due to deteriorating Sino-Soviet ties and sustained Sino-American confrontation throughout history, health assistance was an integral part of China's diplomatic strategies toward the least developed countries (LDC), and both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were convinced that it was China's international responsibility to support the socialist and revolutionary movements in the LDCs. Beijing continuously provided aid to its African allies who refused to coordinate with the Soviet Union after the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Scholars of Chinese aid policy have noted that, prior to 1971, Chinese aid was directed to African socialist states that shared ideologies very similar to that of Mao's China, or used the need to compete with Taiwan for diplomatic recognition.¹²

12. Yanzhong Huang, "Domestic Politics and China's Health Aid to Africa." *China: An International Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3, December 2014, pp. 176-198.

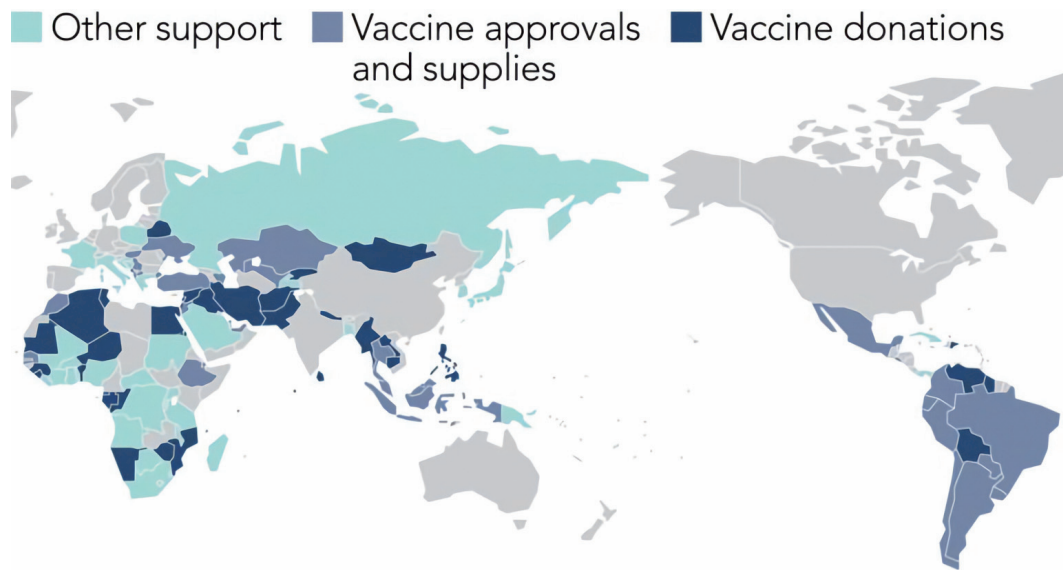


Figure 5. China and Its Health Silk Road Map

Source: Anna Nishino, Iori Kawate, & Yasuo Takeuchi, “China Emerges As Big Winner In Vaccine Outreach - Beijing Parlays Homegrown Jobs To Expand Diplomatic And Economic Influence,” *Nikkei Asia*, April 5, 2021, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/China-emerges-as-big-winner-in-vaccine-outreach>>.

It is therefore apparent that in order to combat local and global diseases, Beijing has ramped up its engagement with international efforts. Beijing is taking steps to minimize such dangers and agreed to partner with the WHO to establish a “Health Silk Road” to improve the health of the people along the Silk Road. As Liu Peilong, a director of the Global Health Department at Beijing University, explained, the new arrangement is a milestone as “it will extend bilateral cooperation to countries involved in the BRI and contribute to global health security.”¹³ In addition to the bilateral framework under BRI, China actively participates in all of the UN’s specialized bodies relating to health, including the WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, and other multilateral health forums.¹⁴

¹³ Baijie An & Xiaodong Wang, “China and WHO to jointly create ‘Health Silk Road,’” *China Daily*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017wef/2017-01/20/content_28007208.htm>.

¹⁴ Dennis Van Hickey, “China’s Expanding Engagement in Global Health,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Spring 2020, pp. 327-342.

There is still debate about China's proclaimed global health aspirations, with studies showing that whether China has targeted health assistance preferentially to resource-rich countries.¹⁵ This has resulted in doubt about Beijing's intentions, fueled by the apparent plundering of BRI member-states and the environmental impact for countries that are involved in the unprecedented aid projects.

Conversely, research has been conducted to identify Chinese modes of engagement in its health assistance. Grepin et al., for example, have used the AidData from "China African Aid Database" (CAAD) to provide the first systematic analysis on the subject, arguing that there is little evidence that China directs its health assistance specifically to natural-resource-rich countries.¹⁶ Their research also demonstrates that Chinese aid appears to be more concentrated than that of more traditional donors, with greater focus on health system projects and human resources for health (HRH).

More research needs to be conducted on the role that China has played as an increasingly powerful role in shaping the contours of global health.

III. Taiwan and the World: Democratic Regimes and U.S. Alignment

It is now evident that the Biden administration has the will and capability to preserve the "hub and spoke system" with its "offshore balance" strategies for the U.S.' overall strategic blueprint. Hence, the concept of alliances again returns as the main axis of U.S. foreign policy. The goal of alliance formation mainly aims to increase a country's overall strength, and sharing the economic and military burdens of the U.S. in a timely manner. In the foreseeable future, the Biden administration will continue to increase its ties with its allies by extending strong security commitments to more allies and partners.

15. Deborah Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 277-281.

16. Karen Grépin, Victoria A. Fan, Gordon C. Shen, & Lucy Chen, "China's Role as a Global Health Donor in Africa: What can We Learn from Studying under Reported Resource Flows?" *Globalization and Health*, Vol. 10, No. 1, December 2014, pp. 1-11.



Figure 6. Blinken and Austin’s Visit to East Asia

Source: “Top US diplomats to visit Japan, S. Korea, India next week” *Xinhua*, March 11, 2021, <<https://www.chinadailyhk.com/article/160099>>.

The structural competition between Washington and Beijing, driven by the realists’ argument of power politics, has dominated the regional order after Biden entered the Oval Office. The Biden administration has attempted to build a stronger democratic alliance to stabilize the Indo-Pacific. Political scientists suggest that democracies are more willingly to build larger, more durable, and reliable alliances.¹⁷ The underlying driver of alliance formation in Stephan Walt’s view, that the enemy of your enemy is your friend, has shaped the decision making of democratic societies. Because the domestic political ideologies within democracies do not threaten the legitimacy of other like-minded countries, democracies will attempt to coordinate with each other and build a larger group, or community, to counter autocracies. Broadly speaking, democracies are more likely to uphold their alliance commitments even in the times of war and conflict, and they might make more effective partners during wartime.

Such beliefs are only strengthened by the U.S. president’s announcement that

17. Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the US and China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 11-35.

American's alliances are "ironclad." This type of assurance comes from a deep and trustable security commitment in terms of foreign policy, which will expand comprehensive communication and cooperation with U.S. allies in the military, economic, trade, and diplomatic spheres to avoid returning to the unilateralism of "America First."

Democracies are more likely to align with other democracies. This is because democratic countries appear to be more likely to obey and comply with diplomatic commitments of all kinds. Taking the *Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty* (NPT) as an example, many scholars believe this to be the most successful international treaty in history, and most of the countries that comply with the treaty are democratic countries. Iran and North Korea, which signed the treaty but failed to live up to their treaty obligations, belong to the non-democratic camp.¹⁸ On the contrary, democratic countries that signed the treaty never attempted to develop nuclear weapons. In a nutshell, democracies are more likely to sign and comply with international agreements in a wider range of areas, including arms control, climate issues, trade, and human rights.



Figure 7. Taiwan and Its Diplomatic Allies

Source: "Which Countries 'Recognize' Taiwan in 2019?" *Political Geography Now*, September 23, 2019, <<https://www.polgeonow.com/2018/07/map-which-countries-recognize-taiwan.html>>.

18. Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the US and China*, p. 27.

Based on the arguments above, Taiwan should pay more attention to international cooperation with other democratic countries. Due to the concept of “credible commitment,” participants in the democratic community will endeavor to fulfill their obligations alongside alliance members or within international institutions. Because democratic leaders may fear “audience costs” for making international agreements and then failing to comply, democratic countries have greater responsibility to fulfill the contracts and/or agreements made with other countries. In general, democracies stand out as more reliable and attractive diplomatic partners during emergencies such as global pandemics, periods which are filled with uncertainty, inconveniences, and precariousness.

Taiwan may therefore consider taking the issue of regime type and alliance formation into further consideration when elaborating its foreign policy. Taipei could take this chance as a responsible stakeholder by actively participating in the security community along with the democratic member states and contributing to public health, disease control, and high-quality medical services to the international community. Even though Taiwan has encountered tremendous difficulties engaging with intergovernmental organizations, Taipei can nevertheless revamp its policy orientations by interacting with democratic states with special focus on a variety of public issue areas, such as rule of law, respect for social contract, and human rights. Furthermore, it should become the major goal of the Taiwanese government to accelerate its own vaccine production, which could make it an active player by contributing vaccines to the international community. Working closely with countries that share democratic values and bypassing China’s boycotts on vaccine diplomacy will eventually help Taiwan successfully engage with the international community.



Figure 8. U.S. Senators Announce the Donation of 750,000 Vaccines Doses to Taiwan

Source: Matthew Strong, “Taiwan close to completing US vaccine donation process,” *Taiwan News*, June 12, 2021, <<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4221372>>.

IV. Conclusion

The issue of vaccine diplomacy has caught the attention of the scholarly world. In a certain way, this form of diplomacy represents the positive meaning of alliance formation. In order to support its allies in the region, Washington has sent strong signals of security commitment to its allies through public health support. Vaccines donated by the U.S. can therefore be regarded as one such signal. Even though U.S.-Taiwan relations do not qualify as a formal security alignment, Taipei has still received medical assistance from the U.S. and its allies. This vaccine assistance represents an alternative type of diplomatic support, aiming to embolden Taiwanese society to counterbalance against the potential security challenges and threats posed by Beijing.

There is still insufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate whether democratic or autocratic regimes are better equipped to address crises such as pandemics. Although

reports suggest that most of the developed countries have better medical resources with enough vaccines, there are no clear signs that democratic regimes have better capabilities to control the pandemic. Further discussions on how the U.S. provided its democratic allies with unimpeded vaccines and expanded a framework of coordination to other public health areas are therefore necessary. In the meantime, Taiwan should nevertheless deepen its efforts to explore new topics in the field of public health, in order to expand the diplomatic terrain beyond traditional and/or non-traditional human security issues.

