



**GLOBAL INDIA PODCAST
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“Tibet, Taiwan, and the India-China-US triangle”

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Guest:

RYAN HASS
Director, John L. Thornton China Center
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for East Asia Policy Studies, John L.
Thornton China Center
Chen-Fu and Cecilia Yen Koo Chair in Taiwan Studies
The Brookings Institution

Host:

TANVI MADAN
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for East Asia Policy Studies
The Brookings Institution

Episode Summary:

While India has remained careful about how it addresses China’s “sovereignty concerns,” since 2020 New Delhi has been less deferential to Beijing’s sensitivities on issues such as Tibet and Taiwan. To unpack this shift and India’s approach in the context of the India-China-U.S. triangle, host Tanvi Madan speaks with Brookings Senior Fellow Ryan Hass, director of the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings.

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MADAN: Welcome to *Global India*, I'm Tanvi Madan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, where I specialize in Indian foreign policy. This season our conversations will be focused on India's relationship with China, and why and how China-India ties are shaping New Delhi's view of the world.

On today's episode, I want to take you back to a notable exchange that took place in August 2022 at the Indian Foreign Ministry's weekly press conference in New Delhi. Three journalists—one Indian, one Chinese, and one Taiwanese—asked the spokesperson about India's position on tensions in the Taiwan Strait following an increase in Chinese military activity after U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had visited Taiwan.

India called for, quote, "the exercise of restraint, avoidance of unilateral actions to change the status quo, de-escalation of tensions, and efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region," unquote. It also talked about being displeased about the militarization of the Taiwan Strait.

This answer from the spokesperson was notable because India has in recent years largely stayed silent on questions around the Taiwan Strait. It was also notable because when the Chinese journalist, and subsequently the Chinese ambassador to India, pressed the Indian government to also endorse a One China policy. Delhi refused to do so, noting that its position was well known.

India has also been careful about how it deals with and talks about the issue of Tibet. Indeed, Tibet has been of even more direct concern to India than Taiwan. We'll talk about why on the podcast today, though we won't go into the historical detail that we usually do. For that I would recommend recent books by former Indian Foreign Secretary Ambassador Nirupama Rao, Professor Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, and Dr. Kyle Gardner.

On today's episode, we will look at how India looks at issues such as Tibet and Taiwan. New Delhi knows these are "sovereignty concerns" for China. Over the last decade and a half, and especially since 2020, India has been less deferential to Beijing on these subjects, but nonetheless remains conscious of Beijing's sensitivities about them. And this consciousness includes being aware of past Chinese anger and accusations about India-U.S. interaction on these subjects.

To reflect this aspect—these issues fitting within a U.S.-India-China triangle—today we're going to do something different. I'm going to be in conversation with my Brookings colleague, Senior Fellow Ryan Hass, who leads our China Center and holds our Taiwan Chair. We'll exchange views on how India and the U.S. see the issues of Tibet and Taiwan, and whether and how the other country fits into Delhi and Washington's pictures.

Before I continue on to the interview, I want to thank you all for listening to or watching the podcast, providing feedback and sending me questions on social media. I want to highlight that the last episode of the season of the podcast will be a special Q&A episode in which I will answer audience questions about India-China relations.

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So, please do send us any questions you'd like answered or that you wished had been answered during the course of the season. You can do so by posting your question on Twitter, or X, with the hashtag GlobalIndia, all one word, or if you'd prefer to submit your questions via email, you can send it to globalindia at Brookings.edu.

And now onto the conversation with Ryan Haas.

MADAN: Welcome to the podcast, Ryan.

HASS: Thank you, Tanvi. It's really a pleasure to be with you on Global India.

03:55 Has India featured in U.S.-China ties or talks?

MADAN: Ryan, I want to start from a broader vantage point. And as somebody who's been both a practitioner as well as a scholar and analyst of U.S. relations with China, has India featured in those ties or in those talks between the two countries? And if so, how and why

HASS: Well, I think that they have featured in an increasing level. And in the real headline of my response to your question is that the degree to which India has figured into American overall strategy towards China has only grown from administration to administration.

And if you just briefly take it one administration at a time, I think the George W. Bush administration, they deserve credit for pushing forward the civil nuclear deal that that really helped unlock a lot of potential in the U.S.-India relationship. But I think that they viewed India as something that would have windfall benefits for America's overall strategy, less so as a component of America's approach to China.

If you look forward to the Obama administration, again, President Obama invested considerably and deeply in the U.S.-India relationship. And I think that largely out of sight, there was a deepening discussion that took place. Part of that was a feature of the fact that, Jaishankar, now Foreign Minister Jaishankar, was the Indian ambassador to China and developed a very robust channel with his counterpart at the time, Jon Huntsman, who was the U.S. ambassador to China at the time. And then after that, he came to Washington, was the Indian ambassador to United States, and carried forward those conversations as well during that period.

But there was also a deepening architecture of communication, different channels that were open and established, and intelligence and military channels, diplomatic channels to really sort of move forward the discussion on China.

And then from there, you move into the Trump administration. President Trump himself, I think, was tactical and transactional. But his team thought a lot about China and put a lot of energy into deepening the discussion between the United States and India as it related to China. And they put in place mechanisms to share information and intelligence that have continued to serve a purpose of deepening integration of effort between the United States and India with respect to China.

And then in the Biden administration, they are well known for being prominent advocates of the important central role of India in just about everything. Kurt Campbell is famous as saying that the India-U.S. relationship will be the most consequential relationship for the United States in the world in the 21st century. And they've invested considerable energy both at the leader level and also below to ensure that the gaps are as small as possible in how each side views, interprets, and responds to events related to China.

But that's the overall arc. I think that there is a open and unresolved question in the expert community about how much potential still exists to push the ball forward. And I think part of that will, you know, be a function of how India relates to China going forward.

06:42 How is India considering sovereignty issues that relate to China, such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan?

And on that, how are you looking at how India is considering sovereignty issues that relate to China, whether it be Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan?

MADAN: Ryan, you're right. It is a question that comes up quite a bit when I hear in Washington discussions about U.S. and India working together: What is India's position on Taiwan in particular? Before I get to that, I do want to say one thing about your point about the then-ambassadors Huntsman and Jaishankar meeting. It tells you how much U.S.-India discussions about China and the Indo-Pacific have changed, that when news leaked that the two of them used to engage in Beijing, there was a lot of concern in India about such engagement and such consultation, saying, oh, you know, it'll upset Beijing.

Today, such conversations are so routine that if the report came out that now Ambassador Pradeep Rawat and Ambassador Nick Burns engaged, there'd be a collective shrug. It wouldn't even get noticed.

But just going back to your question, I think, you know, one of the reasons for those sensitivities and caution is because of India's general sensitivities and how it has approached these sovereignty questions that China defines. And I think India has broadly seen these 3 or 4 issues—Tibet, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong—from three perspectives that combine for this kind of broader view that India has taken.

I think one has been traditionally India's own sovereignty concerns factor into how it thinks about or approaches China's sovereignty concerns. Particularly for India as a post-colonial country that has been trying to consolidate its own borders, that has disputed boundaries, competing claims with two of its largest neighbors—and even there was competing claims with Bangladesh for a bit.

But basically, you've seen that a country like India has therefore tended to be, like China, sovereignty hawks—sensitive about others commenting on its internal affairs. Or, these issues, which India considers internal affairs being brought up in international fora. So, on that, it's actually been quite similar to where China's taken such positions.

And the second prism through which India has seen these sovereignty issues that China outlines is from the perspective of the India-China relationship, wanting to keep that relatively stable so that, despite all the frictions that they've had, so that India can focus on growth and development and on its other security challenges. And so, there's been this tendency to not want to do things that would provoke China in some ways. And these issues are seen if India takes especially very public views, as provocative.

And the third thing is combining these two elements of India being the sovereignty hawk, but also concerned about India-China relations, is this aspect of Delhi's consciousness that if Beijing sees Delhi as going out on a limb on issues like Tibet and Taiwan in ways that it does not like, that it too can put pressure on India's sovereignty concerns on places like Kashmir or places like India's northeast, which has had insurgencies in the past. China has done both these things, changed its position according to how it's feeling about India at the time.

And so, I think that has been how India has seen these sovereignty issues, and therefore it's resulted in a broad approach that's usually called for mutual sensitivity. And so, India's been careful about how it has dealt with these issues. The current foreign minister has talked of India and China needing to follow a three mutuals policy: mutual sensitivity, mutual interest, and mutual respect.

10:22 Has India become less cautious in commenting on issues China considers sensitive?

This last "respect" part is where you've seen a little bit of a shift. There is a sense in India that China has not respected India's sensitivities on sovereignty issues, and the border and others, on relations with Pakistan.

And so, what you've seen is an India that has become a little bit less cautious about commenting on these issues or the approaches taken. On Xinjiang, for example, usually when the Indian Foreign Ministry is asked about the situation in Xinjiang, it will usually punt. It has not punted recently. It has taken note of UN reports talking about quote unquote, "the serious maltreatment of minorities." That's been one change.

On Tibet, you've seen Prime Minister Modi going from not directly saying much to publicly now wishing the Dalai Lama on his birthday every year and other official engagements with other officials.

And then you see, and we'll come back to this on, on Taiwan, India criticizing the militarization of the Taiwan Strait last year, which is also a change.

But as we'll talk about, you do see kind of different levels of how much India cares. So, India has been less forward leaning on Xinjiang; Hong Kong a little bit more because there's been a lot of economic engagement and citizens; and then I think you've seen on Taiwan a little bit more in recent years.

11:36 What has been the US view of and approach toward the issue of Tibet and the succession of the Dalai Lama?

I think the issue that India cares more about, though, of all these issues is Tibet.

I want to ask you on the Tibet question, what has been the U.S. view and approach towards the issue of Tibet? Has this changed over time? Does the U.S., for example, have a view on the succession issue when it comes to the Dalai Lama?

HASS: Well, it's an important question and a question that deserves more attention, frankly. The short answer is that I think that U.S. views and prioritization of Tibet have shifted over time. If you think back, from George H.W. Bush administration to the end of the Obama administration, there was a pattern of the Dalai Lama meeting with the U.S. president every two years. And that was roughly consistent, and it was a ongoing rhythm that unfortunately broke during the Trump administration. It hasn't been picked up since.

And while the Tibet issue is bigger than the Dalai Lama, the Dalai Lama is a powerful symbol that has significant political salience in the United States. Speaker *emerita* Nancy Pelosi and others are huge champions of the Dalai Lama and of Tibet issues more broadly. And his visits would have a galvanizing effect in terms of mobilizing interest and focusing attention on the issue of Tibet.

Now, other Tibetan leaders still visit Washington regularly. And at technocratic levels there are ongoing conversations about how the United States can best support Tibet and the Tibetan people. But it's just different when the leader, in this case the president, is not directly engaged. And so, that's where we are.

I think that the overall policy posture of the United States towards Tibet has been broadly consistent, which is recognizing that Tibet is a part of China, but working very hard to try to preserve Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions. And I expect that that that will continue carrying forward.

On the sensitive question of reincarnation, it is interesting. It is the only issue in the world I can think of where I've had a conversation in the Oval Office about the topic of reincarnation, but it has come up. And I think our view is that this is not an issue that should be decided by anyone outside of the Buddhist community and the Dalai Lama and his closest advisers.

And so, the Dalai Lama, his life will end at some point and this question will become very salient. I think that we as a community deserve to be having this conversation now so that we all have clarity on our respective views. And so, it's not just a U.S. and China issue or an India and China issue, but an issue of global concern. Because that is, I think, the magnitude of and significance of it.

14:09 Why has Tibet been of such sensitivity in the India-China relationship, and how does India think about the reincarnation issue?

But Tanvi, in your view, why has Tibet been of such sensitivity in the China-India relationship? And how is India thinking about the sensitive question of reincarnation?

MADAN: It is been a sensitive issue, I think, for India for three reasons. I think one, because more so than the other sovereignty issues we talked about, it directly

implicates India's interests, particularly the question of the boundary dispute with which it's intimately connected and has been.

If you go back to when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949—India had got its independence just a couple of years before then, in '47—at that point, India and China didn't actually have much of a border. Most of India's border was with Tibet. And it had special political, economic, religious, cultural links with Tibet. India had some also inherited some rights from the British when it became independent. And indeed, India's border claims were partly based on this tripartite Shimla Convention in the 1910s that was agreed to. And so, it had these links with Tibet as an entity.

Now with the Chinese takeover in Tibet in the 1950–51 period, that changed. Tibet was no longer a buffer state. I think as part of that recognition in India that China had essentially taken over and had control of Tibet, you see India and China then negotiate an agreement on Tibet, the preamble of which is well known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which are now probably remembered more in the breach than in them being followed.

But nonetheless, what that agreement did is essentially de facto India recognizing Tibet as a region of China—that was in 1954. Fast forward many decades: in 2003, India went further and recognized the Tibet Autonomous Region as a part of the territory of China. But in '54, what you did see is India essentially saying, we don't think of Tibet as independent, we are now negotiating with China on the issue of Tibet.

It also meant India giving up a number of rights. And the Nehru government at the time indicated that, look, this was going to buy peace. There's been subsequently a lot of criticism in India that, frankly, India should have gotten more out of that agreement, that China really wanted that agreement, that India could have negotiated, at the very least, a border settlement.

Now, part of the reason that was not negotiated, and this was a wrong assumption on Nehru's part, is Nehru assumed the boundary was settled and was settled as part of the agreement because China didn't bring it up. China did not consider it settled. And this is, again, where Tibet comes in. India discovers that China doesn't consider it settled when they suddenly note that there's a road that China's built to consolidate its own control linking Tibet and Xinjiang. India says, wait, this is on territory we claim.

And that's when you really see this border issue come to the fore. And you see this Tibet link also in India's east. So, this was all in the western sector in what India calls Ladakh, areas China claims as Aksai Chin. But even in the eastern sector, China claims a part of territory India identifies as the state of Arunachal Pradesh—China calls it South Tibet.

And it particularly wants control of this place called Tawang, which is also a signifier that this is not just a geopolitical issue. It's a ideo- or quasi- ideological issue. Tawang being important because it is considered to be where the sixth Dalai Lama was born, and so important for Tibetan Buddhism. And Indian analysts consider that

one of the reason China claims this is to try to exercise control not just over the succession of the Dalai Lama, but control of Tibetan Buddhism more broadly.

The 14th Dalai Lama, the current one, visits Tawang. His way of essentially endorsing India's claims to Arunachal Pradesh. And also, India facilitates that because it helps India's cause. So, that's one reason Tibet is intimately linked with this boundary dispute and India's claims, it's sensitive.

And it's sensitive for a second reason for India, because there's a political dimension. This is an issue, Tibet, that the Indian public, both on the right and left, interestingly, have cared about. Lots of criticism of the Nehru government for having given up on Tibet, let the Chinese take over Tibet. Now, that's another podcast, perhaps on the feasibility of that.

And I think finally, this is where we come back to the U.S., which is one of the reasons India is careful about how it talks about Tibet: China has had suspicions and accused India in the past, including in the run up to the 1962 China-India war, of either alone or in collusion with the U.S., essentially trying to undermine China's control and authority in Tibet. And so, accusing, for example, in the 1950s, the U.S. and India of essentially engineering or facilitating the escape of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959.

And so, to this day, the presence of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees in India is a sore subject with China. They're also very disapproving of when India allows U.S. officials to engage or U.S. officials to visit places like Tawang.

19:30 Has there been consultation and coordination on Tibet between the US and India?

Despite that, one of the questions I've had and I'm going to ask you is Ryan, has there been consultation and coordination on the subject of Tibet between the U.S. and India?

HASS: Yes, there has been. And I believe that it's appropriate. India hosts the Tibetan government-in-exile as well as the Dalai Lama. The United States has significant interest in preserving and protecting Tibet's unique cultural and linguistic history. And so, I think that there has been quiet consultations between the United States and India on how best to do so in a mutually supportive way toward a shared objective, but not in a way that is designed to be confrontational or adversarial towards China, but simply in a affirmative view of doing what is best to preserve and protect Tibet's unique cultural and linguistic traditions.

MADAN: The only thing I'll say on that on India is there has been, at least in its effort to be very cautious about any public consultation, which I think is fair because of those sensitivities I mentioned. Having said that, I think it is important also when the succession issue comes up, India is usually very careful, or at least the Indian government is very careful, about what they say publicly. Essentially the approach has been when it has been talked about, usually by unnamed sources, that it is for the Tibetans to choose.

But this is something India cares about deeply, not least because it will have implications for China-India ties. But also potentially, you know, the Dalai Lama has indicated that the next Dalai Lama would be born in a free country. And that could include India as well. So, there will be these sensitivities.

One of the reasons I think consultations should take place is it is clear to me that China will name its own Dalai Lama. India has not backed the Chinese stance that it will control the succession. I think that has also upset China, but nonetheless there will be this issue of China perhaps not just naming a Dalai Lama, but also seeking to encourage other countries to recognize the Dalai Lama they name and particularly any countries who have large Buddhist populations. So, it probably behooves India and the U.S. and other like-minded partners to discuss how they will approach such issues, even if they're not doing it publicly.

21:42 What is the US stance on Taiwan?

Ryan, I want to now move to the other sensitive sovereignty issue that China brings up and gets much more attention in the news for understandable reasons because of the stakes involved for the world, is Taiwan. One of the things I find is there's often a lot of confusion about what exactly is the U.S. stance, including in India, about Taiwan. So, Ryan, you're the best person to ask. [You've written a book with our colleague](#) Richard and our friend Bonnie from the German Marshall Fund recently on U.S.-Taiwan relations. So, what is the U.S. stance on Taiwan?

HASS: Well, one of the best distillations of U.S. policy that I've seen, and I would refer people to look at if they're interested in digging deeper, is a background briefing call that a White House senior official provided ahead of Taiwan's January 13th election. And in that call, the senior official laid out in very concrete ways what our policy is and what it is not. So, that's a friendly advertisement for that background briefing call.

But in short, the north star of American policy is to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Period. That is that is the basis upon which all decisions flow from and have for decades. And I expect will into the future as well.

And part of the reason why I think there are so many questions about American policy is because Americans are sort of a problem-solving people. We see a problem and we want to solve it. In this case, in the case of Taiwan, our strategy, our policy is not designed to solve cross-Strait disputes. It is designed to keep a path open for leaders in Taipei and Beijing to find a resolution themselves.

The United States does not support Taiwan independence, but also opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo by either side. We insist that any resolution of cross-Strait differences be done peacefully, free from coercion, and in a way that respects the will of the people on Taiwan who have a democratic ability to exercise their views and their voice.

And so, that is the construct or the framework in which U.S. policy towards Taiwan operates, and, and I expect will into the future as well.

23:45 How does India approach the question of Taiwan?

But let me turn the question back to you, Tanvi. How is India approaching this question of Taiwan? And how have Indian views evolved in recent years? And how do you see them going forward?

MADAN: I think they approach it much less publicly than the U.S.—obviously less directly involved. But one of the things that India took a very early decision on is, in terms of recognizing—it was only the second or third country to recognize or shift its recognition from the Republic of China led by Chiang Kai-shek to the People’s Republic in the early ‘50s. And it was because India said, look, they have control over the territory and they have established that they hold authority in most of the country, and so, we will recognize that government. And so, you saw that decision made very early on.

India also very early on and very consistently backed China, that is Beijing, taking the Chinese seat at the United Nations, a decision still criticized by some in India. But after that, you saw minimum official interaction almost till the 1990s.

Even during this period, it wasn’t like India didn’t care about what happened in the Taiwan Strait. When I was writing my book on U.S.-India-China ties, one of the things I was actually surprised to learn is that India cared deeply about Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950s. Because in the 1950s and ‘60s, while India’s mediation efforts or efforts to de-escalate or prevent escalation in the Korean War or in Southeast Asia (or what was then called Indochina) are better known, it was also making efforts, diplomatic efforts, to de-escalate the situation, including passing on messages directly in meetings between Nehru and Mao Zedong or Nehru and President Eisenhower. And so, you saw India care deeply.

And the position essentially was, this was not other people’s problem. Whatever happened in the Western Pacific would affect India.

But you didn’t see official interaction. I think you start seeing this changing in the 1990s when India starts considering Taiwan as a prospective economic partner. You see the establishment of the India-Taipei Association, which is India’s representative office, in 1995. Eventually, in 2003, you see a serving officer being appointed to head that as director general.

And you see one other change, which is until this point, India had never used the term “One China policy.” You see this really happening in the mid-1990s when India and China are trying to stabilize ties and Jiang Zemin visits India. And it’s the first reference you really see in an Indian document to not a One China principle as China lays out, but a One China policy. And it’s repeated a few times.

But you essentially see that end in 2008–09. That was the last time you saw India mention it. It has refused to reiterate that. And the attitude—inadvertently, perhaps not in a planned way—the Indian foreign minister in 2014 essentially said, look, if China, if China doesn’t have a One India policy, then, don’t expect us to talk about a One China policy. And so, I think that’s where you’ve seen at least that issue stand.

In the meantime, one thing we’ve seen is economic, cultural ties, which always were maintained, have increased. You see this in the trade and investment numbers. This is where India-China tensions, because [of] their border clash, have helped, because

as India as well as other like-minded partners are trying to de-risk. India is trying to attract Taiwanese business into India. You see a company like Apple whose Taiwanese subcontractors have now set up facilities.

And as a result, you're also seeing not just those kind of economic, educational, think tank engagements increase. I think you're also starting to see some of the quasi-official attention and engagement increase. So, just a couple of things I'll mention. You've started seeing Indian ministers attend the inaugurations of, say, some of these Taiwanese subcontractors setting up. Taiwan has set up a third office of its economic and cultural center in India, in Mumbai. They already had them in Delhi and Chennai.

So, while India is still pretty cautious about what it says, you've seen it be more forward leaning. You've seen the Indian government in 2022 depart from its usual silence on what happens in the Taiwan Strait and call for restraint. As you said in the U.S. case, call for no unilateral changes to the status quo and the desire for peace and stability.

And then, those of us who watch these things very closely, there're minor changes that seem minor but are over time will show more of an impact. Indian diplomats used to go to do their Chinese language training in Beijing. They're now doing it in Taipei. You've seen also the officers that India is sending as director general, they've not just served in China, they have often served in the U.S.; the current new director general has also served in the prime minister's office, as the previous one.

And so, you're seeing not very official—I don't think you'll see that change much. You've seen calls amongst the Indian public to do more, but largely you have you have seen a little bit more happening between India and Taiwan.

28:43 Can India contribute to deterrence in the region vis-à-vis Taiwan? And what might U.S. expectations of India be in a Taiwan contingency?

I want to again, flip this around to how you see things. I mean, one of the things as we talk about engagement with Taiwan broadly, but much of the discussion is about crises in the region.

Are there things that countries like India, in your perspective, can do before actually getting to a crisis point? So, two aspects of the question. One, are there things that countries like India can do to contribute to deterrence in the region or engagement with Taiwan? So, things to prevent a crisis taking place. And the second aspect of that that I'll ask is, well, if a crisis does take place—and I don't think we can't discuss that—what are the expectations from the U.S. or likely to be from the U.S of countries like India and what they should be doing or could be doing if any one of the scenarios that people talk about materialize?

HASS: Those are big questions, and I will do my best to try to tackle them. On the first question, what can India be doing short of crisis? way that I think about it at a

conceptual level, China would like to isolate Taiwan as an issue and have it just be a narrow China and Taiwan issue for the two sides of the Taiwan Strait to resolve. That is their preference. And the more that India's leaders are able to communicate that, no, it is not just a narrow issue, it's an issue of global concern that directly implicates vital Indian interests, I think that that is a meaningful contribution.

But not just narrowly in private diplomatic channels between New Delhi and Beijing, but also in ways that help the Indian public understand their stakes in the preservation of cross-Strait peace and stability. Because the inescapable reality is that if there is a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, every country will be impacted because the global economy will come to a grinding halt. Taiwan is the epicenter for production of semiconductor chips upon which the global economy runs. Over 50% of global commerce flows by Taiwan on a daily basis. And if there is instability in that part of the world, then every company, every country will be impacted for the worse. And the shock will be as large and most likely larger than was the case during COVID. So, the stakes are enormous. And the more that there is public awareness of everyone's direct interest in the preservation of peace and stability, I think the better.

The other thing that India could do short of conflict is help Taiwan be the best version of itself—which I think is in India's interest, it's in America's interest—to help Taiwan enjoy dignity and respect in the world stage, to help its economy remain vibrant, and and to give it confidence in its own future.

All these things, I think, are possible within the bounds of India's existing policy framework. And it would be it'd be wonderful to continue to make progress towards the direction of providing greater material and psychological support to the people of Taiwan.

Now, in the event that there is a crisis—that's hard. But I think that the starting point for thinking through this is not to think of a cross-Strait military conflict as dogfights above Taiwan and naval skirmishes in the Taiwan Strait. The reality is that if there was a conflict, it would be sprawling, global in scope, where each side would be seeking to exploit the other side's vulnerabilities, whether that's in space, in cyberspace, in access to fuel or critical components for continued economic development.

And I think that the United States would look to and hope for support from India in finding ways to limit China's warfighting capacity, to try to terminate the conflict as quickly and bloodlessly as possible.

Now, there are ample ways in which India could contribute, short of direct military engagement in the conflict. The United States would want to be able to free up resources and capacity, and there are areas where I think the India could provide support for the United States to be able to do so.

But those are just a few initial ideas to help us move forward in our thinking on this hard question. But how do you expect, Tanvi, that India would be impacted by any crisis in the Taiwan Strait?

32:44 How might India be affected by and respond to a crisis in the Taiwan Strait?

MADAN: So, Ryan, if you'd asked me a few years ago how India saw the impact of a Taiwan crisis or was thinking about its approach, I would have had a different answer. I think earlier you wouldn't have heard much of a discussion in India, especially publicly, about a Taiwan contingency. It was largely considered other people's problem.

But I think you've seen this change. And I think it's changed for four reasons, and four developments have caused a shift in how Indian government officials and how parts of the Indian strategic community are now seeing both the possibility as well as the spillover effects of a Taiwan Strait crisis.

I think in 2020 you saw a couple of developments take place that has pulled more Indian attention towards Taiwan broadly. But also, the idea of a contingency and the approach towards a contingency—to see that differently. One was the border crisis between India and China, which in Indian minds brought Chinese assertiveness to the fore.

And then the second was actually, interestingly, COVID, which helped awareness about Taiwan grow in a couple of different ways in India. One was that Taiwan itself was quite proactive in extending support in the initial months on the public health side, but also engaging with the with the Indian public through newspapers and interviews. Earlier you wouldn't see Taiwanese ministers' interviews being published in Indian newspapers. You started seeing a lot more of that.

You also saw as a result of COVID, India, as I mentioned, engage in and undertake some of these de-risking policies, which has now meant actually more interest in the Taiwanese economy and understanding, as you mentioned, of things like the importance of semiconductors and Taiwan's place in that.

I think in 2022, the two things that made a difference was, one, you saw tensions across the Strait. Following Speaker Pelosi's visit, you saw Chinese military activity around Taiwan. That was noticed in India as well. And you saw, as has been mentioned earlier, you saw India take a public position on the need for restraint and no changes to the status quo. So, I think that period of tension in the Taiwan Strait, arguably that is continuing, made a difference to how India was thinking about this.

And I think the second thing and significantly was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For two reasons. One, I think, a sense in India that a centralized authoritarian leader can take steps that most of the rest of the world would consider irrational, and they can take them without too many constraints.

And second, the fact that while it was considered by some "this is Europe's problem, this Russia-Ukraine war", there has been a spillover effect in India, especially on the economic side. And diplomatically as well. And so, there is a consciousness that look, if the Russia-Ukraine war has had such a spillover effect, that Taiwan contingency would have far more.

And so, you've seen this real discussion in India taking place now, just the beginning of it, but nonetheless important, about the geopolitical and economic impact of a Taiwan Strait crisis—what it would mean for the balance of power, what it would mean for the U.S. power and presence in the region. You've seen on the economic

side discussions, various reports coming out, a lot of attention to this new Bloomberg study that looked at the fact that actually India would take an estimated 8% hit to its GDP in the first year after a crisis. That's even more than the U.S.

And so, you've really seen this discussion, public discussion, reports, you've seen some newspaper reports that the Indian government and military have are doing studies on what the impact would be of a contingency.

And now you see [comments from the former Indian navy chief in Taiwan](#) talking about the many ways that India could be affected by a contingency and how it needs to be approaching it. And we'll try to put the links in the episode notes of that speech. As well as I'll flag another guests that we had, [Ambassador Vijay Gokhale has written a report](#) on this as well, we'll put the link in that too. So, just to give you a sense of what the discussion in India is like.

And I think in terms of how you think about the Indian response, I think it would depend. It would depend on a few different things. One, the particulars of the contingency, things like who or what sparked it, the state of India-China ties at the time, the state of the boundary dispute or what's going on at the boundary, India-China boundary at the time. Or, for that matter, the state of U.S.-India ties.

And so, you could see a range of responses. Diplomatically, you could see an India that does an expanded version of what it's talked about, which is wanting to see restraint, no unilateral changes, no use of force, and backing—it might not do this in a collective statement, but definitely you could see something like that in a unilateral statement. You could see India preparing economically, both through building resilience, but thinking about its responses, how it would protect its own and help other economies as well. Arguably, by being a place that countries and companies are diversifying to these days, it's already playing a role in the economic resilience building, global economic resiliency phase.

I think the third thing, which often is the one that is most talked about, is militarily, what could India do? I think you see at the very minimum India contributing to deterrence by just the fact that it has tens of thousands of troops at the India-China border, which will tie down a certain number of PLA troops at the border. During a crisis, you might also see additional military presence if India goes into a state of heightened alert at the border, partly to prevent any potential Chinese military action against India, but also perhaps as a signal for China not to actually expand a conflict. But at the very least it could tie a certain number of troops and assets, military assets, down at that border.

Are there other things India could do? Yes, and this is all pure speculation. In the maritime space, India could pick up the slack in the Indian Ocean, maybe along with France and the U.K. And that's the minimum. Particularly pick up the slack if the U.S. and Australia have to redeploy to the western Pacific.

But you could also see more, India do more depending on what's going on Maritime maneuvers that could signal China, that could deter certain Chinese actions, naval actions. There are other questions and will have to be asked in India and I hope are being considered: is India going to give the U.S or others logistical access? Is it gonna provide munitions? Is it going to allow U.S. or other ships involved in

hostilities to use its maintenance and repair facilities? Now that the U.S. and India have all sorts of agreements for these things, it's not a given that India give the U.S. access, but I think this is something that India should be thinking about.

And so, when we talk at the end of our episodes about myths or misunderstandings, my myth on this or misunderstanding is people often talk about an Indian response being a given to a Taiwan contingency. And I don't think that that response is a given. I think it'd be a good idea for India to do some contingency planning. I suspect it is already doing some of that.

But I also think it would be good for India to have private consultations with its like-minded partners, including the U.S., to exchange assessments, to talk about expectations, and be realistic about this. Also talk about the bounds of what India might be able to do. And I think in the meantime thinking about how India can build its own resilience in case of a crisis and then contribute to regional deterrence would be a good idea.

40:17 Lightning Round: What is your myth or misunderstanding when you think of U.S.-Taiwan ties, or Tibet?

So, Ryan, I talked about my myth or misunderstanding. What would your myth or misunderstanding be when you think about U.S.-Taiwan ties or Taiwan or Tibet for that matter?

HASS: The biggest myth or misunderstanding that immediately comes to mind for me, Tanvi, is in the U.S.-Taiwan context. And there is a myth or misunderstanding that the United States supports a particular political party in Taiwan, which is not the case. The United States was disciplined in its neutrality throughout the entire election process, which is a testament to the fact that the United States believes that the U.S.-Taiwan relationship is strongest when it is done on a bipartisan basis, both in the United States but also in Taiwan.

[music]

And so, that's one thing that I just wanted to draw out because I think it's important.

MADAN: With that, thank you, Ryan, for joining us on the podcast. Hope to have you on a future season as well.

HASS: Thank you, Tanvi. It was wonderful to be with you.

MADAN: Thank you for tuning in to the *Global India* podcast. I'm Tanvi Madan, senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. You can find research about India and more episodes of this show on our website, Brookings dot edu slash Global India.

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