

India's top think tank the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) just concluded India's flagship foreign policy dialogue — the 2021 Raisina Dialogue. Over the past six years, the Raisina Dialogue, funded by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, has attracted several heads of states, ministers, policymakers and top academics from around the world.

The impact of the Raisina Dialogue and the discussion revolving around it have proved beyond doubt that think tanks are one of the most important actors in a country's foreign policy projection and decisionmaking process.

The ORF, with its international outreach, has been able to further establish a coherent strategic identity of India worldwide.

India, which has a rich strategic culture, can articulately convey its interests through its vast number of foreign policy think tanks.

The contributions of the late K. Subrahmanyam, India's leading strategic thinker, could not be overemphasized in bolstering the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (now renamed as the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses), a foremost think tank in India with a global voice, and shaping India's strategic culture.

The ministry also funds several other dialogues, such as the Delhi Dialogue and the Indian Ocean Dialogue, the focus of which is fostering a dialogue with the strategic community in the Indo-Pacific region.

Indian think tanks are playing a huge role in conveying India's geostrategic interests.

To further gather ideas on how to strengthen the security partnership and advance their foreign policy interests, groupings such as the ASEAN-India networks of think tanks and the EU-India Think Tanks Twinning Initiative have been launched.

## Think tanks can link Taiwan, India

Written by Sana Hashmi  
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Over the past few years, Taiwan's strategic culture has been shaped by its desire to engage countries in the Indo-Pacific region. High-level conferences, such as the Ketagalan Forum, the Yushan Forum and the Taiwan-US-Japan Trilateral Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue, are helping Taiwan to increase its outreach, and engage policymakers and academics around the world.

One of the prominent think tanks in Taiwan, the Prospect Foundation, established in 1997, has played a huge role in facilitating Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues between Taiwan and its Western counterparts.

National Chengchi University's Institute of International Relations houses the Taiwan chapter of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific.

Somewhat like India's Delhi Dialogue, Taiwan holds the Yushan Forum focusing on Taiwan's relations with South and Southeast Asia.

It is being curated by the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), which focuses on Taiwan's relations with New Southbound Policy countries, specifically those in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

TAEF is not only Taiwan's only think tank that is holistically studying the New Southbound Policy, but in the past four years, it has attempted to build bridges between Taiwan and the policy countries.

The New Southbound Policy, Taiwan's flagship foreign policy, is people-centric. Five years after its initiation, there are visible results.

However, more steps could be taken to bolster the policy. One of the important steps in this direction would be to increase think tank interactions between Taiwan and New Southbound Policy countries.

India is a key focus country in the policy, and an emphasis on elevating ties has been evident since the first term of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文).

It is important to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Indian and Taiwanese think tanks. TAEF signed one with the New Delhi-based National Maritime Foundation last year.

More such arrangements are needed, but MOUs also need to be accompanied with regular conferences, visits and writing collaborations.

Last year saw a number of Webinars on Taiwan, as well as on Taiwan-India relations, by Indian think tanks.

A few Webinars were jointly organized by Indian and Taiwanese think tanks: two by the ORF and Taiwan's Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research region; a Webinar on the prospects of a deeper India-Taiwan cooperation in the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region; and one by India's Research and Information System and the Prospect Foundation on cooperation in the fields of science, technology and innovation.

Some Western think tanks are considering opening Taipei chapters.

The European Values Center for Security Policy's announcement of a potential opening in the second half of this year is one example.

Some Indian think tanks are making strides in the global think tank space. While the ORF opened its US chapter in 2019, India's Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) established its Washington office in 2018. CUTS International also has offices in Geneva, Hanoi, Accra, Nairobi and Lusaka.

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With growing interest in Asia, especially India, Taiwan's strategic culture is expanding its horizons. More collaboration between Indian and Taiwanese think tanks is needed.

In the long run, Taiwan chapter of a private Indian think tank would further bolster India's standing in the region, and help India better understand Taiwan, China and the wider East Asian region.

Such a step would generate ideas on how Taiwan and India could further advance their interests within the framework of their "unofficial" relations. Such collaborations would add further volume to Taiwan-India interactions.

While Taiwan still lacks expertise on India, with just a handful of people studying India or South Asia, it has a number of academics who thoroughly understand the US, Japan and China. The Indian strategic community must collaborate with the Taiwanese strategic circle.

Tsai said at the Yushan Forum: "Taiwan helps Asia, Asia helps Taiwan." Without cultivating new voices in New Southbound Policy studies, Taiwan's objective of reaching out to South and Southeast Asian countries would remain incomplete.

In the absence of diplomatic ties, representative offices have limitations.

Taiwanese and Indian think tanks could play the role of catalysts for public discussion about India-Taiwan relations, and provide necessary inputs to the governments, and, if the need arises, persuade the governments by helping them set the agenda for engagement.

Constructive interactions between the strategic community can help bridge the gap between the actual and perceived potential of relations by steering the discussion in the right direction.

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