

Democracy and Freedom: The Cornerstones for Developing Cross-Strait Relations

Opening Remarks by
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at the International Conference on
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Executive Vice President Holmes of the Heritage Foundation, Vice-President Chen of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning!

It is my great pleasure to be invited to attend this conference jointly held by the Heritage Foundation and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. The defense of freedom has long been a core principle of the Heritage Foundation. It has also staunchly supported the development of democracy and the common values shared by Taiwan and the United States. For this, I would like to express my deepest respect. This international conference has tremendous significance at this time when the Asia-Pacific region is undergoing rapid changes that bring both risks and opportunities. I would like to make some brief observations and elaborate on the ROC government's cross-Strait policy positions.

First, cross-Strait relations have affected peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region for 70 years

In 1949, the Nationalist Government relocated to Taiwan and the period of separate governance across the Taiwan Strait began and lasts even today. In terms of historical depth and the changing international framework, the past nearly 70 years of cross-Strait relations could be described as a journey from conflict to conciliation, and then a swing to unease. The cross-Strait relationship is a unique case in the world. For years, the two sides have attempted to bring their mutual relationship to a final settlement through force, peace, or a mixture of other means. However, a solution satisfactory to both sides has not been found due to an insistence on national sovereignty and a democratic way of life. The ROC will never

relinquish its sovereignty in exchange for an illusory peace. Nor will the 23 million people of democratic Taiwan ever allow their destiny to be decided under the non-democratic system of the other side.

The past several years have witnessed rapid changes in Asia and posed unprecedented challenges for cross-Strait relations. In this complex and changing situation, the ROC government has remained a force of responsible stabilization through its commitment to maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. Since taking office over two years ago, President Tsai Ing-wen has consistently handled cross-Strait relations with pragmatism and managed cross-Strait affairs in accordance with the ROC Constitution, the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation. She has also respected the historical fact of the cross-Strait talks in 1992, as well as the joint acknowledgment of seeking common ground while reserving differences to promote the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations. In this regard, our position has been consistent and firm.

Second, Taiwan's strategic importance is rooted in its democratic system and values, which is the foundation of our existence.

Taiwan occupies an important strategic position in the first island chain of the Pacific. In the post-Cold War period, it has acted as a cushion during mainland China's rise as a regional power and helped to maintain a safe environment for stable development in the Asia-Pacific. Taiwan is not only a model for economic development, but also a successful example of democratization. In its steady transition to democracy, belief in democracy has become rooted in the thinking and life of the people in this island. In recent years, Taiwan has steadily risen in the global rankings of democracy, freedom, and civil rights to become a beacon of democracy for Asia and the world. Through democratic institutions, the people of Taiwan debate and supervise public policy, protect their interests and needs, enforce checks and balances against dictatorial behavior by decision-makers, and narrow their distance from the government. Democratic values have made Taiwan a diverse and lively society with boundless creativity and vitality.

During an interview last month, President Tsai said that, as an emerging democracy in Asia, Taiwan has been an "island of resilience" under different rulers over the centuries. Through a bloodless revolution, it has transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy to become today a society in which different ethnic groups harmoniously coexist and collectively

form its core values. This cannot be violated. One can fully see the achievement and self-confidence of democracy amply reflected in our next generation, each of whom adds to the "pride of Taiwan." For this new generation, democracy is no longer a heartfelt hope. It has become a way of life, taken for granted, and a value shared by all in Taiwan across ethnic and party lines. The momentum and vitality of democracy and freedom connect us with the world. Even with a range of views about the Beijing regime, Taiwanese society is able to forge majority support for maintaining good and peaceful relations with mainland China.

Third. Mainland China has centralized control even more with the intent to change global order and international framework

Mainland China's overall national strength has risen rapidly in recent years by adhering to a developmental path and institutional choices distinct from those of "western parliamentary democracies." However, this road has led it towards increasingly centralized authoritarianism. Since the 19th Party Congress, Beijing has established internal and external development steps and goals. However, its governance model not only lacks respect for democracy and human rights, but also involves social control through pervasive monitoring of its citizens by means of modern electronic technology. The "China model" has attracted the world's attention for its economic developmental achievements, but it lacks the institutional means to reflect public opinion and ensure accountability. It cannot effectively resolve the people's ever-growing needs for a better life or address the social contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development. It relies on a system of intensive control to achieve social stability at the expense of the people's freedom, exposing the defects and limitations of the "China model."

At the same time, the oppression of China by western powers in modern times has become part of the nation's collective memory. The discontent with the western-dominated international power structure grows in mainland China and has gained enormous energy as China's overall national strength grows, sparking concerns in the international community over the mainland's development intentions and strategic direction. In its national security strategy report released last year, the US defined mainland China as a "revisionist" in its attempts to change the international order that has prevailed since World War II. It has criticized China for using economic and military power to entice or coerce other countries with its political agenda. Beijing has used "sharp power" to export its ideology and influence government policy-making in other countries. This has put many nations on increased alert

and drawn attention to mainland China's intention to expand institutional control and change the global order.

Institutional competition is not about ostentation, bluster, or high-pressure control. It is a matter of giving humanity the respect and choice of freedom, rights, and justice. A system that leads to hegemony has forgotten its original aspiration of creating a "moderately prosperous society" in which "provision is made for the aged till their death, the adults are given employment, and the young enabled to grow up." People cannot be won over by bullying. The mainland Chinese leader has said that "As the world's largest political party, the CPC must behave in a way commensurate with this status." Such behavior should include respect for democracy and human rights, as well as an understanding that, in relations with neighbors, "only benevolence in a great country is able to serve a small one."

Fourth. Maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait is beneficial to peace and prosperity in East Asia

Beijing's long denial of the existence of the ROC has prevented resolution of the political impasse across the Taiwan Strait. Under its so-called "one China principle," the Mainland has repeatedly sought to coerce Taiwan by military and diplomatic means or further "policies to integrate Taiwan." By these carrot-and-stick strategies, Beijing has been undermining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait with ever greater speed in an attempt to lead to an irreversible outcome. It has not only stubbornly refused Taiwan's calls for negotiations without political preconditions to resume normal cross-Strait exchanges, but has also constrained Taiwan's space for international existence through its irrational behavior. As a result, the spiral of hostility between the two sides has escalated and presented a difficult dilemma. We fully realize that mainland China is steadily eroding the sovereignty of the ROC in the international community. We also realize that the Mainland intends, by enticements and coercion, to make the people of Taiwan become followers, give up the right to be their own master, and thus pay a price in the loss of their country, democracy, and freedom. The ROC government will never waver from its position of defending national sovereignty and Taiwan's dignity, nor will it be silenced.

We thank the international community for its support for Taiwan's principles in developing cross-Strait relations, the United States in particular. The friendly relations between Taiwan and the US are based on shared democratic values and beliefs, as well as on a common interest in regional strategic security. The US administrative branch and the

Congress recently reiterated their commitment to the Taiwan Relations Act, support for the vibrant development of democracy in Taiwan, opposition to the Mainland's unilateral change to the status quo, continued promotion of pro-Taiwan legislation, and emphasized that cross-Strait relations form an important link in the Indo-Pacific strategy. President Tsai has said that, as a free democracy in the Indo-Pacific region, Taiwan will work closely with neighboring countries to defend the collective achievements of freedom and openness. It will also protect a rules-based international order and further contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

President Tsai's cross-Strait policy of maintaining the status quo is in line with the major interests of all parties in the region and is a correct and feasible path. Peace, stability, and prosperity in East Asia are vital to the global order. We hope that the US and the international community will continue to support our cross-Strait policy, convey to the Mainland the importance of maintaining the status quo, peace, and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and urge the Mainland to be rational, show goodwill, and stop affecting security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region by unilaterally undermining the cross-Strait status quo.

Fifth. Considering a road to peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations

Facing new developments, the ROC government offers the following proposals for the future direction of cross-Strait relations:

(1) To start, the two sides should have the determination to improve cross-Strait relations. While ensuring national sovereignty and dignity, we are willing to consider future interactions between the two sides with a more open attitude and a more flexible policy.

(2) Each side seeks internal consensus and views. The two sides differ internally in their views on the development of cross-Strait relations. They should mutually respect each other, listen to rational views domestically, and work out rules for an orderly interaction.

(3) Stop words and actions harmful to Taiwan. Mainland China has hurt the feelings of the people of Taiwan through words and actions aimed at provoking and pressuring Taiwan. It should stop this and restrain internal factors detrimental to positive development.

(4) Engage in pragmatic communication and dialogue. We are willing to promote cross-Strait dialogue and communication in any form, at any place without political preconditions, while conducting potential risk management.

The ROC is a sovereign state. Taiwan's core interest is to maintain the sustainable development of its democratic and free system. We will not degrade ourselves because of belittlement by others, but will more determinedly reach out to the world. Looking ahead, we are certain that dialogue is the best option to resolve differences. The choice between conflict and peace in fact lies in the thoughts of the leaders. Mainland China should embrace a benign attitude and face up to the existence of the ROC in good faith. It should have the courage to resolve political differences between the two sides and not to misjudge the situation, not to miss opportunities, and not to make the wrong decisions. We also hope the Taiwan and US experts and scholars of cross-Strait studies here today can apply their wisdom and their past invaluable experience of beating swords into ploughshares to bring new inspiration and impetus.

In closing, I would like to wish the conference the greatest success. Thank you!