

Peace in the Taiwan Strait: An Important Cornerstone of Regional Security

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Speech by

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Director Dafydd Fell of the Centre of Taiwan Studies at SOAS University of London, Deputy Representative O, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good afternoon!

It's my great honor to have this opportunity to join you here today. SOAS is a leading center for oriental studies in Europe. Over the years, SOAS has developed extensive experience in regional studies and become a world-class think tank for Asian studies. It has made outstanding accomplishments in numerous fields and is dedicated to the causes of human equality and the creation of a harmonious international society.

Global and regional peace, stability and progress are hopes shared by all humanity. They are also goals to which governments around the world aspire. Cross-Strait relations have evolved closely with international developments, forming a vital link in regional peace and collective security. Understanding this, the government of the Republic of China (R.O.C.) has endeavored to maintain peaceful and stable ties across the Taiwan Strait. Today, taking the opportunity presented by this international platform for progressive thinking, I will speak on international developments, cross-Strait relations, and the significance of the cross-Strait policy of the R.O.C. government.

1. Changes and continuity in the international order and security environment

(1) Heightened interdependence of the international community under the trend of globalization

The evolution of international situation is a history of constant advance that drives development across regions. The end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union brought about a shift in the

global order as the superpower confrontation between the U.S. and Soviet Union gave way to a U.S.-led order of one superpower and multi-powers. The international security environment has also undergone significant changes. The old framework of hard power confrontation rooted in military strength has been replaced by soft power competition in the economic, trade, and cultural spheres. The incident of 9/11 brought to the fore new forms of conflict and disputes. It also heightened the world's attention to international dialogue and cooperation on security issues. Since then, countries have pursued preventive peacekeeping methods, particularly in non-traditional security fields. They have also sought to preemptively respond to potential threats. Besides, the internet economy, knowledge economy, and the rising pace and scope of globalization have also given a new face to the global economy and deepened interdependence in international affairs.

(2) Emerging countries rise on the international arena

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has undergone political and economic changes as countries have deepened exchanges and cooperation in these fields. In the past 25 years, emerging countries, led by East Asia and Latin America, have steadily risen. The important international economic and trade issues existed among the G7 or G8 countries and were deliberated and resolved by advanced countries in Europe and the United States. However, in 1999, the G20 was formed and began to play an important role in international finance and economic cooperation. A decade later, in 2009, the BRICS countries joined hands for the first time at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. They proposed a set of game rules for global greenhouse gas emissions that resonated with most developing countries. At its first summit in 2011, the group declared that it would bring together all developing countries to establish a fairer and more democratic new international political and economic order. Emerging countries are now exerting their influence in international interaction and cooperation. The development trends in mainland China have particularly attracted attention in the international community.

(3) Asian countries play an increasingly important role in global politics and economy

Recent years, changes have been brought by economic-driven development in major Asian countries. These nations have drawn on population, resource, and market scale advantages to enter the global economic and geopolitical spotlight. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast in its 2016 global GDP ranking that three of the world's 10 largest economies (the United States, mainland China, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, India, Italy, Brazil, and Canada) would be in Asia, representing the second-, third-, and seventh-largest economies on the list. Studies have also predicted that, by 2030,

Asia will account for 50% of global GDP. In addition, Global Firepower, a website on military power, included four Asian countries, led by mainland China, in the top-10 list (the United States, Russia, mainland China, India, France, Britain, Japan, Turkey, Germany, and Italy) of its "2016 World Military Strength Rankings" (covering 126 countries worldwide). Clearly, Asian countries have long played an important role internationally in the political and economic spheres.

2. Geostrategic changes in the Asia-Pacific region and role of Taiwan

(1) Mainland China gains influence with rising political and economic strength

In the late 1970s, mainland China embarked on reforms and opening measures. In the early phase, the Mainland attracted labor-intensive production with cheap labor, gradually becoming the "world's factory." As the consuming power increased in the Mainland, the world began to pay more attention to the country as a market, economic development in the Mainland became a focal point of the world. In the three decades since embarking on reforms and opening up, mainland China has increased its GDP at average annual pace of more than 9%. In 2010, the Mainland surpassed Japan on GDP to become the world's second-largest economy. Some studies believe that mainland China's GDP will surpass that of the United States sometime between 2020 and 2030. At the same time, the Mainland has increased defense spending at a double-digit annual pace since 1990, steadily raising its influence in international politics, military, and regional security fields.

In recent years, mainland China has also externally advocated the establishment of a "new type of international relations" rooted in win-win cooperation. It has proposed a "new Asian security concept," promoted the concept of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, and actively participated in regional economic cooperation and international affairs. Mainland China also planned the "One Belt and One Road" program and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to build a close network of common interests with neighboring countries. It has also greatly enhanced its military capabilities to maintain its status and influence in the global strategic order.

(2) U.S.-China competition and cooperation affects strategic order in the Asia-Pacific region

The strategic competition and cooperation between the United States and mainland China in the Asia Pacific region has also affected developments in the region and the strategic layout of major countries worldwide. The U.S. continues to intensify its "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" strategy and to strengthen political and economic cooperation and alliances with major countries in the region to

maintain its leading role in the development of the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. and mainland China have cooperated on global climate change, fighting terrorism, the development of new energy resources, and in other areas. Yet they also are at odds on the East China Sea and South China Sea sovereignty dispute, regional economic integration, cyber security, human rights, and other issues. The U.S. is strongly dominant on security affairs in the Asia-Pacific region overall. However, mainland China is steadily growing stronger and exerting a greater influence on countries in the region. Many countries in the region hope, on the one hand, to continue to enhance their independent abilities. On the other hand, they also want to maintain cooperation and avoid confrontation with the U.S. and mainland China.

(3) Developments in the Asia-Pacific region heighten the significance of Taiwan's strategic role

Mainland China has rapidly increased its political and economic strength in recent years. This rise has come with developments in the Asia-Pacific region and the Mainland's adherence to the "core interests of the country" since Xi Jinping came to power. The Mainland has played a pivotal role in the island sovereignty and maritime rights disputes, especially in the wrangling of claimants in the South China Sea arbitration case, as well as in strategic competition and cooperation among powers, regional economic integration, the energy security crisis, the spread of international terrorism, and other non-traditional security developments. Taiwan occupies a strategically central position at the intersection of Eurasia and the Pacific. It has also played an important role in maintaining order in the Asia-Pacific. Taiwan has long been committed to maintaining peace and stability in the region and the across the Taiwan Strait. It has made important contributions to peace, stability, prosperity, and security in the Asia-Pacific region. Taiwan is also an important claimant in the East China Sea and South China Sea island and reefs and maritime rights issue. We are ready to actively engage in cooperation on regional issues and establish close and normal communication with relevant parties to peacefully settle disputes.

3. Evolution of cross-Strait relations and Taiwan's defense of universal values

(1) Shifting cross-Strait relations from confrontation to interaction

The history of cross-Strait relations traces back to the Chinese Civil War resulting from the struggle between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and Communist Party of China (CPC) for power in mainland China. In 1949, a dividing line was drawn across the Taiwan Strait, marking the start of a period cross-Strait military conflict, separation and confrontation. In November 1987, the R.O.C. government began allowing family-related visits from Taiwan to mainland China, beginning the

replacement of long-term confrontation and deadlock with people-to-people contacts and exchanges. As these exchanges have grown closer and more frequent, Taiwan's experience and soft power have widely affected mainland China. For example, the experience, capital, and technology brought by Taiwan businesses to mainland China have been key factors in the qualitative changes and rise of the Mainland economy. In the political sphere, the governments of the two sides authorized the establishment of the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) to deal with issues derived from private cross-Strait exchanges. The two organizations have conducted several talks and established mechanisms for institutionalized cross-Strait negotiations. Over the years, interaction, exchanges, and consultations between the two sides of Taiwan Strait have undergone numerous twists and turns, leading nearly to war. However, cross-Strait relations have steadily developed and advanced throughout these ups and downs.

(2) Taiwan's universal values and soft power bring positive energy to cross-Strait and regional development

The R.O.C. is Asia's first democratic republic. The democracy movement in Taiwan began in the late 1970s. The Democratic Progressive Party was founded in 1986, injecting new energy for political reforms in Taiwan. In 1987, the government announced the lifting of martial law, marking a turning point on Taiwan's path to democratization and liberalization. In 1991, the period of mobilization for the suppression of the communist rebellion was terminated and Taiwan introduced full congressional elections. In 1996, the president was directly elected by the people for the first time. Since then, the political party in power has changed three times. For many years, Taiwan has worked hard to deeply cultivate democratic reforms, develop a pluralistic, free, and open society, and safeguard human rights. This has been a positive force in the process of cross-Strait development. Taiwan not only adheres to the universal values of democracy, freedom, and peace, but has also always been a staunch defender of peace. We believe that a mutually beneficial cross-Strait relationship is the key factor in promoting peace and security in the Asia-Pacific. It also accords with the common interests of both sides and regional parties.

At the same time, the R.O.C. government is promoting Taiwan's participation in regional economic integration and a "New Southbound Policy" to realize the value of Taiwan's advantages and find new growth momentum. It is actively seeking a role for Taiwan in the regional economy, and it is looking for new external economic support and forces for Taiwan. We hope to establish a close "economic community" consciousness with members in the region. We also hope to jointly establish a stable and prosperous environment in the Asia-Pacific region and actively participate in multilateral

and bilateral economic cooperation. We are willing to exchange views with parties in the region, including mainland China, on issues related to joint participation in regional development. We also hope to explore various possibilities for cooperation and joint efforts and to contribute positively to innovation and sustainable economic development in the region.

4. The R.O.C.'s Cross-Strait Policy Position and Actions

The R.O.C. government is committed to establishing consistent, sustainable and predictable cross-Strait relations and to maintaining a peaceful and stable security environment in the region. This has always been the core thinking behind the cross-Strait policy promoted by the R.O.C. government. The significance and direction of this policy is as follows:

(1) Respecting the historical fact of the 1992 talks and maintaining the status quo of cross-Strait peace and stability

President Tsai Ing-wen clearly stated in her May 20 inaugural address and National Day address that she respects the historical fact of a certain joint acknowledgement and understanding achieved during the meeting between the SEF and the ARATS in 1992. The government will continue, on the existing political foundation, to promote the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations. It will also conduct cross-Strait affairs according to the R.O.C. Constitution, Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation, with a commitment to maintaining the peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations. The R.O.C. government has also been clear, consistent and firm in its policy view and position on maintaining the peaceful cross-Strait status quo. It has shown the greatest flexibility and acted pragmatically. The government hopes that the two sides can show wisdom, act with prudence and patience, mutually express goodwill, and jointly safeguard peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and region.

(2) Opening a door for cross-Strait communication and interaction and handling cross-Strait relations rationally and pragmatically

In the more than five months since President Tsai took office, the cross-Strait policy promoted by the R.O.C. government has specifically clarified the utmost flexibility and common denominators in Taiwan society. Mainland China has repeatedly insisted on the "1992 Consensus" of "both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China" as the political basis for cross-Strait interaction. It has suspended

official cross-Strait interactions, institutionalized negotiations, and other mechanisms, making it difficult for the two sides to resolve their differences and doubts. We believe that mutual understanding and respect, as well as constructive, unconditional, and benign communication and dialogue are critical to solving problems and building trust. Both sides can sit down and talk about any issues that are conducive to the development of cross-Strait peace and the people's welfare.

(3) Advancing mutual understanding and setting aside historical baggage to build harmonious and stable cross-Strait relations

During the nearly 70 years of division and separate government across the Taiwan Strait, the two sides have made their own choices in terms of lifestyle system development and values. As a result, the two sides need to show mutual understanding, set aside differences, and seek common ground. Both sides should set aside the historical baggage and mutually respect their different development experiences and distinct political systems, ideologies, and ways that their societies function. This would help cross-Strait relations to advance. We also call on mainland China to face up to the reality that the R.O.C. exists and the people of Taiwan's insistence on democracy. The Mainland should also actively treat Taiwan's seriousness in "maintaining the status quo" and pragmatically understand Taiwan's democratic mechanism. It should renounce the zero-sum thinking of the past and calmly and rationally deal with current problems between the two sides to create mutually beneficial cross-Strait relations.

(4) Actively promoting Taiwan's participation in the international community and developing benign cross-Strait interaction on the international arena

Equal, dignified, and contributive participation in international organizations and activities is a goal earnestly hoped for and pursued by the people of Taiwan. It also contributes positively to the international community. However, Taiwan has recently faced artificially-created barriers to international participation. An obvious example is Taiwan's inability to participate in this year's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly. We deeply regret this, but are also very grateful to the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, and Japan and other major countries and their people for speaking up for us in various ways. We believe that Taiwan should not be excluded from the international system and hope that all parties will continue to support the R.O.C. government's bids to participate in the ICAO, INTERPOL, UNFCCC, and other international organizations. We will also continue to communicate and seek support from all parties, including mainland China.

5. Conclusion

Facing global geostrategic changes and the challenge of mainland China's rise, the R.O.C. government remains committed to its pledge and goodwill in developing cross-Strait relations. It will not yield to pressure against Taiwan, nor will it act confrontationally. It will establish consistent, predictable, and sustainable cross-Strait relations and contribute positively to regional peace and prosperity. We will endeavor in the following directions and appeals:

(1) The international community should encourage and support Taiwan's positive role as peacekeeper: Peace in the Taiwan Strait is an important factor in maintaining regional stability and international security. The R.O.C. government will actively develop Taiwan's geostrategic role and value and take concrete action to maintain the peaceful and stable status quo of cross-Strait relations and regional security. We hope that international parties will heed the importance of developments in the Taiwan Strait, face up to and support Taiwan's role in maintaining peace, encourage continued communication and dialogue between the two sides, and work with Taiwan to create conditions beneficial to promoting regional peace and prosperity.

(2) Taiwan is dedicated to developing mutually beneficial cross-Strait relations in alliance with global democratic values: The universal values of peace, freedom, and democracy are core values of the R.O.C.'s cross-Strait policy. They also form a foundation for cooperation among countries allied on global democratic values. We will continue to deepen comprehensive cooperation with democracies friendly to Taiwan and seek to start the process of forming strategic and mutual beneficial relations with mainland China. In doing so we aim to highlight Taiwan's soft power, spread the universal values of democracy, freedom and peace, and exert a positive influence at a critical moment as mainland China develops a pluralistic and democratic society.

(3) Seeking mutual understanding through cross-Strait communication and dialogue and calling on mainland China to approach with goodwill: The two sides should give priority consideration to the rights, interests, and well-being of the people. They should promptly resume existing cross-Strait communication and consultation mechanisms, find common awareness and understanding, and provide positive impetus for the promotion of mutual cooperation. We hope that all parties can support Taiwan's continued promotion of positive development in cross-Strait relations rooted in the deepening of democratic institutions.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for participating today. I look forward now to the opportunity to exchange views with you all and to benefit from your insights.