

Maintaining the Status Quo of Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait, Defending Taiwan's Interests and Value

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Toward New Normal ? "

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Senior Vice President Michael Green of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) , Director Ding Shuh-fan of the Institute of International Relations at National Chengchi University, Ambassador Kao, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning!

I am honored to be invited to attend this symposium jointly held by CSIS and the Institute of International Relations at National Chengchi University. Thirty years have passed since the government of the Republic of China (ROC) lifted restrictions on family-related visits across the Taiwan Strait. This symposium has particular significance at this time of rapid changes in cross-Strait relations, in the internal and external environments facing mainland China, and in the international security environment. Today, I will speak on recent developments in cross-Strait relations and the cross-Strait policy of the ROC government.

1. Taiwan's Adherence and Commitment to Maintaining Democracy and Peace

The past year or so has been a time of complexity and change in cross-Strait relations and East Asia regional affairs and thorny geopolitical conflicts. Amidst these challenges, the ROC government has firmly promoted the development of cross-Strait relations and proposed pragmatic policy positions, including the following:

"One" key objective: Maintain the peaceful and stable status quo. Since taking office, President Tsai Ing-wen has repeatedly stressed the importance of peace and stability

across the Strait, as well as Taiwan's efforts and determination to maintain the status quo. This status quo is not about changing the social systems of the two sides. It does not have the purpose of encroaching on the development and survival of the other side or undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. This is a status quo based on mutual benefit for both sides: one that allows cross-Strait relations to smoothly advance on the existing foundation and the track.

The "Two" main stakeholders are Taipei and Beijing. During 30 years of cross-Strait exchanges, Taipei and Beijing have advanced at pace and rhythm that are sometimes at odds. Nevertheless, the development of cross-Strait relations is not a one-sided responsibility, nor can one side set political preconditions for the other. Over the next 30 years, Taiwan and mainland China need to jointly advance the cross-Strait relationship. As a democracy, Taiwan can never have one perpetual ruling party. Beijing cannot just negotiate with particular political parties in Taiwan. It needs to lay down the historical baggage.

An appeal for "three" new ways of thinking. During an interview, President Tsai stated that the changing external environment brought by developments in the Asia-Pacific region and cross-Strait relations over the past year or so have presented a "new situation" that both sides need to jointly face. The two sides need to jointly respond to a "new answer sheet" and jointly consider a "new model" conducive to peaceful and stable cross-Strait interaction. This "Three New" thinking is built on the existing political foundation. Namely, the Tsai administration respects the historical fact of the talks and joint acknowledgement of "setting aside differences to seek common ground" between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) in 1992. It also values the achievements of cross-Strait negotiations and exchange over the past 20-plus years.

2. "Maintaining the Status Quo" in the Taiwan Strait is in the Interest of All Parties

Maintaining peaceful and stable development across the Taiwan Strait is the shared responsibility of both sides. The Tsai administration has worked hard to create an environment for rational cross-Strait dialogue and policy decisions to establish consistent, predictable and sustainable cross-Strait relations. Mainland China has stuck to the "one China principle" as a

political precondition for the development of cross-Strait relations and Taiwan's foreign relations. It has tightened cross-Strait official relations and curtailed Taiwan's international space, sacrificing an opportunity to improve cross-Strait relations and affecting peaceful and stable status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Public opinion surveys commissioned by the MAC and related agencies all show a steady trend of more than 80% support for maintaining the status quo. Mainland China should correctly interpret the Tsai administration's Mainland policy and public opinion trends in Taiwan. It also should be vigilant to the potential risk of cross-Strait opposition.

Although the ROC government lost Sao Tome and Principe and Panama as diplomatic allies, the Tsai administration will not vary from its refusal to buy diplomatic allies and Taiwan's unique values and status in the international community will not change. The Tsai administration will not change its pledge to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, though, it absolutely will not sit back and watch as the interests of the country are repeatedly challenged. The cross-Strait relationship is complex and sensitive. It requires of both sides a high level of wisdom and patience to steadily resolve and control differences. The rising strength and intensity of high-pressure and retaliatory tactics has reduced the space for cross-Strait moderation and goodwill. It has also widened the distance across the Strait. This is why the U.S. and other members of the international community universally hope for a show of determination and action by both sides to maintain the status quo.

3. Mainland China Needs to Move beyond Zero-Sum Thinking

Mainland China has raised the level of risk and suspicion in cross-Strait relations through a series of recent diplomatic actions unfriendly to Taiwan. It successively lured away two of Taiwan's diplomatic allies. It also pressured the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) based on its unilateral political stance to prevent Taiwan from continuing to participate in their assemblies. This has created new challenges in maintaining the cross-Strait status quo and sparked a backlash and dissatisfaction in public opinion in Taiwan. Over the past year, Beijing has restricted travel by Mainland tourists and students to Taiwan. It has also limited visits to the Mainland by legislators of Taiwan's governing party, selectively receiving only the groups in Taiwan that it recognizes. More notably, Beijing has avoided convening meetings of the cross-Strait

agreement working groups in violation of its commitment to implement agreements. This has also curtailed the space for cross-Strait cooperation on functional issues.

With the zero-sum thinking of a world power and an approach of marginalizing and belittling Taiwan, mainland China has viewed the functioning of democracy and pluralistic lifestyles, systems, and values in Taiwan with negative thinking and politicized interpretations. This displays a superficial understanding of pluralism and democracy in Taiwan. Although the two sides differ in their political thinking and values, we hope that Beijing can appreciate the need to expand dialogue and communication with Taiwan to shift from moving at odds with each other to advancing together in cross-Strait relations.

4. Steady Development of Taiwan-U.S. Relations

The "2017 National Defense Authorization Act" signed by President Obama in December 2016 covered high-level military exchanges between Taiwan and the United States. Under the new Trump administration, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, senior director for Asian affairs in the U.S. National Security Council Matt Pottinger, and acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton have successively expressed commitments to following the Taiwan Relations Act or "Six Assurances." The US government has long supported the position that cross-Strait issues should be resolved peacefully and in a manner agreeable to both sides. It emphasizes that the two sides should engage in fruitful dialogue, avoid escalating tensions and undermining stability, and oppose unilateral change to the cross-Strait status quo by either side. The friendly relationship between Taiwan and the US is based on shared democratic values and beliefs, long-term mutual trust, and mutual benefit. The ROC government appreciates the support of the US.

Cross-Strait peace and stability are consistent with vital US interests. The US recently expressed the position that the two sides should engage in dialogue and should be concerned about the potential risks for both sides if communication is prevented by political preconditions set by Beijing. The Tsai administration has repeatedly called for direct dialogue and consultations between the two sides without preconditions. We hope that the US will continue to support Taiwan's cross-Strait policy position and encourage the Mainland to join Taiwan in maintaining the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and protecting security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

5. Conclusion: Taiwan's Position and Hope in Response

Confronting the new changing situation, the ROC government has raised the following four hopes and commitments on future policy positions and direction of efforts for cross-Strait relations:

(1) Firmly defend Taiwan's interests and values and fulfill the responsibility to maintain regional peace. The Tsai administration emphatically does not want to see cross-Strait relations shift from peace to confrontation through polarized thinking and provocation between the two sides. Rude language and fist shaking will only increase anger. The two sides need a peaceful relationship to steadily advance. President Tsai has solemnly stated that cross-Strait affairs will be handled according to the ROC Constitution and the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. This should be respected and re-affirmed. The ROC government seeks to prevent Beijing from unilaterally changing the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. At the same time it will continue to actively promote a "New Southbound Policy" to strengthen cooperation with relevant countries and create regional economic prosperity.

(2) In response to changes in the Asia-Pacific region, the two sides should maintain stability through communication and dialogue. Facing the Taiwan-US-China relationship, the holding of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, and its impact on cross-Strait relations, Taiwan will stick to the consistent position of closely watching but not provoking. If Beijing has the will and sincerity, and if there are no political preconditions or restrictions on form or place, we are willing to promote cross-Strait dialogue and communication at the earliest possible time to resolve hostility and avoid misunderstanding and misjudgment between the two sides.

(3) Promote the sound and orderly development of cross-Strait exchanges and strengthen management mechanisms. Cross-Strait relations have experienced ups and downs over the past 30 years, but one rule that has stayed the same is the

increasingly close and diverse nature of cross-Strait exchanges. We will steadily promote cross-Strait exchanges in various areas and seek the earliest possible passage of the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervisory Act. The Tsai administration will strengthen management mechanisms for cross-Strait personnel exchanges in response to dynamic developments in cross-strait relations to maintain Taiwan's overall security. However, it will not adopt a confrontational mindset or deliberately set obstacles to exchanges.

(4) Cross-Strait relations should be based on protecting the rights and well-being of the people. The well-being of people on both sides is central to the development of cross-Strait relations. It is also an unshirkable goal of the government. Li Ming-che, a non-governmental organization worker from Taiwan, involuntarily disappeared and was accused of "the crime of subversion of state power" in mainland China. It is evident from this case that the two sides of the Strait, despite their physical proximity, are separated by a deep and wide gap when it comes to freedom and democracy. We have repeatedly called on Beijing to promptly disclose the specific facts and evidence in this case and to duly protect Mr. Li's rights and interests. Cross-Strait relations can only move forward if the cross-Strait authorities conscientiously safeguard the interests and well-being of the people on both sides.

Looking to the future, elite decision-makers on both sides should avoid falling into the self-fulfilling prophecy of inevitable confrontation. The Democratic Progressive Party administration has led cross-Strait exchanges for only a limited time. However, through constant adjustments, it has increasingly showed goodwill to mainland China. The Tsai administration hopes that the US will continue to honor pledges made under the Taiwan Relations Act and "Six Assurances" and support a policy of peaceful and stable interaction between the two sides of the Strait. This is good for the status quo of peace in the Taiwan Strait. It also supports the Trump administration's strategic layout in East Asia.

Finally, I would like to wish the symposium the fullest success. Thank you!