

Flight Safety and National Security Cannot be Compromised: Mainland China should Value Public Opinion in Taiwan and Promptly Hold Consultations with Taiwan to Resolve Cross-Strait Disputes

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On January 4 this year (2018), mainland China unilaterally activated the M503 northbound flight route and three extension routes (W121, W122, and W123). These routes affect flight safety and the national security of Taiwan. The Taiwan side has repeatedly expressed its solemn position and called on the other side to promptly hold consultations with Taiwan to resolve this controversial issue. The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, in consideration of overall cross-Strait shipping relations, has adopted the lightest possible treatment with respect to the two Mainland airlines that continue to fly on the disputed routes. We have demonstrated a high degree of restraint and earned the support of the majority of the public in Taiwan.

The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) hopes that this incident can awaken all parties to the importance of addressing and resolving issues related to cross-Strait relations and then build consensus and take action to bring this incident to a successful close. The following four-point statement is issued to this end:

1. Resolution of the M503-related route issue concerns the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and transcends political party lines.

The Mainland has repeatedly stressed that activation of the M503 northbound flight route and extension routes is an internal affair, that this matter does not involve flight routes and waypoints in Taiwan, and that there is no issue of unilateral opening. Such statements broadly diverge from the facts of cross-Strait interaction and as such are unacceptable to Taiwan.

In 2007, the Mainland began planning the establishment of the M503 route and submitted an application to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). However, the

route was not implemented due to concerns in Taiwan and the international community. In January 2015, the Mainland unilaterally issued a notice to airmen (NOTAM) regarding the flight route. Due to an intense backlash in Taiwan and protests of the government at that time, the two sides agreed to hold several consultations between the Taipei Airlines Association (TAA) and the Cross-Straits Aviation Transport Exchange Council (CSATEC). They reached a consensus on March 2 of the same year, including: The actual path of the M503 flight route would be moved westward six nautical miles and only be used for southbound flights; the W121, W122, and W123 air routes would not be activated or implemented at this stage; and the timing of activation must be communicated and confirmed between the two sides.

Cross-Strait negotiations on the M503-related routes are necessary due to the proximity of the routes to the median line of the Taiwan Strait and their intersection with the W2, W8, and W6 routes linking Taiwan with Kinmen and Matsu. These routes have a huge impact on flight safety and airspace management in Taiwan. Consequently, the Blue and Green camps in Taiwan agree across party lines that international civil aviation regulations must be followed and relevant issues must be handled through cross-Strait negotiations. This is the context of the March 2015 consensus between the TAA and CSATEC and a fact that can not be distorted.

The policy position implemented and maintained by the current government is the same as that of the former government in 2015 and the consensus reached at that time by the TAA and CSATEC. This is also a major flight safety and cross-Strait issue of universal concern to the people of Taiwan across party lines.

2. Cross-Strait civil aviation negotiations do not involve political preconditions.

The TAA and CSATEC held consultations on M503-related routes in 2015. This was an important example of the two sides' mutual goodwill and willingness to negotiate a resolution on issues of concern to the people. Civil aviation issues concern the rights and interests of the broad public on both sides and do not involve any political preconditions.

During the first Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration, the TAA and CSATEC held several talks to arrange cross-Strait charter flights during the Lunar New Year and other holidays. This also laid a foundation for comprehensive cross-Strait transportation links under the Ma administration from 2008.

The consultations between the TAA and CSATEC on M503-related routes were also based on the needs of civil aviation management and flight safety. The consensus reached by

both sides was publicized through official press releases. Neither side should refuse to fulfill the consensus.

"Whoever started the problems has to take care of it" The dispute over the M503-related routes should again be handled through consultations as a cross-Strait civil aviation issue not involving political preconditions. The TAA and CSATEC should promptly hold technical consultations to resolve the dispute.

3. Flight safety and national security allow no compromise and all sides should stand together.

The controversy over the M503-related routes is a flight safety issue and national security concern. It is an issue on which compromise cannot be lightly allowed.

According to a public opinion survey released by the Cross-Strait Policy Association on January 22, 2018, 74.2% of the public disapprove mainland China's unilateral opening of the M503 flight route; 85.7% of the public support the government's demand that mainland China communicate with Taiwan as soon as possible; and 63.4% of the public support the government's refusal to approve the applications of airlines flying on the M503 route to expand flight service during the Lunar New Year holiday. The poll results highlight the Taiwanese people's concerns over the M503-related routes unilaterally activated by the Mainland without cross-strait negotiations, as well as the hope that the two sides can resolve this issue through negotiations.

The MAC therefore especially calls for all sides to stand together on this matter and to build the fullest internal consensus and force in order to prevent divisions and urge the other side to face up to the insistence and public will in Taiwan.

4. Calling on the other side to promptly consult and work with Taiwan to resolve the dispute.

The people of Taiwan can be persuaded with reason but they will not bend to force. We remind that the satisfactory resolution of the M503 controversy is a test of whether the other side respects public opinion in Taiwan. It is also an important indicator for the people of Taiwan in viewing the future direction of cross-Strait relations. Beijing would be wise to not ignore its key influence.

We also again call on Beijing to cherish the hard-won peace and stability in cross-Strait relations, to adopt compensatory measures responding to the various concerns raised by activation of the M503-related routes, and to promptly arrange technical communication between the TAA and CSATEC according to the consensus reached between the two sides in March 2015 to resolve related disputes and bring an early close to this incident that has triggered cross-Strait uncertainty.