

Maintaining Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait Is a Shared Goal of Both Sides

Opening Remarks at the International Symposium on
"Cross-Strait Relations under the Tsai Ing-Wen Administration"

by

Lin, Cheng-Yi

Deputy Minister, Mainland Affairs Council of the Republic of China

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Dr. Richard Bush (Director of Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies of the Brookings Institution), Mr. Christopher K. Johnson (Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies), Mr. Ding Shuh-fan (Chair of the Institute of International Relations at National Chengchi University), Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning!

I am deeply honored to be invited to attend the international symposium jointly hosted today by the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies of the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Institute of International Relations at National Chengchi University. The symposium takes on particular meaning in the unique context of internal and external developments in cross-Strait relations and mainland China. Today I will talk on

current development in cross-Strait relations and the implications of the R.O.C. government's cross-Strait policy.

1. Maintaining the peaceful status quo: Starting with respect for the historical fact of the 1992 talks

In her inaugural address on May 20 this year, President Tsai made it clear that, "In 1992, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), through communication and negotiations, arrived at various joint acknowledgements and understandings in a spirit of mutual understanding and a political attitude of seeking common ground while setting aside differences [and that] Taiwan respects this historical fact." This emphasized that the government will continue, based on the existing facts and political foundation, to promote the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait relations. The government will conduct cross-Strait affairs in accordance with the R.O.C. Constitution, Act Governing Relations between the People of Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, and other relevant legislation. In this respect, the existing political foundations have four key elements:

First, the fact of the 1992 talks between the two

institutions representing each side across the Strait (SEF&ARATS), when there was joint acknowledgement of setting aside differences to seek common ground. This is a historical fact;

Second, the existing R.O.C. constitutional order;

Third, the outcomes of over twenty years of negotiations and interactions across the Strait; and

Fourth, the democratic principle and prevalent will of the people of Taiwan.

Cross-Strait relations are a long-term process of dynamic evolution. Both sides need to show patience and wisdom and work jointly to maintain the status quo of peaceful and stable development across the Taiwan Strait. In her May 20 address, President Tsai endeavored to narrow the distance between the two sides, avoiding provocation and surprises to establish consistent, predictable and sustainable cross-Strait relations. This firm pledge demonstrates an attitude and determination to pragmatically conduct cross-Strait affairs, as well as to act on the core values of the current government's cross-Strait policy.

2. Practical cross-Strait relations: Opening the door for communication and consultation

Over the past three-plus months, the two sides have sought to understand and acknowledge each other despite divergent views on the development of cross-Strait relations. Maintaining the status quo of cross-Strait peace and stability accords with the development interests of both sides, as well as with the general hope of the international community. This is the greatest common denominator between the two sides. The R.O.C. government has always believed that dialogue and communication are the keys to achieving and maintaining peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations and to establishing mutual trust between the two sides.

Mainland China insists that the "1992 Consensus" that "both sides are part of one China" is the political foundation for cross-Strait interactions. It has temporarily suspended the existing cross-Strait mechanisms and this has presented challenges for cross-Strait official interactions and institutionalized negotiations, making it harder to ease suspicions and reduce risk. The R.O.C. government has handled major recent incidents, such as the missile misfire, extradition of fraud suspects to mainland China, a travel

accident, and other major recent events in a timely manner based on the well-being of people and security considerations. We have used existing channels and various other means to proactively maintain contact with the other side and ease tensions over these incidents. The R.O.C. government also completed personnel arrangements for the SEF chairman, making positive steps to stabilize cross-Strait relations. We also believe that the mutual concern and pragmatic handling by the two sides during natural disasters and emergencies highlights the importance of maintaining existing cross-Strait communication mechanisms. It also demonstrates the goodness and original intention of people-to-people exchanges between the two sides, as well as contributes to the building of mutual trust and the benign development of cross-Strait relations.

3. The key to transforming cross-Strait relations: Mutual understanding and difference management

The two sides of the Taiwan Strait have been divided and separately governed for nearly 70 years. During this time, Taiwan has developed as a democracy with a civil society and diverse public opinion, while the Mainland has significantly deepened governance reforms and systematically transformed. In this context for cross-Strait relations, both sides have made

their own choices in terms of lifestyles and value systems. We find it unsurprising that contradictions exist between the two sides, and it is these differences that create a need for mutual understanding, pragmatic communication, and difference management. We need to set aside our differences and seek common ground. Any negative reading by one side of the other side's positions and policies would be like observing the other side with shaded glasses. It will only create more misunderstanding and concern and prevent the build-up of mutual trust and opportunity for cooperation between the two sides.

We hope both sides can set aside the package of history and mutually show goodwill. However, the key is that goodwill and dialogue must be rooted in mutual respect for different historical experience of development, and distinct political systems, ideologies, and approaches to social functions. The two sides likely face a breaking-in period, and we do not expect that our differences can be eliminated overnight. But we do hope that we can effectively and duly manage these differences and steadily adjust cross-Strait relations to reduce conflict, maximize the space for cross-Strait cooperation and consensus, and make this the new normal in the development of cross-Strait relations.

4. A new paradigm for the development of cross-Strait relations: Cooperation and co-prosperity

Cross-Strait relations form a key factor in building an Asia-Pacific security network. Taiwan will endeavor to maintain peaceful and stable cross-Strait relations, seek to participate in international organizations and related activities, and actively contribute to the international community to bring regional peace and prosperity. We are facing up to mainland China's rising political and economic strength and international influence. We also hope that Beijing authorities will care about the right of Taiwan's participation in the international community. The R.O.C. government will continue to communicate with all parties and seek broad-based support, including from mainland China, to highlight Taiwan's advantages and role and enable both sides of the Strait to play to their strengths and jointly contribute to the international community.

We face a period of slowing global economic growth and a key moment for Taiwan as we seek breakthroughs in economic development. With new thinking, we will adjust and continue to promote cross-Strait economic and trade exchanges and cooperation. We will actively participate in multilateral

and bilateral economic cooperation and free trade negotiations. We will also promote a "New Southbound Policy," seek a human-resource, capital and information role for Taiwan in the regional economy, and find new external support for Taiwan's economy. This policy is not politically driven, rather it is complementary to the development of cross-Strait economic and trade relations. We are willing to jointly participate with mainland China on issues related to regional development, exchange views, and explore all possibilities for cooperation and collaboration.

5. Significance of solid Taiwan-U.S. relations: Defending the values of democracy and peace

Taiwan-U.S. relations are at their best in over 60 years. U.S. President Obama also has repeatedly encouraged the two sides towards a position of creating links, reducing tension, promoting stability, and advancing development on the basis of dignity and respect. This has become the foundation for establishing cross-Strait peace and stability. The U.S. Congress recently passed a resolution to take concrete action affirming the importance of the Taiwan Relations Act and "six assurances" to Taiwan-U.S. relations. The friendly ties between Taiwan and the United States are built not only on long-term

mutual trust and mutual benefit, but more importantly on shared democratic values and beliefs. For this the R.O.C. government is grateful.

On Taiwan Strait related issues, the U.S. has encouraged Beijing to continue dialogue with Taiwan. This is an important force supporting Taiwan. Since President Tsai took office, the U.S. has congratulated Taiwan's democratic achievements and reiterated that cross-Strait peace and stability is consistent with its fundamental interests. We hope that the U.S. will continue to support Taiwan's cross-Strait policy, convey to the Mainland the importance of cross-Strait peace and stability, and urge the Mainland to show greater flexibility and creativity and support the normal operation of institutionalized cross-Strait negotiations and official communication and liaison mechanisms.

6. Conclusion: What we hope for cross-Strait relations

Facing the new cross-Strait situation, Taiwan will continue to leave the door wide open for cross-Strait communication and dialogue and work to create a friendly atmosphere and overcome deadlocks. The MAC would like to propose the following appeals and actions:

(1) The two sides should make an effort to show goodwill and gradually establish mutual trust. It is normal for differences to exist. The two sides should apply their wisdom to solve problems and proactively show goodwill that could be echoed by the other side and progressively accumulate and build mutual trust.

(2) The two sides should communicate regardless of formality to build mutual awareness and understanding. Through communication, the two sides can elaborate on their intentions and desire to cooperate without provocation or conflict, find a consensus on which both sides can identify, and provide positive momentum for cooperation.

(3) The two sides should put the well-being and interests of the people first. The well-being of people on both sides is central in the development of cross-Strait relations. We hope that normal contact between the two sides can align the cross-Strait development in a direction and pace consistent with the public's expectations. This "people first" spirit can also provide momentum for further development between the two sides.

(4) The ROC government is committed to promoting legislation of the Cross-Strait Agreement Supervisory Act and maintaining benign cross-Strait interactions.

We will endeavor to complete an effective and feasible Supervisory Act that best meets the needs of society so that cross-Strait exchanges and development will be continued on a sound legal basis.

(5) The two sides should expand economic and trade exchanges and cooperation to bring mutual benefits.

Institutional economic and trade exchanges and interaction across the Taiwan Strait can enable healthy industrial competition and mutualism. We welcome the further development of Mainland investment in Taiwan to bring more mutual benefits.

Looking ahead, we hope that mainland China can recognize that differences exist between the two sides. These differences should not be obstacles hindering the development of cross-Strait relations, but rather could be positive factors in promoting dialogue and cooperation. The Mainland also should face up to the R.O.C. and respect Taiwan's dignity and public

opinion. This is the only way to prevent the two sides from slipping into vicious cycles of suspicion, doubt, interruption, and stagnation. At the same time, the R.O.C. thanks the U.S. for its long-standing support of Taiwan in both official and private sectors. The deepening of Taiwan-U.S. relations and the U.S. affirmation of Taiwan's cross-Strait policy are conducive to consolidating the pattern of peaceful and stable development across the Taiwan Strait and can strengthen the U.S. strategic presence in East Asia.

In closing, I wish the symposium the fullest success.
Thank you!