



A Conference with the Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council

**By Raymond Burghardt
June 2017**

Introduction

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) held its annual conference with the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of the PRC State Council on June 13-14, 2017 in New York. The conference brought together leading Chinese and American experts on relations across the Taiwan Strait and took place prior to the most recent U.S. arms sale to Taiwan. A list of participants is included in the appendix.

This report is divided into several sections: The Current State of Cross-Strait Relations; The PRC Perspective; The American View; The Taiwan Issue and Sino-U.S. Relations; and Conclusions

The Current State of Cross-Strait Relations

Chinese and American participants were in agreement that relations across the Taiwan Strait remain in a state of “cold peace” or “hardening stalemate.” Beijing insists that formal cross-Strait dialogue must remain suspended until President Tsai Ing-wen accepts the “92 Consensus” or some other “One China” formula. Despite this stand-off, neither side wants confrontation or conflict. The twenty cross-Strait agreements on trade, transportation, law enforcement and other practical matters continue to be implemented through working-level, day-to-day communication. Experts who had participated in the NCAFP’s Cross-Strait Trilateral Meeting in late March agreed that mistrust between Taiwan and the Chinese Mainland probably had deepened during the previous two and a half months.

In recent weeks Beijing has more actively suppressed Taiwan’s participation in multilateral organizations, most notably in preventing Taiwan from being an observer at the late May meeting in Geneva of the World Health Assembly (WHA). The day before our conference, Panama broke relations with Taiwan and established diplomatic ties with Beijing, the clearest action since Tsai’s inauguration to signal the end of the Ma era “diplomatic truce.”

Americans saw signs that Tsai Ing-wen still was seeking to avoid provoking Beijing, rejecting asylum for a PRC human rights activist and turning away visits by the Dalai Lama and other figures offensive to the PRC leadership. Tsai also has floated some new concepts on cross-Strait relations, suggesting both sides shoulder mutual responsibility for developing a new framework for relations. Beijing quickly brushed aside these proposals and has not publicly acknowledged any helpful actions by Tsai. Tsai has occasionally expressed some hope that prospects for cross-Strait progress might improve after the Chinese Communist Party’s 19th Congress in October.

Beijing has said nothing to encourage this hope for autumn flexibility. Chinese experts at the conference insisted that Tsai Ing-wen must clarify the nature of the relationship between Taiwan and the Mainland, making clear that the two sides of the Strait belong to one country and are not two countries. While there is no compromise on this demand for a “One China” position, President Xi Jinping has articulated a policy of continued and even enhanced efforts to improve conditions for young Taiwanese to study and find jobs on the Mainland. Chinese scholars said the Mainland has made it easier for lawyers, doctors and other Taiwanese professionals to work in Mainland China. One Mainland scholar commented that these measures are designed to counter what Beijing sees as efforts by the Tsai administration to weaken social, economic and cultural cross-Strait ties.

The PRC Perspective

Chinese experts roundly criticized President Tsai’s central policy position that she wants to maintain the cross-Strait “status quo.” They emphasized that Taipei’s definition of the status quo—as well as Washington’s—is very different from that of Beijing. Tsai’s status quo is simply the preservation of peace and stability. Beijing of course shares that goal, but its “status quo” has two other aspects—promoting “peaceful development,” i.e. continued forward movement in cross-Strait relations; and preventing independence. The PRC sees Tsai as basically satisfied with the current state of cross-Strait relations and with no interest in pushing ahead into new areas.

One expert commented that by ignoring Beijing’s more expansive definition of the status quo, Tsai—as well as the U.S. Government—show a “lack of respect” for Beijing’s policy goals. In Beijing’s view, Tsai’s rejection of the “foundation” for cross-Strait relations (One China) is the greatest change that has been inflicted on the status quo.

The Chinese scholars dismissed as delusional Tsai’s musings that Beijing might be more disposed to compromise after the 19th CCP Congress. One expert recalled similar self-delusion by Tsai before the 2016 election, when she predicted that Beijing would “adapt” its policy depending on which party won the election. PRC speakers stated that the CCP’s “general cross-Strait policy” would remain unchanged after the Party Congress.

Echoing comments by Mainland speakers at the NCAFP’s March trilateral conference, Chinese participants denounced what they variously described as de-sinicization, soft independence, disguised independence or “promoting independence in a more cunning way.” They professed to see these nefarious trends in the Tsai administration’s “transitional justice” actions against the Kuomintang, DPP legislators plotting to lower standards for passage of referenda, as well as the change in the names of Japan’s office in Taiwan and vice versa. They also complained about new restrictions on Mainland tourists’ freedom of movement in Taiwan or long delays in issuing entry permits, new difficulties for Mainland investment in Taiwan, and appointment of “secessionists” to key education and judicial positions.

Beijing sees all these “soft” measures as a long term threat. It sees the U.S. as taking a short-term view, satisfied with Tsai because she avoids provocative actions that could pose an immediate threat to stability. For Beijing, as long as Tsai represents a pro-independence party she is a long-term threat while the American approach comforts her that the U.S. is “by her side.”

Mainland scholars appealed to the U.S. to appreciate Beijing's efforts to stabilize cross-Strait relations, to have a "more clear, more consistent policy toward Taiwan," to oppose any actions leading to de jure independence, especially in the ROC Constitution, and to endorse the '92 Consensus.

Chinese speakers also raised concerns about media stories that the U.S. is contemplating new arms sales to Taiwan, including possibly F-35s or F-16 Cs and Ds, and that a U.S. cabinet member may visit Taiwan. American experts thought an impending routine sale was likely, as such a proposal had been awaiting approval since the final months of the Obama Administration.¹

There was considerable discussion about whether the DPP could break the stalemate by freezing or removing the independence clause from its party constitution. An authoritative PRC speaker stated that freezing or abandoning the independence clause could make possible CCP-DPP party-to-party ties. He and other PRC speakers did not expect however that this major modification of the party charter would be sufficient to result in resumption of formal cross-Strait dialogue. They also noted that while some senior DPP figures had floated the idea of a change in the party charter—in one recent case suggesting it and then soon retracting the idea—Tsai herself has never spoken publicly on the notion. One Chinese speaker commented that Tsai Ing-wen could learn from Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je about how to create cross-Strait goodwill, citing Ko's statements that both sides of the Strait belong to "one family" or "a common community."

The American View

American experts reiterated the U.S. position that stability in the Taiwan Strait is essential to America's national interest in maintaining peace in Asia. The U.S. therefore must respond to actions and policies that threaten cross-Strait peace and stability. The U.S. cannot view the peace of the Strait as a strictly Chinese internal issue.

A U.S. speaker explained that the U.S. believes Taiwan's ability to engage in the international community on regional and global issues contributes to security, and therefore, Washington was disappointed that Taiwan was not invited to observe the 2017 World Health Assembly. The U.S. also does not believe that efforts to persuade Taiwan's diplomatic partners to change relations to the PRC help regional peace and stability. U.S. speakers reaffirmed the long-standing American policy to provide Taiwan with defensive arms to give it the confidence needed to pursue constructive relations with Beijing. They stated that the U.S. will continue to make available defense articles and service to make sure that Taiwan maintains sufficient defense capability.

American participants saw President Tsai as having maintained a reasonable, non-provocative stance. Close associates of Tsai believed that her administration had constructively communicated with Beijing about how Taiwan could again be a WHA observer, but never received an encouraging response. One U.S. expert commented that while Tsai had refused to endorse the '92 Consensus, she maintained its basics, including what he called a "de-facto One China policy."

¹ This sale moved forward in late June, without the jets.

U.S. participants believed that the WHA and Panama actions are causing a backlash in Taiwan, increasing hostility on the island toward the Mainland and decreasing the possibility of reconciliation. They also predict that these actions against Taiwan will increase momentum in the U.S. Congress and among some in the Executive branch to do more for Taiwan. One respected American expert commented that Beijing's pattern of pressure and punishment against Taiwan "is not a strategy."

U.S. participants believed that establishment of DPP-CCP ties would be a grossly inadequate reward to inspire Tsai Ing-wen to take the political risk necessary to change her party's charter. For Tsai to sell in Taiwan the idea of freezing or removing the independence clause, she would need to be sure of a much more substantial response. This was not a situation in which one side could be expected to act and then wait to see the other side's response. There had to be a deal in advance.

In response to Chinese appeals for the U.S. to pressure Tsai Ing-wen, the Americans rejected the idea of a U.S. endorsement of the '92 Consensus. It has consistently been U.S. policy not to mediate or play a role in cross-Strait relations. Some Americans suggested that if the U.S. were to change that policy, Beijing likely would come to regret the American role.

The Taiwan Issue and Sino-U.S. Relations

There was considerable discussion about President Trump's suggestions of linkage between China's helpfulness in controlling North Korea and possible U.S. actions and policies on Taiwan, trade and other issues. Americans and Chinese agreed that in general this kind of linkage is not a good idea in foreign relations. Americans recalled that in the past China also had suggested that U.S. behavior on Taiwan could affect Beijing's willingness to help rein in the DPRK's nuclear and missile development.

American participants stated that any U.S. administration would have to take very seriously the threat of North Korea developing an ICBM that could strike San Francisco. If Pyongyang does succeed in developing such a capability, that will affect the atmosphere of Sino-U.S. relations. Americans will review how that happened and will see the record of Chinese complicity: years of insisting it was not possible; resisting UN resolutions; and an important role in facilitating the DPRK's development of that capability. At the same time, Americans will notice that while China had been reluctant to put sufficient pressure on North Korea, it was increasing pressure on a democracy in Taiwan.²

² The subsequent U.S. pressure on China with secondary sanctions, the Taiwan arms sale, and the threat of further punitive trade measures; and the evolving reaction to the DPRK's long-range missile test on July 4 bear out these predictions.

Conclusions

While Chinese and Americans views on the cross-Strait stalemate differed in important ways, there was common ground on the importance of avoiding confrontation and conflict. Participants agreed that neither President Trump nor President Xi wants the Taiwan issue to come to the top of their bilateral agenda.

Participants also agreed on the importance of patience. When asked what were likely to be Beijing's next steps vis-a-vis Taiwan, Chinese experts were confident that Beijing wants to continue to implement the many cross-Strait agreements on transportation, trade and people-to-people ties.

All expected the cold peace to continue and recognized that it was an inherently unstable peace. Each side hoped that the other could do more to help break the stalemate, but neither side offered to take any specific action.

RAYMOND BURGHARDT served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) from February 2006 – October 2016. AIT is the private entity established in 1979 to manage U.S. relations with Taiwan in the absence of formal diplomatic ties. Former Secretary of State Rice appointed Burghardt to the AIT Chairmanship and the Obama Administration had asked him to continue in the position.

Ambassador Burghardt has a long history of involvement with Taiwan. He was Director of the American Institute in Taiwan from 1999-2001, representing U.S. interests in Taipei during the period of political transition when President Chen Shui-bian was elected and took office. Prior to his arrival in Taipei, Burghardt was Consul General in Shanghai (1997-99), a position in which he served as the U.S. Government's chief interlocutor with the late Wang Daohan, the People's Republic of China's lead negotiator with Taiwan. In the mid-1970's, Burghardt studied for one year in Taichung at the State Department's Chinese Language School.

Burghardt served for many years as one of the leading Asian specialists in the U.S. Foreign Service. He was Ambassador to Vietnam (2001-2004), Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassies in Manila (1993-96) and Seoul (1990-93), and Political Counselor in Beijing (1987-89). Burghardt's earlier career included an assignment on the National Security Council staff as Special Assistant to President Reagan and Senior Director of Latin American Affairs. Concurrently with his position as AIT Chairman, Burghardt served from 2005 until December 2012 as Director of Seminars at the East-West Center in Honolulu.

Burghardt received a B.A. from Columbia College in 1967 and did graduate study at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs. He was born in New York City and raised in the New York metropolitan area.

**THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY'S
FORUM ON ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY (FAPS)
PRESENTS**

**A CONFERENCE WITH THE TAIWAN AFFAIRS OFFICE OF THE
PRC STATE COUNCIL**

JUNE 13 & 14, 2017

**PARTICIPANTS
(in alphabetical order)**

The Honorable Raymond F. BURGHARDT
Former Chairman of the Board
American Institute in Taiwan

Mr. Victor CHANG
Translator

Ms. CHEN Jing (*Tuesday only*)
Consul
Consulate General of the PRC in New York

Ms. CHEN Xiaoyan
Staff
Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council

Mr. CHEN Yuanfeng
Vice Minister
Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council

Ms. Rorry DANIELS
Associate Project Director, Forum on Asia-Pacific Security
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

The Honorable Rosemary A. DiCARLO
President & CEO
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Mr. Jianhang MAI
Translator

Mr. DUN Shixin
Director General
Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council

Ms. HE Lanjing
Deputy Director General
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC

Ms. Juliet LEE
Associate Project Manager, Forum on Asia-Pacific Security
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Professor LI Peng
Deputy Director, Taiwan Research Institute
Xiamen University

Mr. LIU Zhenjiang
Secretary to Vice Minister Chen Yuanfeng
Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council

The Honorable Winston LORD
Chairman Emeritus
International Rescue Committee

Ms. LV Hui
Division Chief
Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council

Ambassador James F. MORIARTY
Chairman of the Board
American Institute in Taiwan (AIT)

Mr. Alan ROMBERG
*Director of East Asia Program & Distinguished
Fellow*
Stimson Center

The Honorable Jeffrey R. SHAFER
Consultant
JRSHAFER INSIGHTS

Dr. SHAO Yuqun
*Director, Institute of Taiwan, Hong Kong and
Macau Studies*
Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS)

Mr. WANG Shushen
*Associate Research Fellow, Institute of Taiwan
Studies*
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Professor XIN Qiang
Deputy Director, Center for American Studies
Fudan University

Mr. YANG Mingjie
President, Institute of Taiwan Studies
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

The Honorable Stephen M. YOUNG
Former U.S. State Department Official
U.S. Department of State

Professor Donald S. ZAGORIA
Senior Vice President
National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Mr. ZHOU Zhiyong
Director, Political Section
Consulate General of the PRC in New York

Mr. ZHU Jianzheng (*Wednesday only*)
Consul
Consulate General of the PRC in New York

Mr. ZHUANG Lekun
Second Secretary
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC

FAPS would like to thank the following organizations for their support of our work:

Carnegie Corporation of New York
Chadbourne & Parke, LLP
China Energy Fund Committee
Eastern Media International Corporation
Formosa Plastics
Henry Luce Foundation
Mutual of America