



U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations: Managing Triangular Stability

A Summary of Discussions from the NCAFP Cross-Strait Relations Trilateral Conference

March 27-28, 2018

By Ralph A. Cossa

On March 27-28, 2018, the Forum on Asia-Pacific Security (FAPS) of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) conducted its annual trilateral cross-Strait dialogue in New York City involving some 30 scholars and former officials from the United States, the PRC, and Taiwan. Sorely missed at the meeting was long-time participant Alan Romberg, who succumbed to cancer as the dialogue was in progress. His contributions to this dialogue and to cross-Strait relations were immeasurable and this report is dedicated to his memory.

Topics of discussion included cross-Strait dialogue and communications, bilateral economic relations and agreements, international space, security issues, domestic politics, and relations with the United States. The discussion was off the record and not-for-attribution; comments represented the personal views of the participants. While differences of opinion were clearly articulated, the meeting was conducted in a cooperative, constructive atmosphere.

The meeting took place amid the backdrop of recent Trump administration announcements of planned tariffs against China for unfair trade practices, including the theft or forced acquisition of intellectual property rights, which were seen by many as the opening shots in an impending trade war. Announcements that Ambassador John Bolton would soon be replacing Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster as President Trump's National Security Advisory and that CIA Director (and former Tea Party conservative) Mike Pompeo had been nominated to succeed Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State just preceded the meeting.

Key Takeaways

- While cross-Strait relations remain critically important, there is little sense of urgency today to resolve the official impasse as both Taipei and Beijing seem more internally focused. Both sides believe time is ultimately on their side.
- Formal cross-Strait dialogue mechanisms remain frozen but informal contacts continue and economic interaction remains stable with a modest increase in cross-Strait trade and a slight upswing in Chinese tourism in the second half of 2017.
- Chinese interlocutors understand the political realities that prevent Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen from formally endorsing the "1992 consensus" used by her predecessor as the framework for cross-Strait dialogue but remain steadfast in insisting she do so.
- Beijing continues its "soft-hard" approach toward Taiwan with the soft getting softer and the hard getting harder.

- The “soft” side is seen in the “31 measures” policies recently announced by Beijing, which are designed to attract young Taiwan professionals to study and work on the Mainland. These policies are “winning their wallets” but not necessarily their hearts and minds.
- The “hard” side includes increased PLA Navy and Air Force activity in the vicinity of Taiwan and a “relentless” campaign by Beijing to further restrict Taiwan’s international space, which were seen as counterproductive to any hearts and minds campaign.
- The unintended consequence of the hard approach is a deepening of the view in Washington, both within the administration and the Congress, that Beijing is being a “bully” toward Taiwan despite President Tsai’s commitment to maintaining the cross-Strait status quo. The Taiwan Travel Act is seen as a direct response to Beijing’s “bullying.”
- To the extent there was tension at the meeting, it was more within the Taiwan delegation (Blues versus Greens) than between Taiwan and the Mainland. Concerns were expressed that the DPP’s transitional justice campaign, aimed at historical reconciliation, contained elements of retribution that could pose a long-term threat to Taiwan’s vibrant democracy.
- The above takeaways were generally consistent with the impressions formed by the NCAFP delegation that traveled to Taipei and Beijing in December of last year (please [click here](#) for a copy of the 2017 Asia trip report).
- The biggest change detected was in Chinese views of President Trump. After his November visit to Beijing, many on the Mainland seemed confident that the relationship was on track and that Trump could be effectively “managed.” The recent tariff announcements and apparent hardening of views toward China, magnified by the impending appointment of hardliners like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton to key national security positions, has reduced this confidence.
- The Trump administration’s seemingly ever-adjusting policies remain the greatest variable in maintaining triangular stability. Chinese and Taiwan interlocutors worry that changes in U.S. relations with one will adversely impact relations with the other and across the Strait.
- Finally, the impact of China’s recent constitutional change allowing President Xi more than two terms on cross-Strait relations remains unclear. If Taiwan is to become a legacy issue for Xi, however, the term extension should further reduce any sense of urgency in “solving” this problem.

Cross-Strait Dialogue and Communication

The major point of discussion and concern was the lack of any progress in cross-Strait relations since the DPP returned to power. All agreed that official communications had essentially ground to a halt, even though the agreements negotiated during the previous KMT administration under Ma Ying-jeou continue to be observed and informal channels of communications remain.

From a Mainland perspective, President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to accept the '92 consensus lies at the root of all the problems. Chinese interlocutors understood the political dilemma facing Tsai and lamented the fact that the opposition KMT was too weak to apply domestic pressure. Tsai did not attach a high priority to cross-Strait relations. As a result, they saw little prospect for improvement in cross-Strait relations absent her acceptance of the '92 consensus.

While Beijing was concerned about increasing Taiwan identity, the growth of China's hard power and economic attractiveness were seen as limiting her and the DPP's options. Meanwhile President Xi remained focused first and foremost on political, military, and then economic reform so cross-Strait issues, while critically important, were not seen as needing urgent attention. Beijing is playing a "wait-and-see" game, understanding that Tsai is likely there for two terms. The real concern is not *de jure* independence but perpetuation of *de facto* independence forever. While the Ma administration was by no means pro-unification, it did not rule out the possibility and that stance made dialogue possible.

There was no single Taiwan perspective. Opinions were split, generally along party lines, when assessing Tsai's effectiveness in managing cross-Strait relations and in measuring the success of Beijing's 31 measures people-to-people campaign, but all objected to Chinese efforts to further restrict Taiwan's international space. Beijing's attempts to apply Chinese jurisdiction over Taiwan citizens was particularly troubling and was sure to have a negative impact on any Mainland "hearts and minds" campaign.

From the perspective of Tsai supporters, Beijing was being unreasonable and unappreciative of Tsai's efforts. Her willingness to base cross-Strait relations on the ROC Constitution could have been interpreted by Beijing as a significant step toward accepting the one-China status quo but Beijing has chosen instead to turn up the pressure in an attempt to "divide the people from the government" while targeting students and elites via its 31 measures campaign. While some were concerned that this softer approach would yield substantial benefits—it was noted that there had been a slight increase in the number of those supporting eventual reunification (even though the overwhelming majority still supported the status quo)—the majority of participants seemed to believe that there was a difference between "winning their wallets" and "winning hearts and minds" and that the attractiveness of Taiwan's democracy would win out in the long run.

Most agreed that the nature of the rivalry had changed and that ideology had become less of a factor and economic opportunity (or the lack thereof) was becoming more important. While this was not likely to bring about peaceful unification, it could make *de jure* independence less attractive.

While Americans seldom speak with one voice, Tsai was generally seen as very cautious and trying to meet Beijing more than halfway while Beijing was seen as stubborn and inflexible, hence a number of references throughout the meeting to Mainland "bullying." While there was an overall consensus between Washington and Beijing regarding both Chen Shui-bian ("troublemaker") and Ma (no unification, no independence, no use of force), Washington was inclined to see Tsai quite differently than Beijing. To Americans, she was unlikely to revert to the old path of confrontation, but neither was she likely (or should she) bow to pressure. Beijing's heavy-handed attempts to further restrict Taiwan's international space in the face of Tsai's "reasonableness" were recognized and condemned by both the administration and the Congress and directly contributed to the unanimous passage of the Taiwan Travel Act, a non-binding piece of legislation that nonetheless reflects the mood of the Congress and many Americans regarding Beijing's approach to cross-

Strait relations. Nonetheless, Beijing would be smart not to overreact to this legislation since this administration, like all its predecessors, jealously guards its foreign policy prerogatives.

Bilateral Economic Relations and Agreements

There was a time when cross-Strait relations were described as “cold politics, hot economics.” Perhaps today we should say, “frozen politics, warm economics.” The fact remains that while cross-Strait political ties have been moribund, economic relations have continued apace, with 2017 trade actually increasing (up about 15 percent) over 2016. While Taiwan businesses are exploring other options (the so-called New Southbound Policy looking toward ASEAN and beyond), the focus is still on China and especially now on the service sector.

Taiwan entrepreneurs still see lots of room to do business on the Mainland in many different areas and the Southbound policy is not an either/or approach; Taiwan can and will do business broadly in the region. Nor are the 31 measures an entirely new approach but a repackaging and expansion of existing policies. Meanwhile, Taipei is examining countermeasures to keep the best and the brightest at home.

Chinese tourism, at least for the first half of 2017, had markedly decreased but now seemed to be increasing slightly, while Southeast Asia tourism was up. Economic engagement with India, including joint ventures, was another avenue for diversification.

Mainland perspectives regarding cross-Strait economic developments largely coincided with Taiwan views. There had been no major changes in the economic/trade relationship, which was described as stable with a surplus in Taiwan’s favor. There has been a decline in Taiwan investment in the Mainland but at a slower rate (8 percent) than the global decline in foreign direct investment (down 16 percent). China does not intend to weaken economic ties even with the DPP in power since Beijing sees improved economic ties as supporting its eventual goals. As a result, it will take further action to attract Taiwan business. From a Chinese perspective, while Taipei worries about over-dependence, Taiwan still needs good economic ties and will follow market forces; “business will find a way.” While one Chinese interlocutor argued that the tourism drop was not due to Mainland constraints but to “declining interest to go there as options to go elsewhere grow,” many on the Taiwan and U.S. side believe Beijing had a hand in initially turning off (and now potentially turning back on) the tourist flow.

No one described the China-U.S. economic/trade relationship as stable or business as usual. While much of the discussion centered around President Trump’s “America First” policy and how it has manifested itself in terms of U.S. trade with China and Asia more broadly, there was an underlying American message to our Chinese interlocutors: it has been Chinese actions and China’s application of its so-called “sharp power” that has created the environment that has made American counter-measures necessary.¹

¹ Sharp power is defined by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig in their essay, “[The Meaning of Sharp Power-How Authoritarian States Project Influence. Foreign Affairs](#),” November 16, 2017). They argue that “authoritarian influence efforts are ‘sharp’ in the sense that they pierce, penetrate, or perforate the political and information environments in the targeted countries.”

Chinese sharp power takes the form of coerced acquisition of intellectual property rights and restrictions on access to domestic markets, as well as industrial espionage and disinformation campaigns. Beijing's techniques include both cooption and manipulation targeted at the media, academia, and the policy community. It seeks to permeate institutions in democratic states that might draw attention or raise obstacles to CCP interests, creating disincentives for any such resistance.

While Americans (among others) were confused, if not dismayed, by the Trump administration's approach to dealing with this increasingly unacceptable situation and its preoccupation with trade balances as a measure of economic cooperation or success, most if not all agreed that something had to be done and that a U.S. response was long overdue. Joining rather than trying to torpedo the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would have been a preferred approach.

Most Americans saw a need to avoid a trade war but also a need for greater transparency and a more level playing field to deal with state intervention in the market. While some Chinese acknowledged the problem, there was little or no support for the Trump administration's approach to dealing with it.

Questions were raised but not fully answered regarding the feasibility and advisability of a U.S.-Taiwan free trade agreement and the likely impact of a China-U.S. trade war on Taiwan. Taipei wants good trade with everyone, including China, but needs to protect Taiwan companies and reduce risks. Right now Taipei is focused on trying to get relief from steel tariffs.

International Space

The discussion on Taiwan's international space was probably the most contentious, in that Chinese participants tried to play down the intent and impact of Chinese actions (which could have been much worse) while Taiwan and American reactions ranged from "counterproductive" to "relentless." While it's true that several of the countries that currently enjoy diplomatic relations with Taiwan could easily be enticed (or bribed) to switch allegiance if Beijing were to employ a full court press, it is also true that China has selectively picked off a few Taiwan allies (Gambia, Sao Tome and Principe, and Panama) and seems to be making overtures to others (including the Vatican).

Chinese colleagues argued that international space was a "reward for good behavior" bestowed upon Ma Ying-jeou but that the overtures were deliberately kept reversible in anticipation of another DPP victory. Nonetheless, China approaches the issue carefully out of consideration for its impact on Taiwan public opinion. Beijing wants to diminish Taiwan's international space while still winning hearts and minds. Today's approach is neither business as usual nor a complete assault. Beijing wants to keep the door open if there is significant movement from Tsai.

Taiwan and American participants begged to differ with this analysis. From a Taiwan perspective, and especially from a DPP viewpoint, Tsai has been maintaining the status quo and resistant to deep Green constituents who would applaud a more confrontational approach toward the Mainland. Her reward has been a relentless campaign, which has already resulted in three diplomatic steals, backsliding regarding participation in the WHA/WHO, and numerous other slights.

While Chinese (and some Americans) expressed concern about DPP legislation to make referendums easier to conduct, they were reminded that the DPP position (also followed by the KMT when it was in office) was that Taiwan is already an independent country, and that referendums were restricted from addressing the content of the constitution.

Americans pointed out that even under Ma, Beijing had been less forthcoming or cooperative than promised or anticipated when it came to international space and that this lack of progress contributed to Ma's and the KMT's unpopularity. The deliberate multidimensional downgrading of Taiwan's international space that has taken place under Tsai, from a U.S. perspective, is undeserved and has resulted in Congressional actions such as the unanimous passage of the Taiwan Travel Act. As one American noted, "how does China expect Taiwan's friends to react if diplomatic allies keep getting poached?" Tsai has shown the will and ability to play a positive role in addressing global problems and the potential for creating a peaceful cross-Strait solution would be enhanced if Beijing showed some creativity and flexibility.

Security Issues

Not surprisingly, the security discussion centered on China's growing military capabilities and its efforts to become a regional if not global power. In the past year PLA Navy and Air Force activity in the general vicinity of Taiwan has increased dramatically, both in numbers and in scope with bigger formations and more complex activities.

From a Taiwan perspective, this "hard" approach underscores the constant threat and represents a significantly increased threat not only to Taiwan but to Japan as well. The danger is not just military; China's cyber and media manipulation capabilities add an additional dimension to the threat. Less discussed but also of concern was increased Chinese military activities in the South China Sea, including island building, which have enhanced China's area denial ability. The recent *U.S. National Security Strategy* (NSS) and companion *National Defense Strategy* were well received in Taiwan because the documents more clearly identified China as a revisionist power and potential regional threat. Taiwan participants openly wondered if Taiwan has (or could have) a role in the new "Indo-Pacific Strategy" or if there was room in the Quad (U.S.-Japan-Australia-India) for one more partner.

Chinese participants, surprisingly, had little to say about the NSS but did express concern about the implications of both the Quad and the "Indo-Pacific Strategy." China was expanding its military capabilities as a major regional power and should be expected to do and continues to see Taiwan independence as its greatest military challenge. As one Chinese interlocutor noted, the PLA wants a first class military but its focus is still regional, not global: "don't worry about PLA activity . . . but don't ignore it either." While China seeks economic integration and eventual peaceful reunification, it cannot and will not rule out the use of force as an option of last resort. From a Chinese perspective, the cross-Strait issue is between two parties to a civil war. Beijing wants the U.S. to let the Mainland and Taiwan work it out by themselves. China sees the U.S. as part of the problem and is concerned that Trump may try to play a Taiwan card.

There were passing references to Chinese concerns about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the THAAD missile system and about the potential for Taiwan to be integrated into a regional Air Defense Network, but (unlike some prior meetings) these issues were not dwelled upon to any great degree. Concerns were expressed about the ability of Washington and Beijing to manage future crises or emergencies. One Chinese participant acknowledged the need for China to be more transparent regarding its military goals and perhaps even for codes of conduct with Japan and others.

Americans pointed out that the “Indo-Pacific” was today more a slogan than a strategy and that all references to Indo-Pacific in the NSS were to a region, not a strategy. Likewise, the Quad today represented an informal consultative arrangement that was unlikely for a number of reasons to ever emerge as an operational alliance. Nonetheless, Washington remains committed to maintaining peace and stability in the region and is concerned about the growing cross-Strait imbalance and Beijing’s increased willingness to use economic, political, and military levers to increase pressure on Taipei.

However, from a U.S. perspective, an intentional cross-Strait military conflict remains unlikely; Tsai is not going to declare independence and Xi is not going to attack since the PLA cannot assure victory. But unintentional or accidental triggers could be initiated by any of the three players. Bad communications (not to mention occasional tweets) make it hard to clarify intentions; deep suspicions and a lack of understanding persist. Washington needs to step up senior level attention on cross-Straits issues, Beijing needs to better convey its views and not treat everything as a crisis and understand the impact of its own actions, and Taipei needs to demonstrate more resolve to defend itself.

Domestic Politics

The discussion of domestic politics brought out the sharp divide in Taiwan between pan-Blue and pan-Green sentiments. Both camps seemed to agree on one observation, however: the Mainland tends to overanalyze Taiwan politics while the U.S. tends to under analyze it.

The situation in Taiwan today was described by one pan-Blue DPP critic as “the four withouts”: power without prestige, defense without the will to fight, growth without development, and democracy without respect for the institution. While Tsai has considerable power over her government, legislature, and even judiciary, her prestige and popularity are low. People are unhappy with many of her policies, including on cross-Strait issues. Public opinion polls also show little or no will to fight (an assessment challenged by others who cited opposite polling results). While there has been modest economic growth under both Ma and Tsai, there are no long-term plans for building the economy and productivity is low. Finally faith in democracy is being eroded. There is “deep apathy in Taiwan due to revenge reform programs and Tsai’s confrontational approach.”

Not surprisingly pan-Green proponents had a more positive assessment. The DPP’s transitional justice campaign was aimed at historical reconciliation, not retribution, and was needed to heal the wounds of the past. This was “democracy with justice.” The fault for lack of progress in cross-Strait relations rested primarily on Beijing’s shoulders since Tsai has been trying to meet Beijing more than halfway and has been consistently rebuffed. Concerns were also expressed about Chinese meddling in Taiwan’s domestic affairs, via social media manipulation, cyber attacks, and even the outright purchase of Taiwan newspapers.

Pan-Blue proponents understand that Tsai can't and won't accept the '92 Consensus but argue she is duty bound to come up with a new term acceptable to the Mainland: "she needs to build a new bridge if she won't use the old one." Unfortunately, anything short of accepting the '92 Consensus, from Beijing's perspective, remains a bridge too far.

Chinese interlocutors saw the recent constitutional change that will allow President Xi to remain in power beyond the previously-mandated two-term limit as a reflection of Xi's sense of urgency to push forward with his reform agenda. Xi's focus was very much on domestic reform: first party reform, then military reform, then administrative reform, and then modernization/economic reform. Cross-Strait relations were a critical issue to all Chinese leaders but not an urgent problem requiring immediate attention since Xi's focus was internal and besides, time was on Beijing's side. There was no pressure on Xi to resolve the cross-Strait issue in the next five years.

Surprisingly, "one country, two systems" was referenced by several Chinese in talking about cross-Strait relations. Even under Ma, Taiwan had made it clear that this model, as applied in Hong Kong, would be totally unacceptable to the people of Taiwan. Its use today seems aimed at "inviting Taiwan into China's national development strategy," which includes "creating more opportunities for all people in Taiwan to come to the Mainland to seek their future."

In discussing U.S. domestic politics, there are few occasions to use the term "bipartisan"; Taiwan policy is the clear exception. There is broad and continuing support for Taiwan from both sides of the aisle in Congress and that support has deepened as a result of China's attempts to further restrict Taiwan's international space, witness the unanimous passage of the Taiwan Travel Act referenced earlier. Americans see Taiwan as important in its own right and as a beacon of democracy in Asia, not just in the U.S.-China context.

Relations with the United States

Chinese comments about Sino-U.S. relations centered on President Trump's "unpredictability" and the ups and downs it has caused. Things appeared positive after the Mar-a-Lago Summit and again after Trump's largely successful (or at least uneventful) visit to Beijing, but today the trend was being reversed, given the "triple-headed ride on the roller coaster" caused by disagreements over trade, the Taiwan Travel Act, and the South China Sea. Trump appeared to be taking an ad hoc approach; his long-term goal was unclear and there appeared to be no foundational principle other than America First.

From a Chinese perspective, the U.S. factor in cross-Strait relations remained critical and Beijing appeared more worried about Trump than about Tsai. Introducing hardliners like John Bolton and Mike Pompeo into this equation raised the possibility of more risk-taking. American and Taiwan participants sympathized with these concerns.

From a U.S. perspective, Taiwan-U.S. relations were solid, good, constructive, and transparent, with few problems other than nagging trade issues. U.S.-China relations on the other hand were more complicated and conflicted than ever, with lingering mistrust and growing rivalry the new norm. Two broad areas of U.S. concern were Beijing's toughening posture toward Taiwan/Tsai and the greater authoritarian shift in China, which raises questions about China's future direction. While there are some positive trends, negative trends are becoming the dominant theme. Beijing has not addressed the real and growing U.S. concerns regarding trade and Washington increasingly sees the relationship with China in competitive versus cooperative terms.

Taipei seeks good relations with both Washington and Beijing while also seeking international respect for its vibrant democracy. Taiwan participants argue (convincingly) that Taiwan “has been an independent country since 1949 despite lack of recognition; *de facto* independence has been with us for 70 years.”

From a Taiwan perspective, Beijing has been rocking the boat, not Taipei. Its extradition of Taiwan citizens and prosecution of Taiwan activists represent a change in the status quo. While Tsai will not go back to a confrontational posture regarding the PRC, she will not give in either since she “must be accountable to her electorate.”

It is fair to say that, Trump tweets and other conflicting signals notwithstanding, when it comes to official U.S. policy toward cross-Strait issues, there has been no fundamental change from one U.S. administration to the next in several decades, and this continues to hold true today.

U.S. Taiwan policy continues to be driven by the one-China policy and the Taiwan Relations Act, which unlike the Taiwan Travel Act, is legally binding legislation and lays out U.S. commitments to Taiwan including the provision of defensive arms. The Three Communiqués and the Six Assurances, while non-binding, remain the guidelines for managing relations with both Beijing and Taipei.

U.S.-Taiwan relations are comprehensive and based on our shared commitment to democracy and human rights. From a U.S. perspective, cross-Strait relations have worsened in the past year and the U.S. is “deeply troubled” by Chinese pressure tactics. Washington continues to stress that there should be no unilateral attempts by either side to change the status quo.

Despite assurances that there has been and will continue to be no fundamental change in U.S.-Taiwan relations, Chinese interlocutors still worried about the impact of the Taiwan Travel Act (binding or not) and who might be coming to Taipei to commemorate the opening of the new American Institute in Taiwan office complex. Concerns about John Bolton’s impact on cross-Strait policies were also raised by all, including those who recognized his years of support for Taiwan. Passengers are always concerned about rocking boats, even if friends are doing the rocking.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While cross-Strait relations are of critical importance to all three sides, there is little sense of urgency today. The leadership in Beijing and Taipei believe they can manage the relationship at present and both leaders are focused internally, not across the Strait. Nonetheless, Beijing’s change in attitude toward Taiwan is having an impact although the most significant effect may be an unintended consequence—namely the negative impact on U.S. attitudes toward China and the resulting increased bipartisan support for Taiwan.

The greatest variable in managing the trilateral relationship and Washington’s respective relations with Beijing and Taipei is President Trump’s personal unpredictability and the potential impact that this could have on cross-Strait relations and broader Sino-U.S. and Taiwan-U.S. relations. Here it is important to “watch what we do, not what we tweet.” Actual U.S. cross-Strait policy has not fundamentally changed and continues to be guided by America’s one-China policy and the Taiwan Relations Act.

There is no question that the broader Sino-U.S. relationship has become strained, not just due to China's increasingly hardline position toward Taiwan but primarily today over differences in trade policies and practices. While no one wants a trade war and there was broad-based concern over some U.S. tactics and assumptions, the U.S. message to Chinese interlocutors was that the trade situation as it currently exists is non-sustainable and that Chinese policies and practices, and Beijing's failure to deliver on past promises and commitments, lay at the root of the current standoff. Reciprocity is the key; Americans were generally of one voice in agreeing that the previous grand bargain has been breached by China and no U.S. president would fail to react. Trump may be unique in his approach but a U.S. reaction is overdue and driven by Chinese actions.

All sides looked for greater transparency and consistency (and fewer tweets) from Washington while recognizing at the end of the day that the solution must come from the people and governments on either side of the Strait. While the situation today is not urgent—Xi and Tsai are both internally focused and neither sees value in confrontation—this does not mean cross-Strait relations can or should be ignored or that complacency is in order. From a U.S. and Taiwan perspective, Beijing needs to show more flexibility and be more willing to deal with Tsai and the DPP. Chinese demands that the current administration in Taipei accept the '92 Consensus appear unreasonable and are destined to perpetuate the current stalemate. From a Chinese perspective, however, Tsai remains an independence supporter, which makes continued Chinese pressure and inflexibility both understandable and necessary. Few if any were optimistic that any breakthroughs in cross-Strait relations were likely in the near-term.

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