Xiamen University Launches Research Institutions to Promote Cross-Strait Unification and the “One-China Principle”

On June 3, Xiamen University (廈門大學) announced the launch of two new research institutes focused on cross-Strait unification and applied research on countering Taiwan’s diplomatic efforts. Located in the city of Xiamen (Amoy) in the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—which is less than four miles away from the Taiwan-administered Kinmen Islands (Quemoy)—the Graduate Institute for Taiwan Studies (台灣研究院) at Xiamen University established the “Cross-Strait Integration Development and National Unification Policy Simulation Laboratory” (兩岸融合發展與國家統一政策模擬實驗室) and the “Taiwan Diplomacy Research Center” (涉台外交研究中心). The Graduate Institute for Taiwan Research at Xiamen University is considered to be among a handful of premier “academic” institutions that support the Chinese government’s Taiwan policy. Other organizations commonly grouped in this class include the influential Chinese Academy of Social Science’s Taiwan Research Institute (社會科學院台灣研究所), which is associated with the country’s civilian intelligence agency the Ministry of State Security, the National Society of Taiwan Studies (全台研究會) coordinated by the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) United Front Work Department (中共中央統一戰線工作部), and the Shanghai Taiwan Institute (上海台灣研究所) of the Shanghai Municipal Government.

The Graduate Institute for Taiwan Studies is not the average run-of-the-mill Chinese academic institution. Its predecessor, the Taiwan Research Institute (台灣研究所), was established in July 1980 by the former director of the CCP Central Committee Leading Group for Taiwan Work, Deng Yingchao (鄧穎超)—the wife of Zhou Enlai (周恩来). The current chairman and deputy party-secretary of the institute is Li Peng (李鵬, b. 1973), who has...
served in that capacity since 2017 and was previously a visiting scholar in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the University of Maryland (Li was the recipient of a State Department award to study in the United States). The Graduate Institute for Taiwan Research is currently headed by another professor, Liu Guoshen (劉國深).

The director of the new institute is Chen Xiancai (陳先才), who concurrently serves as director of Xiamen University’s Institute of Political Science. Chen has a long academic career studying Taiwan issues. After beginning his work at Xiamen University in 2007 within the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Studies, he served as the institute’s deputy director and as a director of the “Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations” (兩岸關係和平發展協同創新中心), a united front think tank that was jointly established by several prominent Chinese universities. Additionally, he serves as the director of the DPP Research Center (台灣研究院民進黨研究中心), also located within the Graduate Institute of Taiwan Studies. The mission of this institution is to “analyze the historical, social, and realistic roots behind the establishment, development, and evolution of the Democratic Progressive Party.” In 2018, Chen was also invited to provide a briefing to trainees at the Eastern Theater Command (東部戰區)—which would have operational control over a Taiwan contingency—on the current status of cross-Strait relations and domestic developments within Taiwan.

According to Xiamen University’s announcement, the new laboratory will serve the goals of Xi’s “new era,” helping to solve the Taiwan issue and realize the complete unification of “China.” To this end, the new institution will focus on analyzing and predicting the conditions for national unification, generating simulations of national unification strategies, and investigating potential cross-Strait integration development policies. Additionally, it will analyze simulations of unification under “one country, two systems” (一國兩制). Finally, it will carry out research and teaching initiatives, utilizing artificial intelligence, virtual simulations, experimental teaching, and case studies to promote the unification process.

The goals of the new Taiwan Diplomacy Research Center are somewhat similar and complementary. Osten- sibly, the mission of this department is to establish a research platform focused on promoting the “One-China Principle” through academic exchanges with various countries. The center reportedly intends to expand its cooperation with the United States by undertaking research, holding academic seminars, and conducting academic exchanges. These efforts will be premised on adherence to the “One-China Principle” (一中原則) rather than the “two Chinas” (兩個中國) or “one China, one Taiwan” (一中一台) models. Furthermore, it will work to establish links with relevant universities that have think tanks focused on Taiwan in Europe, Japan, Singapore, and elsewhere.

In a response to the establishment of the new institutes, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC, 大陸委員會)—the Taiwanese government’s cabinet-level agency in charge of cross-Strait policy—issued a statement highlighting the increasingly aggressive efforts that the CCP has taken to unify Taiwan since it issued “Xi Five Articles” in early 2019 and proposed the “One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan.” According to the MAC, these new initiatives by Xiamen University are intended to implement the CCP’s goal of unifying Taiwan. While the MAC restated the government’s position in support of healthy cross-Strait exchanges without preconditions, the agency noted that the PRC has been continuously increasing its United Front operations against Taiwan. Moreover, it discouraged the island’s academic community from carrying out exchanges or cooperation activities with the institutions and their personnel.

The launch of these new initiatives is unlikely to be greeted with great fanfare in Taiwan, whose population has hardened its views toward China and the “one country two systems,” especially in light of ongoing events in Hong Kong. Yet, given the initiative’s apparent emphasis on international engagement, they could be used as a platform for gaining greater international acceptance for Beijing’s formula for cross-Strait unification based on the “One-China Principle” and “one country, two systems.”

The main point: Xiamen University’s new initiatives to explore models for cross-Strait unification based on the “One-China Principle” and “one country, two systems” are likely to be a non-starter in Taiwan, but appear directed at an international audience to gain greater acceptance for China’s policy for cross-Strait unification.
US-Taiwan-Japan Cooperation Going Global as GCTF Celebrates Anniversary

On June 1, the United States, Taiwan, and Japan celebrated the five-year anniversary of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) in Taipei. The trilateral initiative, which was launched in 2015 by the United States and Taiwan, has emerged as a symbol of the growing partnership between like-minded countries in recent years, both in the Indo-Pacific region and increasingly around the world. The approach was addressed by then-Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Tong in 2016 at the launch’s first anniversary:

“The idea is simple: the United States and Taiwan conduct training programs for experts from throughout the region to assist them with building their own capacities to tackle issues where Taiwan has proven expertise and advantages. These include, but are not limited to, women's rights, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, democratization, global health, and energy security.”

Beginning in March 2019, Japan joined the initiative as a coordinating partner, resulting in the forum becoming formally known as the “Taiwan-US-Japan Global Cooperation & Training Framework.” The three partners co-organized the September 2019 forum in the Pacific-nation of Palau, which was the first time that a GCTF workshop took place outside of Taiwan. It is also notable that Sweden, which is now increasingly feeling the political pressure from Beijing, was a guest co-host for the GCTF workshop in September 2019 focused on democracy and media literacy. Planning is underway for another GCTF workshop to be held outside Taiwan in Latin America—probably in Guatemala—focused on the digital economy. At a recent virtual forum hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere Julie Chung stated:

“There’s so much again that we [United States] have done with Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific and [...] our Western Hemisphere has so many challenges but opportunities, too. And that’s where we’re really looking to cement these partnerships and cooperation, even more than ever. And we thought this GCTF framework has been so successful in Asia, [...] and saw how the capacity building at the technical level, at the policymaker level, was able to help people, whether we’re talking about infectious disease issues, or water issues [...] it just was a natural partnership for the United States and Taiwan to work in Asia.”

On the occasion of GCTF’s five-year anniversary, a joint statement issued by Taiwan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), and the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association—the latter two are the names of the de facto embassies of the US and Japan, respectively—highlighted four areas of future cooperation:

1. Expand the frequency, size, and scope of the GCTF workshops, including holding more events outside Taiwan;
2. Expand the depth and breadth of participation from like-minded countries, including co-hosting programs;
3. Establish a GCTF task force under the Department of North American Affairs, the Ministry of...
Foreign Affairs as the GCTF Secretariat;

4. Establish the GCTF Alumni Network to build and expand networks and organize reunions for former GCTF participants.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, high-level officials representing AIT, the US Department of State, the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO), and the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened in late March for a virtual forum on expanding Taiwan’s participation on the global stage. While the specific focus of the discussion was on efforts to reinstate Taiwan’s observer status at the World Health Assembly, it also addressed other avenues for closer coordination. According to the statement issued by State Department:

“Countries around the world can benefit from better understanding the Taiwan Model, as well as the generous contributions and impressive expertise Taiwan—a vibrant democracy and force for good—brings to the global community.”

Indeed, from a long-term perspective, strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world is really between “models” of social, economic, and political development. The development paths that nations take will fundamentally shape the future world order, especially in the post COVID-19 environment. The United States, Taiwan, and like-minded partners should use all tools available to counter China’s authoritarian model and narrative for development.

Towards that end, the Yushan Forum was established in 2017 as “a platform for Asian regional dialogue initiated by Taiwan, with the purpose of expanding multifaceted opportunities for cooperation and facilitating the exchange of ideas, talent, technologies, and social initiatives.” Organized by the non-governmental Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation and still likely scheduled for later this year—barring unforeseen restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic—the forum for enhancing connectivity among like-minded nations within the region is the ideal international platform to showcase the free and open model. Moreover, this event is the ideal place for like-minded countries, especially the United States, to showcase their support for the Taiwan Model.

As GCTF celebrates its five-year anniversary this month, the mechanism has evolved to become an important vehicle and symbol of the growing partnership between like-minded countries, both in the Indo-Pacific region and increasingly around the world. In particular, its expansion to involve Japan and institutionalization with the creation of a secretariat are meaningful developments that reflect its importance as a vehicle for not only helping facilitate Taiwan’s meaningful participation in the international community and enhance its international space but also to benefit the international community of nations as well. These developments indicate that GCTF is moving in the right direction. As the next step, Washington, Taipei, and Tokyo should work together to find other like-minded and reliable partners in other regions to join as coordinating partners to further expand the scope and scale of GCTF.

The main point: The scope and scale of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework has grown in recent years against the backdrop of China’s increasingly aggressive pressure campaign against Taiwan and the rest of the world.

Beijing Set to Increase Pressure on Taiwan’s Diplomatic Space in Tsai’s Second Term

By: Ingrid Bodeen

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After President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took office in 2016, China unilaterally ended a period of suspended hostility—albeit in overt form only—toward Taiwan that began under the Kuomintang (KMT) presidency of Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九). As its first order of business, Beijing resumed the tactic of poaching Taiwan’s diplomatic allies as a means to pressure the island to accept the “One-China Principle” and the so-called “1992 Consensus” that support the concept of eventual unification under “One China” but leaves unstated which “China.” Since the reinstatement of a more ag-
gressive unification agenda, the Chinese government has convinced seven nations—Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Panama, and São Tomé and Príncipe—to switch diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In the most recent switch, Kiribati severed ties in September 2019, just one week after the Pacific island-nation Solomon Islands recognized the PRC.

This pressure campaign spans the globe. Even before the termination of ties between Taiwan and the Solomon Islands, reports had surfaced that China had made several economic offers to Haiti in exchange for the island-nation’s diplomatic allegiance to the PRC. China promised interest-free and concessional loans, along with cooperation on several matters such as trade and education, according to reports. Beijing’s implementation of such “checkbook” or “dollar” diplomacy suggests a continued effort to constrain Taiwan’s presence and participation on the international stage. Unlike her predecessor, President Tsai has continually refused to publicly recognize the “1992 Consensus,” which the PRC has adamantly insisted is the only way “the two sides can ensure the peaceful and stable development of cross-Strait ties.” With only 15 diplomatic allies left, Taiwan could lose still more of its remaining partners during Tsai’s second term. China’s steadfast “race to zero” goal puts Taipei in a tight corner, prompting Taiwanese policymakers to discuss what Taipei should do to combat this contingency and how it can ensure that Taiwan remains internationally relevant even after it loses all formal diplomatic ties.

Beijing’s Strategy

Although Beijing has used varying tactics to successfully woo Taiwan’s diplomatic allies, its most prominent tool is its checkbook diplomacy. To seal the deal with the Solomon Islands, Beijing reportedly promised the island-nation USD $500 million to terminate diplomatic ties with Taiwan by October 1, 2019. In determining the monetary value of their offers, the Chinese government often uses amounts that Taiwan’s diplomatic allies had previously demanded from Taipei. When it sees that Taipei is unwilling or unable to meet that demand, China will then provide a similar offer. For example, before the Dominican Republic switched ties in 2018, Beijing had pledged USD $4.1 million in investment and loans, along with an increase in financial assistance, including funding for freeway infrastructure and a new natural gas power plant, along with the sale of Chinese military vehicles. However, within the first year of the establishment of relations, it became clear that these grandiose Chinese promises had been over-sold. In particular, the Dominican Republic’s imports from China have far exceeded its exports to the PRC. In addition, the Chinese gifts of infrastructure and showy projects are meant to pressure the Dominican government to vote in China’s favor on international issues, particularly in the United Nations.

For many countries, the diplomatic switch is a relatively easy decision to make, since China offers the prospect of being a more crucial economic partner than Taiwan. However, the case of the Dominican Republic shows that these promises can be false or deceptive.

The Taiwanese Perspective

The Tsai administration and the opposition KMT have repeatedly rejected Beijing’s proposal of the “one country, two systems” framework for Taiwan that has been implemented in Hong Kong and Macao. The PRC’s management of the recent calls for independent civil liberties in Hong Kong has become a further reminder to Taiwan of the risk of building closer political ties with China, a message that Tsai successfully pushed home during her re-election campaign earlier this year. In response to the PRC’s diplomatic poaching strategy, Tsai made clear in 2016 that she will not engage in excessive “checkbook diplomacy” as a way to incentivize diplomatic partners to remain with the ROC. She has since stuck by her word and turned down several economic ultimatums from different allied nations. For example, she rejected the São Tomé and Príncipe government’s 2016 request for USD $210 million in financial aid, resulting in São Tomé and Príncipe breaking ties with Taiwan.

After both Kiribati and the Solomon Island severed their relations with Taiwan in 2019, a poll released by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation (台灣民意基金會) found that 53 percent of Taiwanese do not worry about losing diplomatic allies, while 43 percent do. Interestingly, according to Ming-sho Ho (何明修), a professor of sociology at National Taiwan University, Taiwanese citizens are growing immune to these dip-
lomatic setbacks, as Beijing’s poaching successes are viewed as of minimal concern. Taiwan’s diplomatic losses involve small countries that are not deemed significant by the Taiwanese public.

**Role of Diplomatic Allies in Aiding Taiwan on the International Stage**

China has repeatedly used its clout to prevent Taiwanese participation in multiple international organizations. Most recently, this has been witnessed in Beijing’s adamant exclusion of Taiwan from the World Health Organization (WHO) as the international community frantically works to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Along with blocking Taiwan’s participation as an observer in the World Health Assembly since 2006, Beijing has shown no compunction in leveraging its power to force the WHO to put symbolic politics above public health. Additionally, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has faced international criticism for classifying Taiwan as part of China. As canceled flights and travel bans to and from China were being initiated during the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the ICAO created international confusion when it made misleading statements about Taiwan being a province of China. Consequently, individuals relying on the ICAO had no way to determine whether international flights to and from Taiwan remained available, causing unnecessary travel disruptions. In response, several diplomatic allies have spoken up on Taiwan’s exclusion from these organizations. Earlier, in September 2019, 12 of Taiwan’s allies sent a letter to the ICAO’s President Olumyiwa Benard Aliu and Secretary-General Fang Liu in support of Taiwan’s participation in the international aviation organization. Although such expressions of support from diplomatic partners have helped raise the profile of Taiwan in varying institutions, Beijing’s dominating presence in transnational bodies has hindered Taiwan’s pursuit of greater international space.

**Possible Outcomes of China’s Big Squeeze**

Beijing’s strategy to whittle Taiwan’s diplomatic partners to zero could be counterproductive for the PRC. If cornered, Taiwan could declare independence. In any case, it appears to be already re-focusing more attention on strengthening its informal relations with more powerful countries, such as the United States and Japan. [1] Taiwan currently has ties with virtually every major power, with existing de-facto embassies and offices in almost all major cities abroad. Even if Taiwan were to face formal diplomatic isolation, China will have great difficulty in severing these unofficial ties, particularly with the United States. The Trump administration’s policy on Asia is focused on maintaining strategic leadership in the Indo-Pacific region, including taking on a more confrontational posture with China. Additionally, many members of Congress continually emphasize that US leadership in the region could be severely compromised if Washington stood idly by while allowing China’s authoritarian regime to obtain political control of a small but vibrant democracy like Taiwan. Therefore, Taiwan’s loss of all formal diplomatic ties would likely incentivize the United States to further strengthen ties with Taiwan in order to maintain a strong US presence in East Asia.

Although China can offer greater economic incentives than Taiwan, the PRC’s distribution of development aid in regions such as South Asia, South America, and Africa has been criticized as exploitative, while Taiwan’s approach has been praiseworthy. As Taiwan loses more allies, the United States should invest more time and resources into programs such as the Global Cooperation and Training Framework to promote Taipei’s technical cooperation in different regions and counter Beijing’s emphasis on infrastructure investments, thereby strengthening Taiwan’s presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Alongside this, the United States and Taiwan should engage in more cooperation on detecting and combating information warfare and electoral interference in order to move the US-ROC relationship toward a comprehensive strategic partnership. Doing so would better position the United States to deter Chinese aggression toward Taiwan.

**The Role of the United States**

Taiwan’s continued prosperity as a strong Asian democracy undoubtedly serves the interest of the US and other like-minded partners, especially given its geopolitical position along the “first island chain.” As Beijing continues to ramp up efforts to diplomatically isolate Taiwan, it is immensely important for the United States to bolster its support for the island with increased arms sales and active encouragement of more international engagement. There is already evidence of heightened
US interest. It is already evident that President Tsai’s second term in office is a source of frustration for Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi will become increasingly determined to tighten the PRC’s grip over the island. Thus, it is likely that Chinese political pressure from Taiwan will only grow exponentially in the coming years.

It is within this context that the passage and signing of the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) in late March is all the more meaningful. The Act is aimed at strengthening US support of Taiwan in the face of increasing diplomatic pressure from China. Not only does the act advise the Executive Branch to strengthen bilateral relations with Taiwan in the economic, political, and other realms; it also calls on the US government to alter its engagement with nations in consideration of their ties to Taiwan. As Tsai’s administration navigates through its second term in office in an even more precarious situation, Beijing is likely to continue to ramp up pressure on Taiwan and use economic means to poach remaining Taiwanese allies—the United States must avail itself of the tools offered by the TAIPEI Act to shore up Taiwan’s international space.

The main point: As Beijing continues to undermine ROC sovereignty by poaching its official allies, the United States should enact countervailing measures to reinforce Taipei’s valuable presence in the global space. This will aid American interests in the Indo-Pacific region and provide Taiwan with the international breathing room it needs to continue to thrive as a paragon of democracy in the region.


Hong Kong’s National Security Law Stirs Taiwanese Resentment Towards China

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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As Hong Kong residents demonstrated against the move by China’s National People’s Congress (NPC, 全國人民代表大會) to draft a national security law for the semi-autonomous territory, Taiwan’s government has voiced opposition to the new legislation. President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) wrote on Twitter on May 28: “All political parties in Taiwan strongly condemn China’s decision to bypass Hong Kong’s legal process [and] push for the passage of today’s national security law resolution. Taiwan’s government [and] people are united in our support for Hong Kong [and] universal democratic values.” Indeed, in a rare show of political unity, lawmakers from Taiwan’s major political parties issued a joint statement on May 29 that strongly condemned the national security law in Hong Kong, which they feared would result in “a rapid deterioration of the situation in Hong Kong and adversely affect its people's rights and freedoms.” Beijing’s national security law for Hong Kong that could further strip the territory of its freedoms has dealt a severe blow to Beijing’s promise of a “one country, two systems” model for Hong Kong and has intensified Taiwanese distrust of Beijing.

National Security Law for Hong Kong

China’s National People’s Congress voted on May 28 to authorize the Standing Committee (常務委員會) of the NPC to draw up a national security law for Hong Kong that would target secession, sedition, terrorism, and foreign interference in the semi-autonomous territory. The proposed law, which was last put forward in 2003 before being derailed by major protests, would allow Beijing to set up national security organs in Hong Kong in the name of safeguarding national security. After its enactment, the Beijing-imposed national security law will be written into Annex III of the Basic Law (基本法) governing Hong Kong, bypassing the city’s Legislative Council (香港特別行政區立法會).

Beijing’s announcement of the national security law also came amid other legal moves to rein in the Hong Kong people’s specific freedoms. Beijing pushed to enact a local law based on the National Anthem Bill (國歌條例草案), which criminalizes insulting or disrespecting China’s national anthem, “March of the Volunteers” (義勇軍進行曲). The National Anthem Bill, which has been implemented in China since 2017, was passed by Hong Kong lawmakers on June 4, on the somber 31st anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.
**Taipei Supports Hong Kong Protesters**

In light of the new national security law, President Tsai has asked the Executive Yuan to devise a plan to offer humanitarian assistance to Hong Kong residents who would like to resettle in Taiwan due to political factors. Although Taiwan does not have a political asylum law, Tsai argued that the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macau (香港澳門關係條例) could be used to handle the current crisis. Article 18 of the act states that “necessary assistance shall be provided to Hong Kong or Macau residents whose safety and liberty are immediately threatened for political reasons.” According to Chen Ming-tong (陳明通), minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會), the semi-official Taiwan–Hong Kong Economic and Cultural Cooperation Council (THEC, 臺港經濟文化合作策進會) would assist Hong Kong immigrants in obtaining residency and protection in Taiwan. Chen also stressed that Hong Kong “shelter seekers” (尋求庇護者)—avoiding the term asylum seekers—must undergo stringent screening amid concerns that Chinese spies could infiltrate Hong Kong emigration to the island. In the past year, nearly 5,000 Hong Kong residents have resettled in Taiwan, and more than 2,300 Hong Kong citizens were granted Taiwanese residency in the first four months of 2020.

Despite assurances from Taiwan’s government, 60 percent of Taiwanese respondents in a poll released on May 31 support amending Taiwan’s laws to better assist Hong Kong people seeking refuge in Taiwan. A key concern is that Taiwan’s laws on investment immigration may be a barrier to many Hong Kong asylum seekers. Under current investment immigration regulations, the minimum amount needed for investment immigration is around USD $200,000. While past cases have shown that most Hong Kong residents applying for immigration to Taiwan have just met the minimum requirement, members of Hong Kong’s middle class would likely face significant financial hurdles if they cannot pass Taipei’s strict screening process for shelter seekers and opt for investment immigration.

The latest developments in Hong Kong have led to debates in Taiwan and elsewhere around the world that China’s “one country, two systems” (一國兩制) framework for governing Hong Kong is effectively dead. In a recent poll conducted by the Asia-Pacific Elite Interchange Association (中華亞太菁英交流協會), more than half of Taiwanese respondents believed that Hong Kong’s “one country, two systems” principle will be shattered with the enactment of the national security law. Meanwhile, Taiwanese public support for Hong Kong’s resistance against China is strong particularly among the younger generation. A survey found that 85 percent of Taiwanese between the ages of 18 and 34 supported last year’s Hong Kong protests against the now shelved extradition bill (反送中). According to some recent debates, Beijing’s latest moves vis-à-vis Hong Kong indicate that “one country, one system” (一國一制) is China’s intended governance model for Hong Kong.

**Revoking Hong Kong’s Special Trade Status**

In anticipation of the NPC’s decision on the national security law, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo submitted a report to Congress on May 27 stating that Hong Kong was no longer sufficiently autonomous from Chinese rule for it to continue enjoying its preferential trade and financial status under US law. President Donald Trump later announced on May 29 that the United States would revoke Hong Kong’s special status “as a special customs and travel territory from the rest of China,” threatening potential sanctions against individuals responsible for “smothering” Hong Kong’s freedom.

President Tsai is also considering revoking Hong Kong’s special trade status with Taiwan. Tsai said on May 24 that if the situation in Hong Kong continues to deteriorate and endangers Taiwan’s national security, she may invoke Article 60 of the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macao, which would suspend all or part of the regulations under the act. Taiwan’s government currently offers preferential treatment to Hong Kong and Macao in the areas of trade and travel. Stripping Hong Kong of its special status, however, would essentially make the territory no different than China. As a result, critics of invoking Article 60 have accused the Tsai Administration of “abandoning Hong Kong” (放棄香港).

Ending Hong Kong’s special trade status could negatively impact not only Hong Kong, but also US and Taiwanese companies that utilize Hong Kong as a transshipment hub in Asia. Hong Kong’s economy, which
suffered from last year’s anti-extradition protests and the coronavirus outbreak earlier this year, is expected to worsen if trade privileges are suspended. The territory’s loss of its special status would also impact the cross-Strait trade that transits through Hong Kong ports. Hong Kong currently hosts around 13 percent of Taiwan’s exports, most of which are re-exports. Taiwan’s electronics exports, in particular its semiconductor products, are mostly transshipped through Hong Kong. These exports would likely be affected if Hong Kong’s status changes. Since the 1990s, Hong Kong’s trade and financial independence from China helped to preserve its autonomy and foster a distinct local identity; withdrawing US and Taiwanese trade privileges for the territory may inadvertently speed up its loss of autonomy.

In the face of Beijing’s new legal restrictions on Hong Kong, the city is in need of enormous political and moral support. Taipei is stepping up to the plate amid perceptions of waning US leadership in the Indo-Pacific region. By sheltering Hong Kong residents, Taipei is enhancing its moral leadership on the issue. When Taipei comes under political or military siege by Beijing, the hope is that international community will also come to Taiwan’s defense. As Taiwan’s Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) stated in a May 27 interview on Fox News, while Taiwan’s government is trying to protect the freedoms and democratic aspirations of Hong Kong citizens, it is also concerned about a possible Chinese military invasion of the island. Taipei thus needs the support of the United States and like-minded friends to preserve its sovereignty. At bottom, supporting Hong Kong is also about protecting Taiwan.

The demise of freedom in Hong Kong would further entrench Taiwan’s status as the only beacon of democracy and human rights in the Chinese-speaking world. This would, in turn, shift Beijing’s attention towards targeting Taiwan’s democracy. As the “one country, two systems” arrangement fizzles in Hong Kong, Taiwanese politics are likely to become more alienated from Beijing. China’s multifaceted pressure campaigns against Taiwan are likely to fail to change the anti-China attitudes of Taiwanese public opinion. If the national security law was intended to use Hong Kong to scare Taiwan, then it certainly has created the effect of making the Taiwanese public more resistant to Beijing’s promises for the island.

The main point: Beijing’s decision to enact a national security law for Hong Kong has further stirred Taiwanese resentment against China. Ending Hong Kong’s preferential trade status in both the United States and Taiwan may end up hurting the people of Hong Kong and accelerate the territory’s loss of autonomy.

Han Kuo-yu Recall: More Than Just About China

By: J. Michael Cole

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On June 6, residents of Kaohsiung recalled Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜, b. 1962), the former firebrand of the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), in a much-awaited plebiscite. This extraordinary development—a first in the nation’s democratic history—was almost Shakespearean in its tragic arc: from Han’s rise in the November 2018 local elections, to his seemingly unstoppable bid for the presidency, to his final crash and burn. Analyzing the drama following the recall vote, a number of international outlets posited that the outcome constituted yet another example of the strong opposition by the Taiwanese public to unification with China. While Han’s ostensibly close ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) indeed factored into voters’ decision in the recall attempt, their motives were not one-dimensional: several factors, most of them domestic, created the perfect storm for Han’s removal from office.

Unprecedented Recall

Han was recalled with 939,090 votes (97.4 percent) in favor and 25,051 (2.6 percent) against. Despite the extreme heat and torrential rain on voting day, turnout was a very respectable 42.14 percent. Approximately 1.3 million eligible voters did not cast a ballot in the recall, although by no means did all of them oppose the recall. This result stands in stark contrast with the November 2018 mayoral elections, when Han garnered...
892,545 votes (53.86 percent) against his rival from the ruling-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Chen Chi-mai, (陳其邁) who received 742,239 votes (44.79 percent) in the four-way race. Turnout in those elections was 73.54 percent.

Motivated voters, many of them young people still registered as residents of Kaohsiung, traveled from every corner of the island nation down to the southern port city to cast their votes in the recall. The successful recall and high turnout occurred despite rumors in the weeks preceding the vote that local officials were attempting to sow confusion, intimidate voters, and interfere with voting. Han and senior officials in his administration had also called on residents to stay home on election day.

Han’s dismissal was the nation’s first recall attempt against a sitting mayor. Thresholds for recalls were lowered in 2016 following amendments to the Public Officials Election and Recall Act (公職人員選罷法). Under the new rules, the recall of a municipal chief requires a turnout of at least 25 percent of eligible voters—or 574,996, in Kaohsiung’s case—and a majority in favor of the removal.

**Hyping the China Factor**

A number of international outlets analyzed the recall purely from the angle of cross-Strait relations. The New York Times, for example, wrote that Han’s removal “reflects a stunning reversal and a hardening of Taiwan’s attitude toward China.” For its part, The Wall Street Journal headlined its article “Taiwan Voters Throw China-Friendly Mayor Out of Office.” Such language reflected a tendency among foreign media to look at every voter decision and action through the lens of Taiwan’s contentious relationship with China.

Not to be bested, the CCP mouthpiece Global Times ran an article titled “Mainland Unfazed by ‘Mayor’ Recall” in its print edition, in which it alleged that the DPP had used the recall to fuel “separatist” sentiment against China. “Many Taiwan residents who supported Han questioned the legitimacy of the recall online since they believe the ruling party DPP is inciting the anti-mainland [sic] and separatist [sic] sentiment to clean its political rivals and regain power from the city,” it wrote.

In reality, the China factor was just one among many of the reasons why the recall was initiated and successfully passed. Undoubtedly, more Taiwan-centric voters became wary of Han’s intentions soon after his November 2018 election, when he embarked on a trip across the Taiwan Strait, which took him to Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen, and Xiamen. During that visit, Han held closed-door meetings with CCP officials, including head of the Liaison Office Wang Zhimin (王志民), China’s top official in Hong Kong, as well as Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥). According to Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Office, the agency in charge of cross-Strait affairs, Han’s delegation refused to make its itinerary known to the Taiwanese government, adding that the five-day visit was “orchestrated” by the Chinese side.

Han was widely believed to be Beijing’s favorite during the 2020 presidential campaign. Among the reasons for this perception were his embrace of the so-called “1992 Consensus,” his rhetoric favoring closer ties with China, his selection of a running mate from a secret society (Hongmen, 洪門) with close ties across the Taiwan Strait, and his sustained online support campaign, part of which is suspected of having been financed by Beijing or Taiwan-based proxies.

**Domestic Factors**

Apprehensions over Han’s possible pro-unification tendencies, however, are insufficient to explain the mobilization for his recall. After all, similar action has not been taken to target other politicians in Taiwan whose views are similar to those which Han ostensibly espouses. Rather, Han’s many domestic failings contribute to his demise. Chief among those was his decision to seek his party’s nomination for the January 2020 presidential elections a mere three months after entering office in Kaohsiung. Many residents of Kaohsiung, seeking a change in direction for what they regarded as an economically stagnating city after nearly two decades of DPP rule, had embraced Han’s vow to revitalize the metropolis and “make everybody rich,” a slogan that many pro-KMT media outlets and commentators had seized upon. For many of those, Han’s run for the presidency looked like abandonment, betrayal, and opportunism. While in office, Han’s ruling style was also highly erratic: his administration’s mockery of interpellation sessions at city council; threats by his support-
ers against his detractors and their families; rumored alcoholism; pathological lateness; self-contradictory rhetoric; rampant use of disinformation; odd policy proposals (e.g., a “love ferris wheel” project); and the cancelation of a highly popular summer concert at Kaohsiung Harbor, which Han reportedly described as “low class” all conspired to turn many residents of the city against the mayor. A social conservative, Han had also angered Southeast Asian workers in Taiwan with alleged racist remarks and showed disrespect to a delegation of visiting Japanese academics. Furthermore, several foreign officials who have had encounters with Mayor Han have confirmed privately with this author the “highly unusual” nature of the politician.

Unlike what the Global Times and Han himself have claimed, the recall attempt was organized by Taiwanese civil society, including groups such as Citizens Mowing Action (公民割草行動) and WeCare Kaohsiung, although some politicians from the DPP, the New Power Party, and the Taiwan Statebuilding Party did show support. Tellingly, three of the four initiators of the movement to unseat Han came from “blue” (i.e., pro-KMT) families. Within the KMT itself, Han’s idiosyncratic style, seen as anti-elite and populist, had also alienated an important segment of the KMT, resulting in a rift which led many party pillars to abandon him in the lead-up to the January 2020 elections. Incidents during his campaign which resulted in insults to KMT elders, including former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and former legislative speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) also contributed to an erosion of his appeal among traditionalist blue camp politicians, many of whom regarded him as an outlier, upstart, and amateur who could not be controlled by the party central.

Thus, while Han’s China policy may have been problematic to some residents, it was the sense of betrayal and fears of anti-democratic proclivities which—in the aggregate—likely led nearly 1 million people to vote in favor of his recall on June 6. To be sure, the public was not obsessed with his supposedly pro-Beijing policies, nor did the recall constitute, as the New York Times alleged, “a hardening of Taiwan’s attitude toward China.” Instead, much more pragmatic issues pertaining to governance and accountability compelled what the political theorist John Keane describes as “monitory democracy” to spring into action. Nevertheless, the outcome did cost Beijing a potential partner.

Mayor Han’s recall did not constitute a “victory,” as many have termed it. Instead, it was an extraordinary corrective action utilizing democratic instruments which should only be utilized in the rarest of instances. That it came to this indicates that the democratic election process had failed, as an official elected by the public had failed to meet the minimal requirements for holding office. For the KMT, the recall will compel party leaders to re-examine the wisdom of allowing outliers within the party to seek the highest office in Taiwan. Furthermore, it serves as a reminder that its viability as a political party is contingent on its ability to propose candidates who agree to play by the rules.

The main point: The June 6 recall of the former firebrand Kaohsiung mayor Han Kuo-yu was the result of a sense of betrayal and apprehensions over a pattern of behavior which raised questions about his ability to govern under democratic conditions. While his removal ostensibly removes a potential partner for Beijing, China was only one of many factors contributing to his extraordinary demise.

Imagining a New US Military Presence in Taiwan

By: Michael Mazza

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For nearly three decades—until the severing of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Republic of China (ROC) in 1979—American forces were based in Taiwan. Beginning with the establishment of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in 1951, Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel contributed to the defense of Taiwan and strengthened the US forward defense perimeter. The departure of US forces from Taiwan created a gap in the US military presence in the Western Pacific, but a manageable one for a time: for even with Taiwan Defense Command and the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) things of
The past, Taiwan remained independent from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and possessed a military that outclassed its rival across the Taiwan Strait. Even on its own, Taiwan was able to deter Chinese aggression and deny the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) open access to the Western Pacific.

While Taiwan remains independent of the PRC, the PLA has advanced by leaps and bounds during the past two decades. As the use of force to subdue Taiwan becomes more feasible, a Chinese decision to do so also becomes more likely. Today’s commanders of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) must look back with envy at their Cold War predecessors and their access to facilities on the island. If in the coming years the political obstacles to force deployments were to evaporate, what forces might INDOPACOM commanders seek to position in Taiwan?

**Naval Forces**

The US Navy has an ongoing, rotational littoral combat ship (LCS) presence in Singapore. Other American warships conducting routine operations or responding to crises in the South China Sea, however, must come from further afield: namely, Japan, Guam, Hawaii, or the US West Coast. Given the likelihood of sustained tensions in the South China Sea and given China’s growing military presence there, it behooves the United States to enhance its own presence as well. More American ships spending more time in the contested waters would act as a deterrent to all parties, facilitate efforts to build partnership capacity via bilateral exercises, create more opportunities for bilateral and multilateral patrols, and ensure US forces can respond rapidly to incidents there.

Located at the northeastern terminus of the South China Sea, Taiwan would be an ideal site for a permanent or rotational American naval presence. LCS are well-tailored for presence missions and have a relatively light footprint. Based in Taiwan, they would also be well-positioned to regularly patrol the waters around the island, complicating the PLA’s ability to carry out provocative acts. The LCS’s surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and mine countermeasures module options would all have utility in the event of a cross-Strait crisis. The new guided missile frigates under development would be a viable follow-on once they are put to sea, and would be better able to contribute materially to the defense of Taiwan than the LCS.

**Marine Littoral Regiments**

The US Marine Corps is about to begin experimenting with a new unit construct optimized for operations in the Pacific theater: the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR). An MLR will consist of 1,800 to 2,000 Marines and sailors, divided into three elements:

“The Littoral Combat Team (LCT) is task-organized around an infantry battalion along with a long-range anti-ship missile battery...[spokesman Maj. Josh Benson] said. “The Littoral Anti-Air Battalion is designed to train and employ air defense, air surveillance and early warning, air control, and forward rearming and refueling capabilities. The Littoral Logistics Battalion provides tactical logistics support to the MLR by re-supplying expeditionary advance base sites, managing cache sites, and connecting to higher-level logistics providers,” along with also providing for medical and maintenance capabilities.”

One or more MLRs based in Taiwan, besides having frequent opportunities to train with Taiwan’s own marines, would pose a potent threat to Chinese naval operations in waters north and south of the island and would allow US forces to more easily “seal up” the first island chain (running from Japan south through Taiwan and to the Philippines) if needed. MLRs, with their anti-ship missiles and amphibious training, would also be a force multiplier for Taiwan in the event of a blockade or cross-Strait invasion. Beyond the Strait, MLRs in Taiwan would also be in close proximity to the South China Sea and its littoral states.

**Medium- and Intermediate-Range Missiles**

Mobile anti-ship missiles might not be the only missiles the INDOPACOM commander would like to deploy to Taiwan. In August 2019, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which had banned ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles of ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, and quickly began testing new missiles.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper has made clear that
the Pentagon wants to place intermediate-range missiles in Asia once they become operational (a good overview of these missiles’ utility in the region can be found [here]). If it were feasible, Taiwan would likely be on his list of potential host nations. In the event of a conflict, mobile ground-launched medium or intermediate-range missiles placed in Taiwan would allow for strikes deep into Chinese territory. The presence of such capabilities in Taiwan, moreover, would help to deter Beijing from pursuing forceful annexation. Beijing would know that if it launched an attack on Taiwan, Chinese territory would get hit hard—the war would extend far beyond the Taiwan Strait, and damage would not be limited to coastal Fujian province.

**Special Operations Forces**

There are good reasons for INDOPACOM to seek the deployment of special operations forces (SOF) to Taiwan. With two decades of combat experience under their belts, SOF units could provide regular, valuable training to their Taiwan counterparts. This could perhaps include training on how to wage irregular warfare, should it come to that. Recent American operations, however, have not provided US forces with the knowledge and experiences necessary to effectively grapple with the particular challenges that they might face in a conflict between the United States and China. Indeed, American SOF units probably have much to learn from Taiwan’s own special forces—how to conduct civil affairs in a Taiwan context; how to identify and counter Chinese political warfare; how Chinese special forces operate; and the unique challenges to be expected should operations in China be required. Deployment in Taiwan, of course, would also provide American special operators with an opportunity to enhance their language skills—and not just in Mandarin, but also in other dialects that could be of use in the event of a crisis.

Deployed to Taiwan, SOF would be poised to respond rapidly should a crisis erupt. Working hand-in-hand with their local counterparts, American SOF could contribute to counter-infiltration missions and would be positioned to conduct operations across the Strait should the need arise. As with naval and Marine Corps deployments, US SOF in Taiwan would also be in prime position to respond rapidly to crises in Southeast Asia should their assistance be requested.

**Missile Defense**

With upwards of 1,500 cruise and ballistic missiles within range of Taiwan, the PLA poses a substantial missile threat to Taiwan. Depending on the scenario, the PLA could potentially use those missiles to pound military bases, soften up coastal defenses, take out critical infrastructure, or eliminate high value targets. Accordingly, missile defense has been a major concern of Taiwan’s defense planners. The ROC military now has 10 Patriot missile batteries—all purchased from the United States—and plans to field 12 indigenous Tiangong III anti-ballistic missile interceptor batteries (which will replace 1960s-era MIM-23 Hawks).

Taiwan will never field enough interceptors to negate the PLA missile threat, but combined with passive defenses and electronic warfare operations, missile defenses may be able to protect select important targets. The INDOPACOM commander might want to complement Taiwan’s own capabilities by deploying forces to provide a more layered missile defense—here, a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery or an Aegis Ashore installation might be valuable. Such assets would likewise serve to provide a shield for other US forces based on the island, which would likely employ their own medium-range and point defenses. In other words, the United States could help to make Taiwan a much harder target for the PLA Rocket Force.

**Conclusion**

In the absence of a mutual defense treaty between the United States and Taiwan, it remains difficult to imagine much less implement significant, public US force deployments to Taiwan in the coming years. Yet as the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, the world can change in a hurry. Indeed, COVID-19 might prove to be an inflection point in Washington’s approach to Taiwan, accelerating its extant pursuit of a far more normal defense relationship with Taipei.

Thinking through what a theoretical US force laydown in Taiwan would look like is a useful exercise. It prepares the United States to move quickly should deployments become possible. Perhaps more importantly for the near-term, the thought exercise highlights potential shortcomings of current US force posture in Asia, which should prod defense leaders to mitigate them.