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**Forthnightly Review**

**By: Russell Hsiao**

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**Hurdles Ahead for Taiwan’s Lifting of Import Restrictions on US Pork and Beef**

For Taiwan watchers in the United States, it was clear that President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) decision on August 28 to lift the Taiwanese government’s longstanding restrictions on the import of US pork and beef due to food safety concerns was bold and unprecedented. Supporters of Taiwan within the US Congress and in the private sector immediately jumped in and called on the US government to begin negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan. A broad range and bipartisan group of current and former US officials applauded the Taiwanese president’s decision. Notably silent, however, has been the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR), which would ultimately be in charge of initiating, negotiating, and concluding a bilateral trade agreement. Noting this absence, a bipartisan group of 50 senators in the US Congress sent a letter to the US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer on October 1, encouraging him to begin negotiating a comprehensive trade agreement with Taiwan. Setting aside the compelling merits of a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan, there are several possible reasons for the USTR’s silence such as political bandwidth and will. Perhaps chief among the practical considerations may be the fact that while Tsai’s decision—which will reportedly take effect in January 2021—was significant and necessary, it still does not guarantee that her government’s decision will be sustainable against the countervailing forces that oppose the lifting of import restrictions.

Indeed, President Tsai crossed the political Rubicon with her unilateral decision to lift the restrictions with no guarantees of a bilateral trade agreement with the United States at the end of the tunnel. No previous president of Taiwan has ever publicly committed to the lifting of restrictions, despite widespread support for the signing of a free trade agreement with the United States, so the decision was a gamble to be sure. While the Ma Ying-jeou
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馬英九 (Ma Ying-jiou) administration tried to move forward with discussions on lifting the restrictions—which had been in place since their imposition in 2006 during the Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) administration—efforts to do so failed to gain traction and were stifled in the Legislative Yuan. While it was a political risk for Tsai to initiate the process, this is only the beginning—critical and necessary as it may be—of a longer political process that will be starting this week, when legislative debates over the executive order begin. These discussions will surely intensify over the next few months and possibly years, even as the lifting of restrictions will go into effect in the new year. Major hurdles erected by the opposition are already stacking up against the executive order.

From the moment that President Tsai announced her executive decision to lift the import restrictions, Chairman Johnny Chiang (江啟臣), the leader of the main opposition party Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨), has already indicated that he was going to lead the opposition’s effort to forcefully oppose the lifting of the restrictions and initiate a public referendum on the matter. This position flies in the face of the party’s stance on the issue between 2008-2016—when the KMT held the executive office. However, to be fair, the KMT’s efforts to lift restrictions during that period were stymied by zealous opposition from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), which is now the majority party and is, at least on the surface, seemingly aligned with the current president’s new direction. While the DPP retains a majority within the Legislative Yuan, events of the past have shown that the party would likely suffer electorally if the KMT were to be able to successfully attach a referendum to the next local elections that will be held in November 2022. Yet, there is still almost two years from now until the next local elections, so the DPP may feel that there is enough of a political buffer between the decision and the election to soften the blow. Indeed, in the 2018 local elections, the referendum benefited the KMT and helped drive many of its candidates into local offices during the nine-in-one elections.

Mobilization to oppose the lifting of import restrictions will surely be the biggest political test for the new KMT chairman, as Chiang would have been hard pressed to find a similar opportunity to prove himself. Another election for the KMT chairmanship—scheduled for the middle of 2021, at what would have been the conclusion of the former Chairman Wu Den-yih’s (吳敦義) four-year term—is rapidly approaching. The new chairman does not currently have a sure path to win the next election, and there are no guarantees that he will be unchallenged (there were several challengers to the incumbent in the 2017 elections). Chiang’s ability to whip up public sentiment against the lifting of these restrictions and in turn translate that into support for the KMT will likely determine the party’s immediate viability going forward, as well as strengthen his position as the KMT chairman come the next election.

According to a recent poll conducted on Taiwanese support for lifting of the import restrictions on US pork from the green-leaning Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation (TPOF) released on September 28, only 31.5 percent agreed with lifting the restrictions on import of US pork, whereas 59.5 percent opposed the lifting of restrictions.

Moreover, according to another poll from the blue-leaning media TVBS Poll Center, which was conducted immediately after the announcement between August 31-September 2, 64 percent of respondents disagreed with the government’s decision to lift restrictions on the import of US pork containing ractopamine (a controversial food additive), which is significantly higher than the 22 percent who supported it. The remaining 14 percent did not express their opinion.

Given that the DPP currently controls a majority in the Legislative Yuan, it is likely that Tsai and her coalition
will be able to block any legislative initiatives put forward by the opposition to prevent the lifting of the restrictions. However, this will likely come at a political cost. While the president has already instructed her administration to begin the process of lifting the regulations, there are significant administrative and political hurdles ahead.

In a recent media report, DPP Secretary-General Lin Hsi-yao noted that there are three major political battlefields ahead in the fight to lift and maintain the restrictions: the Legislative Yuan, the referendum, and information warfare. Lin expects the KMT to fight tooth and nail on this issue in the Legislative Yuan wherever it has the chance, but he believes that the executive branch and the DPP will be able to defend against this offensive. The second battle will come during the KMT-initiated referendum. The KMT is reportedly going to begin its signature collection campaign in November. According to Lin, the DPP must be very cautious with this referendum, since the previous referendum contributed to the DPP’s defeat in the 2018 local elections. Lin said that the third battlefield will be in the information space, involving public opinion warfare and cyber warfare. If the DPP is to succeed in this context, it will need to immediately mobilize, clarify, and quickly counterattack.

The KMT has adopted a multi-pronged approach and is reportedly already lining up a series of public hearings in various committees, such as the Health and Environmental Protection Committees, to lock down the Legislative Yuan in debate about lifting the import restrictions. While these measures are unlikely to change the course of the executive decision, they could have the effect of drumming up public opposition and drowning out any efforts by the Tsai administration and her party to shift the narrative towards the positive aspects of the decision for deepening US-Taiwan cooperation, bogging down the lifting of restrictions with administrative and political roadblocks.

President Tsai’s executive decree on August 28 to remove the government’s longstanding restrictions on the import of US pork and beef was a bold and unprecedented move—and it will come at a political cost. In light of countervailing public opinion and significant mobilization expected by the opposition KMT to the order, there is no guarantee that this decision will be politically sustainable over the longer-term. A clear commitment by the United States to at least engage in negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan would help to ensure that order can be implemented with greater public support; however, whether USTR will respond remains to be seen.

The main point: While President Tsai’s decision to lift the longstanding import restrictions was bold and unprecedented, there are still many political hurdles ahead.

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As PLA Military Probes Increase Around Taiwan, Taipeici Tests New Missiles

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been significantly ramping up probing activities in and around the Taiwan Strait, in what Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen recently described as a clear “threat of force” against the democratic ally of the United States. According to one local media headline, 50 Chinese military aircraft have breached Taiwan’s airspace over a period of 18 days. As GTI Senior Non-Resident Fellow Michael Mazza notes in this issue of the Global Taiwan Brief, “these activities are part and parcel of what is now a four-year pressure campaign, [and] they also serve to better prepare the PLA to ultimately use force against the democratic nation.” While tensions in the Taiwan Strait continue to mount, Taiwan has not been a passive player. What has been less reported on in the Western media is how Taiwan has been conducting a range of missile tests to counter the growing threat from across the Strait. For instance, the National Chung-Shan Institute of Science (國家中山科學研究院, NCSIST)—the country’s premier defense designer and manufacturer—will reportedly conduct a new missile test at Jiupeng Base (九鵬基地)—dubbed “Taiwan’s Area 51”—in southern Taiwan in mid-October. This test follows a string of missile tests that NCSIST has launched over the past decade, in addition to a marked increase in testing over the past year.

According to a local media report, Zhang Cheng (張誠), the former chief engineer of Taiwan’s indigenous-designed Hsiung Feng-III (雄風三, HF-3) supersonic missile, speculated that the upcoming test will likely be for the extended-range Tien-Kung III (天弓三型, TK-3) surface-to-air missile developed by Taiwan. While the
type and specifications of these tests are never disclosed in public announcements, military sources reportedly told local media that this will indeed be an operational test of an extended-range Tien-Kung III—dubbed the Taiwan-version of the American THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense). The apex of the missile trajectory for the upcoming test was labeled as “infinite height” (無限高), a phrase commonly used during previous tests to obscure the specifications of the system. The upcoming test follows previous tests in April, May, August, and more recently in early and then late September. These tests involved various indigenously developed missiles, potentially including the HF-IIIE, Yun Feng (雲峰), and the TK-3, according to local media sources. While all of these missiles were designed and manufactured by Taiwan, some systems relied on technical assistance from the United States and other suppliers.

The *Hsiung Feng IIIE* has a range of at least 600 km—or about 375 miles—and is “the only one of Taiwan’s Hsiung Feng cruise missile variants specifically designed for land-attack missions.” Similarly, the Yun Feng is a surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missile, with a range of 1,200 to 2,000 km. According to the *CSIS Missile Defense Project*, “[Yun Feng] is one of the few Taiwanese strategic assets designed to reach targets deep in northern and central China.” Meanwhile, the TK-3 is a surface-to-air missile. Together, these indigenous missile systems and others represent key components of Taiwan’s layered defensive system. As PLA defense analyst Ian Easton, senior director at the Project 2049 Institute, noted in his comprehensive 2014 report “Able Archers: Taiwan Defense Strategy in an Age of Precision Strike,” the Taiwanese military is “building a defensive shield that includes a powerful combination of both active and passive defense elements.”

There is also an important domestic component to these missile tests. As Easton astutely observed:

“The American and Taiwanese governments may find merit in launching a public education program on ground-launched, land attack missiles. If they stay silent on the purpose of their new missiles, you can bet the CCP will rush into the void and fill the public domain with false information, undermining a vital defensive capability. Beijing knows that in democracies no strategy can last for long after public sentiment turns against it.”

During previous periods, when the desire to engage China took precedence, similar revelations and missile tests by Taipei would likely have provoked Washington due to the perceived “offensive” nature of an extended missile system. However, these concerns have largely been muted in recent years as the PLA modernizes and provocatively flexes its military muscles over the Taiwan Strait and across the Western Pacific. Indeed, this is consistent with the gradual removal of Washington’s self-imposed restraints on how it interprets its obligations and commitments under domestic law and conducts its longstanding policies toward Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China.

Recent missile tests by Taiwan—and the reaction of Washington to these tests—are reflective of the changing attitude in the United States. This is a sign of growing trust between Washington and Taipei, as well as greater recognition and even acceptance in Washington of Taiwan’s need to take steps to offset China’s growing qualitative and quantitative advantages in military strength by enhancing its own conventional deterrent capabilities.

These shifts are indicative of broader adjustments in US policy in East Asia, as underscored by Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell’s major Taiwan policy speech delivered at The Heritage Foundation on August 31, 2020:

“What we are doing [...] is making some important updates to our engagement with Taiwan to better reflect these policies and respond to changing circumstances. The adjustments are significant, but still well within the boundaries of our “One-China Policy.” We feel compelled to make these adjustments [...] because of the increasing threat posed by Beijing to peace and stability in the region, which is a vital interest of the United States.”

**The main point:** Taipei has been conducting a range of missile tests to counter the growing threat from across the Strait. While in the past Washington may have perceived these capabilities as potentially “offensive,” its muted response to these tests reflects changing attitudes in the United States to China’s growing military capabilities.
Somaliland: Taiwan’s Breakthrough in the Horn of Africa

By: I-wei Jennifer Chang

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Taiwan has found a new partner in the Horn of Africa. The governments of Taiwan and the small East African territory of Somaliland announced in July that they would be establishing representative offices in each other's capitals. Subsequently, the Taiwan Representative Office (台灣駐索馬利蘭共和國代表處) opened in Hargeisa on August 17, followed by the establishment of the Somaliland Representative Office in Taiwan (索馬利蘭共和國駐台灣代表處) in Taipei on September 9. Given that Taiwan has “highly official” though “informal state relations” with Somaliland, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) said it was sufficient to call its office the “Taiwan Representative Office” without the need for “extra words.” In many other countries, Taiwan’s representative offices are often called “Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Offices.” While most international reactions to the announcement have focused on the diplomatic utility, or lack thereof, in this new bilateral relationship, facing similar diplomatic predicaments, Taipei and Hargeisa have found cause for a partnership in their common struggle against neighboring adversaries—China and Somalia, respectively. Taiwan is also poised to work with Somaliland to contribute to peace, security, and economic development in the Horn of Africa.

Common Values and Interests

Somaliland—a self-declared state of 3.9 million people abutting the Gulf of Aden—is not recognized as an independent state by either the international community or the United Nations. Although Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 as the latter descended into civil war and Hargeisa maintains a functioning government and its own currency, Somaliland remains internationally recognized as a part of Somalia. Hargeisa currently does not have diplomatic relations with any country. Similar to Taiwan—which has 15 diplomatic partners—it aspires to join the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations. As a result, Taipei and Hargeisa have found common cause in creating new pathways to break out of their global diplomatic isolation and gain greater international recognition.

Taiwan’s foreign ministry has called Somaliland “a country with a similar concept of democracy and freedom as Taiwan.” Indeed, Somaliland is one of the few functioning democracies on the African continent. Its president and parliament are both directly elected by the people. Although there have been extended delays in its parliamentary elections, Somaliland has undergone three direct presidential elections since 2003 and has made significant progress in transitioning from traditional clan-based politics to a multi-party democratic system. Compared to the instability, terrorism, and destructive internal conflicts plaguing Somalia—often labeled a “failed state”—Somaliland, by contrast, enjoys a stable political situation.

According to Taiwan’s foreign ministry, Taiwan-Somaliland exchanges began in 2009 during the outset of President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) administration. Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) said in a speech that Taiwan and Somaliland have cooperated in the fields of public health, education, and maritime security. Taiwan’s government has also provided scholarships to college students and graduates from Somaliland. In a move that further cemented growing ties, Wu and Somaliland’s foreign minister, Yasin Hagi Mohamoud, signed a bilateral agreement (中華民國（台灣）政府與索馬利蘭共和國政府雙邊議定書) in February 2020 to mutually set up representative offices. With the establishment of a new representative office in Somaliland, Taiwan now has offices in four African economies—namely, representative offices in Nigeria and South Africa, as well as its embassy in Eswatini, its sole diplomatic ally on the continent.

Taiwan’s foreign ministry has recognized that Somaliland occupies a strategically important location. Several countries, including its former colonial ruler the United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Turkey, as well as international organizations including the UN and the European Union, have set up representative offices in Somaliland. However, China notably does not have an office in the territory. MOFA has indicated that Taiwan’s establishment of a local representative office will help both states to facilitate dialogue with relevant countries and international organizations. Taipei appoint-
ed Lou Chen-hwa (羅震華), former counselor at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Saudi Arabia, to head its representative office in Hargeisa.

Furthermore, both Taiwan and Somaliland are driven by a desire for mutual and international support to offset the political and security challenges imposed by their larger neighbors—China and Somalia. “We both face external pressures, but are both proud of our sovereignty and ready to defend it,” said Foreign Minister Wu. “Taiwan is ready to work closely with its like-minded partner in the Horn of Africa,” Wu said. As the Red Sea and Horn of Africa become focal points of regional rivalry and major-power competition, Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi said that both sides are motivated by “a spirit of mutual assistance that will never expose any harm whatsoever to the interests of other countries, but rather contributes to international peace and regional economic activities.” With their stable, democratic systems, Taipei and Hargeisa are hoping to draw a clear contrast to China’s expansionist behavior in the region and the corrupt and chaotic situation in Somalia, respectively.

Counterpressure from Somalia and China

On August 18, immediately following the opening of the Taiwan Representative Office in Somaliland, Somalia’s government issued harsh words for Taipei, accusing it of violating the country’s territorial integrity. Somalia’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement: “The Federal Government of Somalia repudiates such misguided endeavors that seek to sow discord and division among our people.” It called on Taiwan to “cease its misinformed ventures into any part of the territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia.” Mogadishu, whose relationship with Somaliland is similar to China’s approach to Taiwan, is sensitive to any moves that could potentially confer greater diplomatic recognition to Somaliland, with whom tensions remain high.

The Chinese foreign ministry also voiced its opposition to the establishment of official institutions and exchanges between Taiwan and Somaliland. Beijing has had formal diplomatic relations with Somalia since 1960 and currently does not have official relations with Somaliland. However, this has not stopped the Chinese government from pressuring Somaliland to disengage from Taiwan. According to Somaliland’s media reports, Chinese Ambassador to Somalia Qin Jian (覃儉) visited Somaliland twice this year to try to persuade Hargeisa to cease its activities with Taiwan. Qin offered to set up a Chinese liaison office in Somaliland if all activities with Taiwan ended, but Somaliland’s president reportedly rejected his request. Following the August meeting between the Chinese Ambassador and Somaliland’s president, Hargeisa issued a statement that it would seek to cooperate with China on economic, trade, and development issues. Nonetheless, Somaliland has generally resisted Chinese pressure over Taiwan thus far.

It is quite unlikely that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) will establish official relations with Somaliland in the near future. Doing so would result in sovereignty disputes with Somalia, not to mention creating a problematic precedent of recognizing “breakaway” territories. Indeed, the PRC’s own desire for national unification would likely serve as another compelling reason not to recognize Somaliland’s split from Somalia. Furthermore, China is unlikely to recognize a territory when much of the world has not done so either. As Hargeisa continues its campaign to join the United Nations, Beijing could use its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to block Somaliland from joining the international body, and could possibly utilize this tactic to convince Hargeisa to scale back its interactions with Taipei.

Taiwan-Somaliland-UAE Connections

In recent years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as an important player in the geopolitics and security dynamics in the Horn of Africa. The UAE, which is increasing its political and military influence and investing in a free trade area at Somaliland’s Port of Berbera, may become an important link in the development of relations between Somaliland and Taiwan. In fact, the former Somaliland Ambassador to the UAE has praised the territory’s growing relations with Taipei, touting Taiwan’s “success story” and its healthcare assistance to Somaliland. Taiwan and the UAE have enjoyed a distinctively long history of close ties. Compared to the majority of Middle Eastern countries, which have prioritized relations with China, the UAE is seen as the most Taiwan-friendly regional country as I’ve covered in a previous Global Taiwan Brief. From a practical standpoint, to cut down on travel time,
Taiwanese visitors to Somaliland could also take a direct Emirates flight from Taipei to Dubai before flying from Dubai to Hargeisa.

As the UAE deepens its foothold in Somaliland, it may exert increased influence over Somaliland’s government and foreign policy, and thus could impact the trajectory of its relations with Taiwan. For its part, Taipei should expand its already friendly ties with the UAE and explore areas for bilateral cooperation as well as trilateral cooperation with Somaliland, such as on regional peace, security, and development issues. At the same time, given heightened security tensions between the United States and China in neighboring Djibouti, where both countries have military bases, Taipei could also work with Washington to promote regional stability and counter rising Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa. As Djibouti is faced with outstanding debts to China that reportedly account for 71 percent of its GDP, the PRC could potentially exert a great deal of financial leverage in the region, providing a strong incentive for countermeasures from the United States and Taiwan to provide an alternative model for infrastructure financing.

To further deepen ties, as first steps Taipei should also consider enhancing its economic footprint in Somaliland, which could emerge as an economic competitor to Djibouti. Currently, Taiwan and Somaliland’s economic and trade relations are underdeveloped. In fact, Taiwan’s Bureau of Foreign Trade in the Ministry of Economic Affairs does not even list any trade data for Somaliland. However, the East African territory has raw materials including rich uranium and titanium deposits that could be used for nuclear energy, as well as gem and gold mines. Somaliland’s representative in Taiwan Mohamed Omar Hagi Mohamoud has encouraged foreign investment in mining and oil and gas exploration. Taiwanese firms could also explore opportunities in the development of the Port of Berbera, which is expected to become the largest port in the Horn of Africa after its completion. In sum, Taiwan’s expanding relations with Somaliland could bring mutual benefits in terms of greater international recognition for both places, new avenues for collaboration with regional countries, and a new partnership that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has said will help to advance “peace, freedom, and prosperity in the Horn of Africa.”

The main point: In a breakthrough for Taiwan and Somaliland, both sides established representative offices in each other’s capitals. Both territories share similar values and interests, while facing similar challenges in gaining international recognition.

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China Launches New Round of Assault on Taiwan’s International Space

By: J. Michael Cole

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With Taiwan scoring a number of successes on the international stage since the beginning of this year—a list that includes major announcements, high-profile visits by American, Czech, and Japanese delegations, and unprecedented global attention being paid to Taiwan’s successful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic—Beijing has countered by launching a new round of efforts to further constrain Taiwan’s space within the global community.

As discussed in earlier issues of the Global Taiwan Brief (see here and here), since the January re-election of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), Beijing has ramped up its military activity in and around the Taiwan Strait, with a series of unprecedented intrusions into Taiwan’s Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and crossings of the tacit median line in the Taiwan Strait, as well as an intensifying campaign of propaganda and psychological warfare aimed at the Taiwanese public.

Taipei’s Gains, Beijing’s Ire

Beijing’s ire stems from Taipei’s string of successes on the diplomatic front, with highly positive global views on its efforts to combat COVID-19 and provide assistance to the international community. In turn, this has resulted in several interviews and op-eds in global media involving senior Taiwanese officials, including Health and Welfare Minister Chen Shih-chung (陳時中), former Vice President Chen Chien-jen (陳建仁), and Minister Without Portfolio Audrey Tang (唐鳳), as well as dozens of webinars with partners. The Chinese regime has been equally angered by a series of highly visible visits to Taiwan by Czech Senate President Mi-
Later in September, Taipei lodged a complaint with the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) after it was discovered that the organization’s website listed six member cities in Taiwan—Taipei, New Taipei, Taoyuan, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung—under the country classification “China.” Days later, following protests by the Taiwanese government and the six cities involved, the organization decided to change the country designation back to “Chinese Taipei,” the name under which the cities had participated in the past.

Beijing’s targeting of two climate-related organizations may not be coincidental. Recently, China has sought to bolster its image as a global leader in the battle against climate change. With the United States apparently taking a backseat on the issue, China has seen an opportunity, as the Columbia University historian Adam Tooze wrote recently, to “set the agenda,” “marginalize the U.S.,” “wrong-foot the EU which is threatening to ‘pivot,’” “leverage Germany,” and assume leadership of the global green energy industry. Such developments have undoubtedly created tremendous incentives for international NGOs operating in that sector to bend to Beijing’s demands on matters such as Taiwan.

In late September, it was also discovered that China had blocked the admission of the Wikimedia Foundation to the UN’s World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) General Assembly as an observer. According to a statement by Wikimedia, the reason given by the Chinese representative was that “Wikimedia Foundation’s application document was incomplete and its Taiwan chapter is dishing out political activities which could ‘undermine the state’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, therefore, it is not fitting for the foundation to serve as an observer to this professional organization.’”

These recent incidents are certainly not new. Following Tsai’s election in 2016, besides poaching a total of seven official diplomatic allies, China exerted immense pressure on the corporate sector—from airlines to hotel chains to apparel stores—to remove any reference from their websites suggesting that Taiwan is an independent country. The campaign worked, with dozens of multinational corporations, from The Gap to Marriott Hotel to Air Canada yielding to Chinese pressure and some even issuing apologies to China on their
official Weibo accounts for earlier references to Taiwan as anything other than a province of China.

Whether such tactics are effective, however, is debatable. Although the removal of Taiwan from drop-down lists or the use of terms like “Taiwan, Province of China” on websites ostensibly diminishes Taiwan’s visibility and may serve to confuse general publics abroad, the use of this political instrument as a means to undermine morale in Taiwan has failed miserably. In fact, along with other coercive actions, such efforts by Beijing have only served to further consolidate the desire of the people of Taiwan to resist annexation by China and take greater pride in their separate, Taiwanese identity. Moreover, attacks on the legitimacy of the ROC, such as in the BirdLife incident, may well serve to alienate those within Taiwan who, while opposed to de jure Taiwanese independence, nevertheless have a deep attachment to, and association with, the ROC. This includes members of the older generations within the “blue” camp.

Additionally, Beijing’s assault on the legitimacy of the ROC and its symbols complicates the arguments of prominent politicians who favor a more accommodating approach to Beijing like former President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who maintain that under the so-called “1992 Consensus” (九二共識), Taipei and Beijing agree that there is “one China,” with both sides agreeing to disagree on what “one China” means. This ambiguity served the Kuomintang (KMT) well under Ma, even though Beijing never officially subscribed to this formulation. With Ma seeking to make a political comeback using the Tsai administration’s refusal to embrace the “1992 Consensus” as a focal point of his criticism, China’s pressure will make it much more difficult for him to convince the Taiwanese public of the wisdom of his ways.

**How to Respond?**

With Beijing’s continued assault on other symbols of Taiwan’s international visibility likely to continue, the question for Taiwan and its allies is how to best respond. Although the CWBF’s refusal to give in to the parent organization’s request was perfectly understandable from the perspective of maintaining one’s dignity, its decision also resulted in the group’s expulsion from the global organization. In turn, this means that it will no longer have the ability to participate in its activities or set the agenda. This situation raises parallels with the US government’s decision to pull out of the WHO over its displeasure with the organization’s giving in to Chinese influence, a decision which, though potent in its signaling, has nevertheless ceded influence in that institution to the very country whose malign behavior it seeks to counter.

Taiwan and its allies have thus been compelled to think of new ways by which to counter China’s efforts to further elide Taiwan from the international community. In some cases, resisting China may require pressure from larger countries or NGOs representing them within international organizations. At the UN, this will likely necessitate a renewed commitment by a grouping of democratic states to challenge China and its often anti-democratic partners within the global body. In other instances, this could require, where possible, the creation of new parallel organizations which ensure Taiwan’s inclusion and limit membership to democratic nations. As Beijing identifies opportunities and weaknesses in the international system to undermine Taiwan’s visibility, Taipei and likeminded partners must identify areas of their own where it is possible to increase Taiwan’s participation. In doing so, Taiwan can maintain a “status quo” and demonstrate to Beijing that the international community will not countenance the exclusion of a democratic and responsible stakeholder.

**The main point:** As Taiwan scores a series of successes on the international stage, Beijing is increasing its efforts within organizations where it has substantial influence to compel decision makers to downgrade Taiwan by removing all references suggesting statehood. This new campaign should create new incentives for Taipei and its allies to develop countervailing tactics.

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**Signaling from Chinese Military Exercises around Taiwan**

By: Michael Mazza

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the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

People’s Liberation Army (PLA) pilots have been busy in recent weeks. On October 4, one Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft flew into the southwestern portion of Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). This was at least the twelfth day since the start of September that Chinese military aircraft operated in skies near Taiwan. Although these activities are part and parcel of what is now a four-year pressure campaign, they also serve to better prepare the PLA to ultimately use force against the democratic nation.

September Skies

It all started on September 9. According to an unnamed Taiwanese military officer that spoke to Focus Taiwan, “about 30 incursions by PLA Air Force planes and seven by Navy vessels were detected in an area southwest of Taiwan on Wednesday, with Chinese planes entering Taiwan’s ADIZ for at least 21 times.” The PLA, which engaged in similar activities on the following day, was just getting started.

Less than one week later, on September 16, two Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft entered the southwestern part of Taiwan’s ADIZ. On September 18, 18 aircraft comprising H-6 bombers and J-10, J-11, and J-16 fighter jets—divided among 5 groups—carried out flight operations in the Taiwan Strait to the northwest of Taiwan, as well as in the southwestern portion of Taiwan’s ADIZ. The aircraft in the Taiwan Strait crossed the median line, the implicitly agreed upon air boundary between Taiwan and China.

On the following day, 19 more aircraft—fighters, bombers, and patrol aircraft—flew six different routes. As on the previous day, those routes spanned an arc stretching from skies northwest of Taiwan, through the Strait, to the ADIZ’s southwestern corner. As on the previous day, aircraft flying in the Strait crossed the median line.

Then, on September 21, 22, 24, and 29, and on October 1, 3, and 4, much smaller numbers of Y-8s (one or two, depending on the day) operated again in the southwestern corner of Taiwan’s ADIZ. Just as notable as the frequency of flight operations during this time period was a comment from the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson. On September 21, in response to a question from a Bloomberg reporter, Wang Wenbin (汪文斌) avowed: “The Taiwan region is an inalienable part of China’s territory. The so-called ‘median line’ is non-existent.” J. Michael Cole, a senior non-resident fellow at GTI, argues that, with this announcement, “we have entered the most dangerous phase in cross-Strait relations since 2003-2004, if not the Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis of 1995-1996.”

Analysis

Cole provides a number of possible explanations for what he fairly describes as “Beijing’s increasingly belligerent behavior.” Those include “retaliation” for recent developments in US-China relations, “external distraction” from domestic economic difficulties, a desire “to shift the focus” from the positive attention paid to Taiwan in recent months, and “to collect intelligence on Taiwan’s response mechanisms.” None of these are mutually exclusive, as Cole notes.

An analysis of PLA flight paths, however, suggests that testing Taiwan’s responses may indeed be a key motivator of China’s recent activities. Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense has released somewhat detailed maps of PLA flight routes for every publicly acknowledged operation since September 16. The maps—all of which, notably, highlight the location of the Pratas Islands (Dongsha Islands, 東沙群島)—show that the PLA is not making things easy for the Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF). Even on days when only two PLA aircraft are involved—typically two Y-8s to Taiwan’s southwest—they are not flying identical routes, which presumably forces Taiwan to mobilize more assets to track them. On September 18, Taiwan had to respond to 18 aircraft flying five different routes spread out along a front measuring some 400 miles (author’s estimate). The 19 Chinese aircraft that took to the skies on September 19 traced six different, similarly spread-out
flight routes.

In all cases, MND described its response as scrambling fighters and deploying the “air defense missile system.” MND has not provided further details, but monitoring nearly 20 enemy aircraft—whose intentions cannot be presumed peaceful—operating in nearby skies is not a minor operation for Taiwan’s armed forces. Put simply, China may have given Taiwan a peek at what a wartime operation might look like in order to learn how Taiwan would mount a defense.

**A New Normal?**

Beyond testing Taiwan’s defenses, the Chinese foreign ministry’s assertion that there is no median line may put an exclamation mark on the establishment of a new normal in the Taiwan Strait. On March 31, 2019, two Chinese J-11s flew across the median line, reportedly for the first time in 20 years, prompting President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to announce that she had “already ordered the military to stage a forceful expulsion in the first place against any provocation by incursion of the median line.” In the 18 months since that incident, Chinese aircraft have violated the implicit boundary with increasing frequency. If September proves to be representative going forward, we have entered a period in which PLA warplanes seemingly do so as a matter of course.

If this is a new normal, it is one characterized by multiple PLA flight operations in and near the Taiwan Strait every month, with flights regularly crossing the median line or entering into Taiwan’s ADIZ. Bombers, maritime patrol aircraft, and fighters may all practice flying routes, or parts of routes, they would follow in the event of actual hostilities.

China might seek to establish a new normal in the Taiwan Strait for a number of reasons. First, it serves to wear down Taiwan’s limited number of airframes, force the ROCAF to draw down spare parts supplies, and even tire out Taiwanese pilots. Indeed, if China’s use of force is becoming more likely in the near term, as I have previously argued in the *Global Taiwan Brief*, then it behooves the PLA to stress the ROCAF now before Taiwan begins receiving deliveries of brand new F-16s in the mid-2020s.

Second, in establishing a new normal, China may hope to make the international community “numb” to its frequent operations in the skies near Taiwan. When a couple dozen aircraft carrying out threatening operations is no longer striking to foreign observers, Beijing will undoubtedly be happy. In establishing a new, more hostile baseline, Beijing may believe it has more options for dialing pressure up and down in response to future developments.

Third, and related, a new normal marked by a higher operational tempo may make tactical surprise easier for the PLA to achieve. Taiwan can never be sure when what appears to be an exercise or routine patrol will turn out to be something more menacing. But when “routine” includes numerous aircraft flying at different altitudes and crossing the median line at various locations, it becomes easier for China to flip the switch from patrol to aggression and, potentially, catch Taiwan’s defenders off guard.

**The Pratas Islands**

When reviewing the PLA’s activities of the last few weeks, it is important to consider them in the broader context of the Chinese military’s activities in recent months. In May, Japanese media reported that the PLA would hold a major exercise off Hainan Island to simulate an invasion of Taiwan’s Pratas Islands in the South China Sea. According to the *Japan Times*, the PLA had plans to “mobilize an unprecedented level of forces, including marines, landing ships, hovercrafts and helicopters.” Taiwan was sufficiently spooked and quickly began deploying elite marines to the islands in June, with more arriving in August ahead of the PLA exercise. Clearly, Taipei worried that PLA forces were being massed for something other than a rehearsal.

China’s purported interest in the Pratas Islands may explain why Chinese aircraft have been flying in the southwestern corner of Taiwan’s ADIZ, which occurred nine times in September, three in October as of the time of writing, and throughout the summer as well. In some cases, those PLA flight routes have brought Chinese aircraft much closer to the Pratas Islands than to Taiwan itself (the two are separated by approximately 250 miles). Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft and H-6 bombers flew exclusively in the southwestern zone in September and so far in October, with Y-8s making at least nine appearances in those skies. Fighter jets occasion-
ally did so as well last month.

Why? Y-8s may be soaking up intelligence on Taiwanese naval activities in waters separating Taiwan from the Pratas. They may, in particular, be on the hunt for submarines (Taiwanese or otherwise). Of Chinese planes utilized last month, H-6s appear to have flown closer to the Pratas than any other aircraft, perhaps suggesting they are practicing bombing runs on the island. Finally, PLA fighter jets may be rehearsing routes they would fly to intercept forces heading from Taiwan to reinforce or defend the islands against a Chinese attack.

A number of factors may drive Chinese interest in the Pratas islands. In seizing the islands, China might be able to kill multiple birds with one stone. An attack on the Pratas would test both Taiwanese and American responses to a limited act of aggression. Beijing might, in particular, see such an act as a way to significantly increase pressure on the Tsai government and on Taiwanese society, but without a significant risk of US intervention. Militarily, Chinese control of the Pratas might allow the PLA to pose a more multidimensional threat to Taiwan proper and to better control the South China Sea. Alternatively, Beijing might be feigning intensified interest in the Pratas islands as a means of psychological warfare or to distract from quieter activities elsewhere.

**Conclusion**

The recent spate of Chinese military activities near Taiwan clearly serves an expressly political purpose—to pressure the Tsai government, to intimidate the Taiwanese people, and to convey seriousness of purpose to third parties. But it is easy to overlook the PLA’s potentially more narrow ends. Put simply, there is good reason to believe that the PLA is seeking to better prepare itself for the day when Beijing orders military action against Taiwan.

**The main point:** PLA air patrols near Taiwan serve an expressly political purpose, but they also serve to better prepare the Chinese military for the use of force against Taiwan.

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**The Historic Czech Delegation to Taiwan: A Roadmap for Europe’s Ties with Taiwan**

By: Katherine Schultz

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At the beginning of September, a Czech delegation consisting of 89 members, including the Senate President, the Mayor of Prague, parliamentarians, entrepreneurs, and educators embarked on an official visit to Taiwan. The visit, meant primarily to promote bilateral ties between Taiwan and the Czech Republic and send a strong signal to an increasingly assertive PRC that the European country will not kowtow to Beijing, unexpectedly grew into a remarkable moment for Czech foreign policy. The delegation, dubbed “**histor-i**c” by Taiwan officials and observers for its high-profile participants and symbolic significance, came at a time when many countries are becoming increasingly wary of China’s coercive and malign practices in the international arena. The visit enjoyed wide international attention—not only because the delegation was led by Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, the second-highest ranking official after President Miloš Zeman—but also for the threats that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) diplomats publicly directed against Vystrčil. The visit appears to be reflective of a fundamental shift in perceptions within the Czech Republic—and perhaps more broadly in Europe—towards China and Taiwan. The Czech official visit could potentially serve as a watershed moment for European relations with Taiwan and China, showing a possible path towards enhancing European cooperation with Taiwan.

While the **first part** of this series outlined the events leading up to the visit as well as the delegation’s accomplishments, this second part discusses European solidarity with the Czech Republic during the visit and the potential of the visit to shape European ties with Taiwan in the future.

**China’s Escalation of Threats and European Solidarity with the Czech Delegation**

Chinese threats against the Czech Senate leader further escalated and turned from covert to public during
the Czech delegation’s visit to Taiwan. On September 1, the PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) declared at a press briefing in Berlin that Vystrčil had “crossed a red line” and would “pay a heavy price” for the visit. However, his attempt to intimidate the Czechs only further contributed to the publicization of the visit and undermined the goal of his visit to Europe: recovering China’s image in Europe following the coronavirus and “facemask diplomacy” fiascos. Even more notably, this unprecedented case of a direct diplomatic threat toward a European official prompted a number of European leaders to take a stand and condemn Wang Yi’s remarks.

“We as Europeans act in close cooperation—we offer our international partners respect, and we expect the exact same from them,” German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas responded immediately after Wang’s remarks, adding that “threats don’t fit in here.” This was an unusually direct rebuke of China from the top diplomat of a country that has for years pursued engagement with the PRC. More European nations soon followed: the French foreign ministry stated that “Beijing’s reaction is unacceptable” and “no threat against an EU member state is acceptable and we express our solidarity with the Czech Republic.” Slovakia’s President Zuzana Čaputová also tweeted that “Slovakia stands by the Czech Republic.” Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen denounced “China’s bullying of democratic representatives” in a tweet and urged Europe to fight China’s efforts to isolate Taiwan. It is evident that European leaders did not dismiss this incident as a problem that solely concerns the Czechs but felt that, as one member of the European Parliament pointed out, “a threat against one member state is a threat against all of us.” Perhaps more than ever before, China gravely underestimated the power of shared values and European solidarity and has alienated an increasing number of nations as a result. Chinese threats have once again backfired, compelling Europeans to unite and voice support for the Czech Republic, and, by extension, Taiwan.

In the Czech Republic, the threat was widely publicized, but if Beijing intended it to incite fear, the effect was quite the opposite. Many Czech politicians, including those who at first opposed the visit to Taiwan, condemned Wang’s threats, while the Czech Foreign Ministry summoned China’s ambassador, demanding an explanation. One particularly sharp-tongued response from Pavel Novotný, a local district mayor on the outskirts of Prague, in the form of a letter addressed to the Chinese foreign minister even made it to Foreign Policy, where it was declared “the document of the week.” Senate President Vystrčil told this author in an interview that he was thankful to the Czech and European leaders who denounced Wang’s threat and said that he also felt many other European nations’ “unspoken” support. [1]

Shortly after the conclusion of the visit, the Chinese state-controlled newspaper China Daily suggested that members of the delegation would be banned from entering China and restricted from conducting business there (no official announcement on the matter has been released as of this writing). Senator Jiří Růžička commented on this possibility:

“This is something we anticipated even before we embarked on this journey. I believe that the entrepreneurs and company representatives who accompanied us expected the same. […] Given who is banned from entering this country, I consider the ban to be an honor rather than a form of punishment.” [2]

Giving his insight on Wang’s threats and the possibility of economic retaliation, Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib explained in an interview with the Global Taiwan Institute that in his view, the Czech Republic “has already paid a heavy price,” referring to the coronavirus which originated in China, Beijing’s failure to warn the world, and the buyout of Czech medical supplies at the beginning of the pandemic—concluding that the nation has, in fact, “already prepaid a heavy price.” [3]

As of the writing of this article, the only tangible “economic” payback for the visit was the cancellation of a Chinese order of Petrof pianos, which were subsequently purchased by a Czech entrepreneur and will be donated to schools. The sole other move by China following the visit that might be interpreted as retaliation is a travel advisory discouraging travel to the Czech Republic, ostensibly due to a “surge in COVID-19 infections.” Prague Mayor Hřib maintained that this “only proves that they [China] have no way of hurting us and that their influence is greatly overestimated.” [4]
Indeed, Czech analysts have determined that if China were to limit trade with the Czech Republic, the Czech economy as a whole would not register any notable difference.

Senate President Vystrčil commented on these acts of retaliation:

“If today, the PRC is capable of canceling transactions based on signed contracts for political reasons, the sooner we withdraw from such business deals, the better. If we were to further expand this type of cooperation, and at some later time they were canceled due to a political decision, that would be very risky. Although there may be some limitations and unpleasant situations now, the damage is lower than if they were to arise later. This is a great lesson for us now to be more cautious in the future.” [5]

The PRC has succeeded in convincing Europe, at least in part, that it is beneficial for it to develop relations and trade ties with it—without thinking carefully about whether this could lead to dependence which, if too strong, could also be dangerous for Europe. If our delegation compels Europe to think about it more, I would be glad—because this really is something to reflect on. [6]

Indeed, many European nations are clearly reevaluating their policy towards and engagements with the PRC this year, which the EU has deemed a “systemic rival.” China’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic, along with its increasingly aggressive diplomatic strategies and “facemask diplomacy” PR campaign in Europe have resulted in widespread disillusionment with China on the continent. The highly awaited EU-China summits in June and September yielded little to no results, while European leaders have been increasingly critical toward human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Most recently, Germany, France, and the UK have signed a joint note denouncing China’s claims in the South China Sea. European leaders are becoming less concerned about China’s strong statements and threats, perhaps in realization of their own international standing. Individual European countries may be fairly small players in the global scope, but the EU as a whole—or even a coalition of selected European like-minded countries, for that matter—is a powerful enough global player to stand its ground in the face of Beijing. Upon this realization, Europeans may recognize that they have sufficient clout to formulate their China and Taiwan policies based on their shared values and interests, rather than on Beijing’s threats.

**The Czech Republic as a Role Model for Europe**

At minimum, the Czech delegation put a spotlight on Taiwan and the investment opportunities it can provide, making it an attractive economic partner for other European markets. It appears that Europeans are already coming to this realization: on September 22, 15 European countries participated in the first EU-Taiwan investment forum.

Given the growing ties between Taiwan and Europe, equally promising is the potential of the visit to inspire the EU and individual European nations to enhance their ties with Taiwan on a broad spectrum of issues—some of which may provide opportunities for official, high-level visits. Calls for more European official visits to Taiwan are on the rise now that the Czech Republic has paved the way. Edward Lucas has urged more countries to “break the Taiwan taboo,” while J. Michael Cole asked, “If the Czech Republic can do it, why not us?” On September 15, an op-ed (in French for *Le Monde* and in German for *Handelsblatt*) written by leading European academics, lawmakers, and political figures advocated for a high-level EU-Taiwan dialogue and called for strengthening of EU’s cooperation with Taiwan on issues such as health and supply chains. Members of the Czech delegation themselves expressed hope that their visit will inspire European leaders to follow suit. During an interview with this author, Prague Mayor Hřib said:

“I firmly hope that we inspire other states. We met with the representatives of European states in Taiwan and had a discussion which showed that they realize—based on the remarks made by a representative of an unnamed, yet significant European state—that we must stop judging our actions based on China’s reaction. I think it is important not to be intimidated. China cannot threaten sovereign states, nor interfere in their decisions—and its reaction so far has been rather ridiculous.” [7]
In his speech at the National Chengchi University, Senate President Vystrčil also shared his thoughts on such prospects:

“I am convinced that other high-ranking political representatives of European democratic countries and the European Union itself will gradually start to realize their own “democratic delay” and will also visit Taiwan soon.”

Building on this, Senator Růžička pointed out that many countries were likely waiting to see what China’s reaction to such a visit would be and said that he hoped their visit would “give courage to not only other nations but also international organizations, for instance the WHO, to communicate with Taiwan.” [8]

The Czech Republic has shown to the international community that it is possible—and even profitable—to pursue closer cooperation with Taiwan. Building on this momentum, more countries could follow suit. Most recently, former NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and Swedish Trade Minister Anna Hallberg reportedly expressed interest in visiting the island nation. However, it remains to be seen if the Czech visit will fulfill this aspiration, given that Taiwan has recently asked foreign leaders to postpone their visits to Taiwan to next year due to coronavirus concerns. At the very least, the boldness of the Czech visit seems to be inspiring other leaders to stand up for their values and interests in spite of China’s growing pressure.

(The author would like to thank the Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib, and Senator Jiří Růžička for their comments.)

The main point: The Czech delegation’s visit to Taiwan has shown that the pursuit of closer ties with Taiwan is indeed possible and beneficial for European nations, potentially serving as a roadmap for more European nations to resist Chinese pressure and expand cooperation with Taiwan.

[1] Interview with Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, September 22.


[3] Interview with Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib, September 16.


[5] Interview with Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, September 22.

[6] Interview with Czech Senate President Miloš Vystrčil, September 22.

[7] Interview with Prague Mayor Zdeněk Hřib, September 16.