

## Preface

When this series of essays began in early 2006, relations across the Taiwan Strait were becoming increasingly troubled as Beijing saw Taiwan's president, Chen Shui-bian, seeking to push a Taiwan independence agenda. That included Chen's efforts to enhance a sense of "Taiwanese" identity at home—separate and distinct from "Chinese" identity—and to promote Taiwan's separate international personality abroad. Although the PRC only later interpreted Chen's moves as unambiguously striving to formalize independent status (no longer seeing the Taiwan leader as a political opportunist but rather as an independence ideologue), in their minds the direction was already clear and the implications increasingly ominous.

At the same time, even though the United States strongly supported the remarkable democratic evolution in Taiwan, it too was becoming ever more concerned over Taipei's perceived willingness to push an agenda that provoked Beijing to the point of potential confrontation, in the process ignoring vital American national interests.

And while at the end of the day the Mainland came to appreciate the US' steps to rein Chen in, China's long-standing objection to American security relations with the island, especially the unresolved arms sales issue, has continued to trouble ties between Washington and Beijing to this day.

Over the six years covered in these three volumes, we have seen relations between the three countries go through multiple phases. In years past, some of these phases were only mildly troubling, but others verged on dangerous. Whether it was Chen Shui-bian's toying with the notion of a "brand new Constitution" that would omit any historical or even theoretical link between Taiwan and the Mainland, his shelving of the National Unification Council and Guidelines, or his advocacy of a referendum on applying to the United Nations as a "new member" in the name of "Taiwan"—an effort that led Beijing to speak forebodingly of a "period of high danger"—from mid-way through his first term in 2002 until the very end of his second term in January 2008, the dynamic in cross-Strait relations was largely negative and fraught with unpredictability. US-Taiwan ties experienced parallel tensions.

However, following the decisive election victory of the Kuomintang in January 2008 there was a dramatic change in the picture. Economics dominated the campaign but in voting overwhelmingly for Ma Ying-jeou the people of Taiwan were also seen to turn away from the politics of ideology and confrontation across the Strait.

And indeed, Ma's policies of promoting more congenial and productive ties with the Mainland have not only facilitated stability in cross-Strait relations, but also in US-Taiwan and, at least in regards to this issue, ties between the United States and the PRC have also eased. Based on the approaches reflected in important policy statements such as Ma Ying-jeou's May 20, 2008 inaugural address and PRC President Hu Jintao's December 31, 2008 "six-points" speech, both Taipei and Beijing have committed themselves to manage their relations step-by-step, adhering to their joint mantra about addressing easy issues first, harder ones later—and economic issues first, political ones later.

Not all problems have been resolved, of course, even on the economic side of the ledger. Moreover, Ma's agenda of pressing for more international space and greater integration into the international economy presents challenges. His approach to these issues is designed to bypass the most vexing problem, the differing views of sovereignty in Taipei and Beijing. So far, however, the PRC has responded extremely cautiously. Even today the Mainland is seemingly unable to acquiesce to Ma's approach without insisting on a process of cross-Strait consultation that appears, among other things, designed to underscore the island's non-sovereign status, rather than setting the issue to the side. In addition, Beijing's approach, not only to Taiwan's participation in intergovernmental organizations, but to wholly private activities in the international community by Taiwan's NGOs—for example, requiring that all titles or insignia that hint of "one China, one Taiwan" or "two Chinas" be abolished—is viewed in Taiwan with resentment and as an affront to their dignity.

The fundamental reality of Taiwan's robust (if sometimes raucous) democracy is one with which not only Ma, but also Beijing and Washington must cope. Long gone are the days when governments in all three capitals could take decisions and then impose them, including on their own populations. That very democracy, of course, is an enormous strength for Taiwan, but that doesn't gainsay the fact that it complicates matters for all concerned.

In Taiwan, itself, of course, democracy means that all policies, including toward the Mainland, must pass muster with the people of Taiwan. Given the sharp divisions over fundamental aspects of Taiwan's relationship with the PRC, it is hardly surprising that political battles on the island are fierce. Nor, on the other hand, is it unexpected that, while today the vast majority of people in Taiwan reject reunification, they understand the importance of well-managed cross-Strait links for their own security and well-being and oppose policies that would disrupt those links. These twin realities have had a significant bearing on island-wide elections, including the 2008 and 2012 presidential contests, and they are an important focus of debate within the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as it struggles to keep faith with the pro-independence tenets central to its identity, on the one

hand, and, on the other, the need to gain the confidence of a majority of voters that it can handle cross-Strait ties.

On the Mainland, Beijing will maintain a deterrent military capability against Taiwan independence until the day of unification. But Taiwan's democracy means that only a policy of patience and constructive engagement that appeals to the aspirations, as well as the needs of the people of Taiwan, has a chance of winning their hearts and minds, ultimately making possible a peaceful resolution acceptable to both sides. Even more than in the past, PRC's bluster, threats, and excessive pressure against Taiwan's open society would simply generate animosity and resistance to any sort of political reconciliation much less some form of eventual unification. At the same time, Beijing must remain credible at home, convincing its own people that PRC policies are laying a foundation for cross-Strait unity at some future point, not a space for permanent separation.

In Washington, the United States strongly supports Taiwan's democratic governance at the same time it encourages positive interactions across the Strait. This approach means not only ensuring that force and coercion are not used against the island, but also having to work with sometimes fractious politics there to prevent dangerous provocation of the Mainland.

Nonetheless, even if the course of politics in Taiwan is not entirely predictable—and even if there is not necessarily going to be seamless political or policy continuity in the United States or the PRC, it is possible to draw a few basic conclusions from what has transpired in the period covered by these essays.

First, perhaps a blinding flash of the obvious but nonetheless worth stating, none of the three players wants to get drawn into a military confrontation over cross-Strait relations. Indeed, all will go to some lengths to avoid such a mutually destructive outcome.

Second, in this connection, when faced with a potential crisis, all three players are able to adapt and, while preserving basic principle and serving basic interests, jettison positions that unnecessarily complicate things. Although there was concern that the government in Taipei was approaching the limits of Beijing's tolerance by the end of the Chen Shui-bian administration and confrontation could be looming, common opposition to Chen's policies in Beijing and Washington and common sense on the part of the people of Taiwan expressed through the January 2008 election led to a sharp abatement of the tensions and a "resetting" of cross-Strait relations so that the threat of conflict was put to rest for the foreseeable future.

Third, that said, if fundamental interests of sovereignty and national security are at stake, each party is willing to do what it has to in order to protect those interests. Despite the emphasis on avoiding conflict, none of the three players has given up its

basic interests. Taiwan to determine its own future and to preserve and strengthen its democracy, economic well-being, and security; Beijing to block Taiwan independence and to ensure that the door to ultimate reunification remains open; and the United States to preserve peace and stability in the region and to guarantee that whatever resolution Taiwan and Mainland eventually come to, it will be arrived at through peaceful, non-coerced means with neither provoking the other nor seeking to impose its views on the other or on the international community.

Fourth, although the United States and the PRC, while not collaborating on Taiwan policy, have shown themselves able to respect the other's efforts to defuse potential crises, this has not dispelled the widely-held view in the Mainland that the United States seeks to constrain China's rise. In this view, even if it does not support independence, and even if it has worked hard to avert confrontation, the United States is seen to oppose cross-Strait reconciliation, not to mention unification, and to use Taiwan as a "tool" in its effort to hem the PRC in.

Finally, making progress in cross-Strait relations beyond a certain point is going to be difficult. This is not only because the remaining issues (including economic issues) are inherently difficult, but because there are domestic political forces operating on both sides of the Strait that will limit the freedom of action of both governments. Even more fundamental, the two sides do not share the same vision of the ultimate future. They have a common objective of closer, more mutually beneficial economic relations, friendlier ties between the peoples and societies, and the preservation of a climate of low tension. But when it comes to political or security ties, they have very different longer-term objectives: in the case of the Mainland, reunification and preserving its system, and in the case of Taiwan, its freedom of action.

Hence, while one can hope that both sides—and the United States—will act with due regard for the fundamental interests of the others even as they protect their own, this will not always be easy. Indeed, it will likely become more difficult as time passes. To manage all three legs of this triangle will require patience and perspective and, more than occasionally, political courage. The experience of the past six years gives one hope that these qualities can characterize this complex set of relationships. It also gives us reason to know, however, that that is not guaranteed and that vision and enlightened leadership will also be required to ensure a successful path forward.