

Remarks of MA Ying-jeou, former President of the Republic of China (Taiwan)

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Director Mark Wu (伍人英主任) of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies of Harvard University, professors and students of the Harvard community, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon everyone!

It feels so great to be back at Harvard after a departure of almost 43 years. I have many fond memories and old friends here. Today, I'm honored to share my views and recommendations on cross-strait peace with scholars and students from the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies and the Harvard community in general.

During my presidency of the Republic of China (Taiwan) from 2008 to 2016, the authorities from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait signed 23 agreements covering almost every aspect of people's lives. This helped create a peaceful and stable situation across the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, the authorities and relevant departments on both sides established formal channels for interaction and communication, coordinating and consulting regularly.

Not only did the people on the both sides benefit, but relations in the fields of trade, culture, education, and technology also made significant progress. This was widely praised by the international community and represents a major milestone in the history of cross-strait relations.

My cross-strait policy has two main parts. The first is "resolving disputes through peaceful means" and the second is "institutionalizing negotiations" as the specific approach. Mutual trust between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was built on the "1992 Consensus" reached on November 7, 1992, in Hong Kong by representatives of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council and Mainland China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits. The content of the consensus is that "both sides of the Taiwan Strait adhere to the 'One China' principle, and its meaning can be expressed verbally by each side in their own way."(一個中國，各自表述)

Based on the "1992 Consensus," in 2015, the leader of mainland China, Mr. Xi Jinping, and I held an unprecedented cross-strait leaders' meeting in Singapore, where both sides sat down to discuss the peaceful future of cross-strait relations, receiving widespread recognition from the world. I believe the meeting means that Taiwan can maintain a peaceful and friendly relationship with mainland China, and both sides can resolve disputes through peaceful means. There is no reason and necessity for mainland China to use force against Taiwan or send its air force to

fly through Taiwan Strait, and at that time, the United States also did not believe that a war would break out between the two sides.

However, after I stepped down as President in 2016, cross-strait relations began to regress, quickly moving towards tension and confrontation. During the eight years of former President Tsai Ing-wen's administration from 2016 to 2024, although cross-strait relations did not escalate to severe military confrontation, the frequency of large-scale military exercises by mainland China increased, and the atmosphere between the two sides became increasingly tense, with the potential for accidental conflict at any moment. Three years ago in 2021, the risk led Taiwan to be ranked by *The Economist*, the British magazine, as "the most dangerous place on Earth" .

In March 2024, renowned CNN international commentator Fareed Zakaria noted, of the situation across the Taiwan Strait, that "The world's most dangerous place has only gotten more dangerous"

My question is, why has the cross-strait situation shifted from peace and stability during my tenure to such a high level of tension? The key issue is that after the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government came to power in 2016, it refused to accept the cross-strait framework outlined in the "Constitution of the Republic of China" and rejected the "1992 Consensus," which serves as a common political foundation for both Taiwan and Mainland China.

Moreover, the DPP government has been unable to find a new basis like the 1992 consensus acceptable to the other side, leading to a dangerous situation where there is no mutual trust and no formal communication channels between the two sides. If the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were to head toward war, it would not be in the interests of the people on both sides, nor would it serve the long-term development needs of the United States and the international community.

On April 10 of this year (2024), when I went to the Chinese mainland with 20 Taiwanese students, met with mainland Chinese leader Mr. Xi Jinping in Beijing, I said that if a war were to break out across the Taiwan Strait, it would be an unbearable disaster for the Chinese nation.

I also said that both sides of the Taiwan Strait should value the ways of life of their people, maintain peace across the strait, and ensure mutual benefit and win-win outcomes using the wisdom inherent in Chinese culture.

During the meeting, Mr. Xi Jinping's attitude was very clear, gentle and humble, stating that as long as both sides recognize themselves as part of the Chinese nation, any issues can be discussed. He also emphasized the need for continued cross-strait exchanges and hoped that more people from Taiwan would visit mainland China, and vice versa. I believe this

is Mr. Xi's signal of goodwill and sincerity towards the people of Taiwan and also a way to create a constructive space for President Lai Ching-te's administration to operate.

Unfortunately, President Lai Ching-te did not respond to this goodwill gesture. In his inauguration speech on May 20 2024, President Lai Ching-te publicly declared a "new two-state theory" of Taiwan's independence, asserting that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China "are not subordinate to each other." This provoked a strong reaction from mainland China, which not only launched large-scale military exercises near Taiwan but also further announced laws and regulations targeting against Taiwan independence forces.

President Lai Ching-te's promotion of Taiwan independence has also raised concerns among U.S. political, business, and academic circles. The so-called "Skepticism about President Lai Theory" (疑賴論) has emerged in the international community, which questions the Lai administration's ability to stabilize the Taiwan Strait situation and suggests that Taiwan could become a troublemaker for the United States.

The chairwoman of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which oversees US relations with the ROC, has also visited Taiwan multiple times to express her concerns on this new development.

I want to once again urge President Lai Ching-te to abandon the "new two-state theory" which advocates Taiwan independence and return to addressing cross-strait relations based on the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of China and the "Act Governing Relations Between Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area." These are the two most important documents relating to cross-strait relations

For the cross-strait peace and the safety of Taiwan's people, it is crucial to adhere to the constitutional "One China Principle" and rebuild mutual trust between the two sides. This is not only the duty of the President of the Republic of China but that it can bring peace to both sides and the region.

The "new two-state theory" does not at all help Taiwan's security and cross-strait peace, but only create hatred, insecurity, and an atmosphere of turmoil.

The greatest lesson from thousands of years of human history is that "there are no winners in war, and there are no losers in peace." War is absolutely not what we in Taiwan wish for.

As for whether a war will occur across the Taiwan Strait, I still believe that "it is not impossible, but unlikely". But the key for both sides is that they should handle this relationship

with extreme caution. I believe that for both Taiwan and mainland China, the cost of war is severe, and catastrophic. Neither side wants to see it happen.

Preparing for war is necessary, but the high military expenditures are an unbearable burden for Taiwan. Especially if military purchases become the absurd and contemptuous "payment for defense" referred to by U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump, the defense budget becomes a financial black hole that could corrupt Taiwan's finances and only benefit the U.S. military-industrial complex.

From a long-term perspective, Taiwan should seek to resolve disputes through peaceful means, replacing war with dialogue, and ultimately create a win-win situation for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. My eight years in office are the best example of this practice.

I want to urge the United States and our international friends who are really concerned about Taiwan to encourage dialogue between Taiwan and mainland China. This is the most effective and advantageous approach for all parties and for regional security. However, cross-strait issues should be resolved by the two sides themselves, without interference from the any other foreign country. According to our constitution and that of mainland China, both sides belong to one China, so cross-strait issues should be discussed between the two sides themselves. It is not possible, and should not entrust these matters to others nor allow foreign interference.

The DPP government needs to face reality: the United States is unlikely to sacrifice its own troops for Taiwan. If conflict were to break out across the Taiwan Strait, it would be the people on both sides of the strait who suffer the harshness of war.

From Iraq and Afghanistan to Ukraine, proxy wars (代理人戰爭) only lead to devastation and the ruin of countless lives and almost every industries in the war zones. Taiwan must not become a pawn for others. The future development of cross-strait relations should be determined by the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait themselves.

Even though I have been out of public office for 8 years already, I remain committed to deepening cross-strait exchanges. Last year, I led thirty Taiwanese students on their first visit to mainland China, where they toured Wuhan University, Hunan University, and Fudan University. The students enjoyed interactions at each university. In July, students from five mainland universities—Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Wuhan University, and Hunan University—visited Taiwan, where the exchanges were also very enthusiastic. They shared interesting experiences and discussed their respective challenges and concerns. These events were also vigorously reported by Taiwan and mainland media.

In April of this year, I once again led twenty Taiwanese students on a visit to mainland China, where they toured Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and Peking University in Beijing. The Taiwanese students all enjoyed the time with mainland students, and the experience could only be described as "perfectly natural and irresistible." Translated into Chinese, it's 「渾然天成，欲罷不能」。As far as I know, many students continue to maintain connections with each other through social media after they went home.

The future of cross-strait ties belongs to these young people. I believe that increased dialogue and more interactions between the two sides are the best ways to eliminate misunderstandings and enhance cooperation.

In recent years, mainland China has achieved the remarkable milestone of lifting 700 million Chinese people out of poverty, an accomplishment rare both historically and globally, and an unprecedented achievement in the history of the Chinese nation in its many thousand years of history.

A few months ago, mainland China has mediated the signing of the "Beijing Declaration" by various Palestinian factions, working towards peace in the Middle East and showing the world that the Chinese nation is one that supports international peace. If this progress can serve as a foundation for deepening exchanges, shorten the distance of the Taiwan Strait, and fostering cooperation, it would allow people on both sides to enjoy better lives and work together for the future of the Chinese nation.

The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the same Chinese nation and are descendants of Yan and Huang emperors. As Mr. Xi Jinping has stated, the Chinese nation is one of the greatest in the world, having created a long-lasting, brilliant, and unparalleled Chinese civilization. Every child of the Chinese nation feels proud and honored by this heritage.

Only through peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait can the future of the Chinese nation be assured. For Taiwan, without a stable and peaceful cross-strait environment, there can be no stable and progressive Taiwan. For the Chinese nation, without peace and mutual prosperity across the Taiwan Strait, there will be no bright future.

If war ever breaks out across the Taiwan Strait, it would be an terrible, unbearable and catastrophic burden for the Chinese nation, destabilize the global situation, and even lead to the World War III.

I deeply hope that the authorities on both sides of the Taiwan Strait will prioritize the well-being of the people, work with each other, and create peace and friendship together. This is not only the desire of the people on both sides but also the expectation of the entire world.

Thank you all!