

Taiwan's bottom line in Strait talks

Written by Michael Hsiao 郝昌

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On March 17, The Economist published an article entitled “China’s bottom line” that examined three high-ranking Chinese officials’ viewpoints on Taiwan as expressed in talks they gave at the annual session of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) early in March. The three are Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平), Premier Li Keqiang (李克强) and top political adviser and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo Standing Committee member Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声).

The CCP’s intention to annex Taiwan is obvious to all. However, the article reiterated Beijing’s threats and emphasized that China expects a response response from Taiwan, especially from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is enjoying a resurgence in popularity and is expected to win next year’s presidential election.

“Bottom line” means the bottom line in a negotiation and implies an ultimatum — once this line is crossed, a price must be paid. Basically, China’s bottom lines are all old tricks. They are used interchangeably and the priority of their usage depends on the necessity of the situation, but they are all negotiation tactics. Their purpose is to confuse indecisive or pro-China Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) politicians and to threaten DPP politicians — who might be sitting at the negotiation table in the next round of cross-strait talks.

The slogans that China frequently uses to intimidate Taiwan include “one country, two systems” and “one China” — also called the “one China framework” — as well as the so-called “1992 consensus.” For KMT members who are pro-China, fearful of China or want to appease China, the aforementioned three formulas seem to be viewed as different. However, in my view, there is no difference between them. All three slogans are aimed at annexing Taiwan. This is by no means the bottom line that Taiwan wants.

The CCP and the KMT have been quite close over the past few years, and they have been playing around with the meaning of these three formulas. When China mentions “one country, two systems” or the “one China” framework, the KMT responds with its mantra of “one China, different interpretations.” The different interpretations are naturally ignored by the CCP, which only focuses on the “one China” part.

The KMT thought it was very clever to use the “1992 consensus,” which refers to a tacit understanding between the KMT and the Chinese government that both sides of the Strait

acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means.

However, the CCP has in recent years occasionally accepted the “1992 consensus” because it assumed that the KMT accepted, or had even forced it to accept, the “one China” principle. As for the latter half of it, which says that both sides can have different interpretations of what “one China” means, China simply could not care less about it.

The reason is that Beijing knows full well that as long as Taiwan accepts the “one China” framework, foundation, rooftop — or whatever one prefers to call it — unification with China becomes Taiwan's only option. The “China” in the “one China” is, of course, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and not the Republic of China (ROC) as interpreted by Taiwan.

The international community has no understanding of what “different interpretations” means or how “one China” could also be interpreted as the “Republic of China” by Taiwan. In other words, only the “one China” part is left in the “1992 consensus,” while the part that talks about “different interpretations” is entirely left out.

Unfortunately, President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration has continuously and ignorantly echoed the latter half of the “1992 consensus,” the part that talks about “different interpretations,” in an attempt to fool itself and others. Former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) has been in the front line of the Ma camp; he thought he had won China's permission to come up with a consensus that allowed different interpretations. Several commentators with a pro-China stance have praised the “1992 consensus” saying that it is a “useful fiction,” but that is more likely to be just a tactic to take China's side and hoodwink Taiwan.

Nonetheless, a cursory examination of cross-strait relations over the past six years reveals that the ROC, or Taiwan, has not received the slightest respect from the PRC in their exchanges based on the “1992 consensus.”

One must also ask whether Taiwan has gained more space for its political and economic survival in the international community, or whether the president, vice president, premier and ministers of the ROC, or Taiwan, have been given more opportunities or freedom to take part in

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international organizations or in a diplomatic context. The answer is no.

Under the fictional “1992 consensus,” the Ma administration has not come back to its senses, and is even more ignorant. After being oppressed and bullied, the Ma administration is cheerfully claiming that finally the two sides have made positive progress, shamelessly lying to Taiwanese saying that for the past six years, cross-strait relations have been stable and peaceful.

However, anyone with a clear mind knows that for the past six years, Taiwan has consistently been oppressed. At the same time, the two sides have created a completely fictional impression of peace. The reason is that the Taiwanese government is too weak and keeps trying to appease China. China, of course, enjoys this kind of peace and stability because it can have its own way.

For the past six years, the winner has always been China, and the loser Taiwan. China can unilaterally decide to open flight routes which run close to the median line of the Taiwan Strait and even tell Taiwan's president how to travel when offering condolences to important figures overseas.

However, the Ma administration does not seem to think that there is anything wrong with that — they even feel good about it. Neither have they actively fought for Taiwan's interests in cross-strait exchanges, and have let China take all the advantages while leaving Taiwanese in a condition they are angry about but powerless to change.

This resulted in protests led by young Taiwanese and civic society which gave rise to the epoch-making Sunflower movement.

Taiwanese can obviously no longer accept the bottom lines unilaterally drawn by the KMT and the CCP. The sensible thing for Taiwan to do is come up with its own bottom lines, which could form the basis for cross-strait negotiations.

In fact, over the past decade the public have made clear the following bottom lines with regard

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to negotiations with Beijing:

First, Taiwanese democracy must not be compromised or sacrificed.

Second, Taiwan's future should be determined by its 23 million residents.

Third, the cross-strait "status quo" is that Taiwan, or the ROC, and China, or the PRC, do not represent each other and do not belong to each other.

Fourth, the "status quo" should be maintained. Cross-strait relations should also develop peacefully and with stability.

Fifth, to maintain the cross-strait "status quo" is to reject the "one China" or "one nation" principle or framework that is predicated on Taiwan's unification with China.

Sixth, future cross-strait dialogue, exchanges and negotiations must be based on the principles of democracy, peace, safety and transparency.

No Taiwanese political party can cross these bottom lines set out by the public. Since the CCP has said that it has high hopes for Taiwanese, it should respect their bottom lines.

Michael Hsiao is director of Academia Sinica's Institute of Sociology.

Translated by Ethan Zhan

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