A Greater Chinese Union

China needs a new approach to its most challenging dilemma: Taiwan's unresolved future. Tensions across the Taiwan Strait continue to adversely affect China's domestic and foreign agenda by diverting Beijing's focus from modernization and impeding China's aspirations to be viewed as a constructive and responsible world power. Taiwan continues to be the straw that could break the Chinese camel's back.

Beijing has a golden opportunity to take a first step to fulfill its goal of reunification with Taiwan by utilizing the momentum generated by the historic visits of two Taiwanese opposition leaders to China in April and May 2005. By stretching out a genuine olive branch to independence-leaning Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian, Beijing could build on the goodwill of these visits and further dispel some of the negative consequences on the Taiwanese mindset caused by Beijing's passage of an antisecession law. The law, passed by the National People's Congress in March 2005, mandates the Chinese government to use nonpeaceful means if necessary to ensure that Taiwan does not attain formal independence. Predictably, polls in Taiwan show that the overwhelming majority of Taiwanese, regardless of their political affiliation or views on the desirability of unification, view the law as detrimental to cross-strait relations.¹ Beijing urgently needs to reverse this tide of negative sentiment among the Taiwanese if it wants to have any chance of achieving unification with Taiwan.

The current Chinese strategy, focused on maintaining the status quo and above all deterring de jure Taiwanese independence, cannot be viewed as an end in itself. Each political maneuver in Beijing or Taipei, in many instances initiated due to domestic concerns, is met with a countermaneuver by the

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other side, often further aggravating the situation. Each war of words has the potential to escalate into a conflict. China should genuinely confront the Taiwan challenge by proposing a political arrangement across the Taiwan Strait that would be beneficial for both parties to pursue. It is in Beijing's interests to take the initiative, move beyond the status quo, and propose a "Greater Chinese Union," an extremely loose form of political integration reminiscent of a federacy, in which Taiwan would be demilitarized

The Greater Chinese Union model proposed is consistent with a one China policy. but would enjoy substantially more international space—a prerequisite for Taiwanese acceptance of any form of political integration.² The island's demilitarization, as well its democracy, would be safeguarded through international guarantees.

Beijing, adamant that there is only one China, denies Taiwan the right to take part in the global community as a separate political entity. Chinese officials routinely harass, ostracize, and marginalize Taiwanese when they

attempt to participate in international events. According to Beijing, the 22 million residents of Taiwan—the vast majority of whom are well educated, enjoy a comfortable standard of living, and can elect their leaders democratically—should accept that Taiwan is a part of China and that the Beijing government alone has the right to represent China. That is unrealistic. If it wants to achieve its long-standing goal of unification, Beijing will have to make it possible for Taiwan to attain international respect and participate in the international community even if it is not an independent state. The government in Beijing must take the first step. The United States and the international community should encourage, cajole, and even pressure Beijing to do so. It is China, after all, that desperately seeks unification, not Taiwan.

Designing a Greater Chinese Union

For any peaceful settlement to be reached in the Taiwan Strait, "one China" has to be defined in the loosest of terms, along the lines that Beijing's new antisecession law spells out: there is only one China in the world, and both the mainland and Taiwan belong to that one China. The Greater Chinese Union model proposed is consistent with a one-China policy. It incorporates centuries-old Chinese practices of governance and political philosophy as well as elements of a federation, confederation, and federacy, the latter defined as "an asymmetrical relationship between a federated state and a larger federate power, providing for potential union on the basis of the feder-

ated state maintaining greater internal autonomy by forgoing certain forms of participation in the governance of the federate power."³ Federacy allows for a great deal of flexibility with regard to power allocation and institutional formation.⁴

Although the Greater Chinese Union model in its entirety has no modernday precedent, one of its characteristics defining security arrangements—the concept of demilitarization guaranteed by international treaty—currently constitutes the premise on which the federacy relationship between Finland and the Åland Islands is based.

Demilitarized Integration: The Finland-Åland Model

The Åland Islands are a group of ethnically Swedish and strategically located islands whose final decisionmaking powers are credibly divided, with the central government in Helsinki. The people inhabiting the Åland Islands have a strong local identity that sets them apart from the mainland Finnish identity. They predominantly speak only Swedish, unlike the Finnish majority, and mainland Finns are not allowed to own land in Åland. Åland has its own parliament, legislation, and tax laws but adheres to Helsinki's foreign policies. Finland and Åland both have a democratic system of government, admittedly a glaring difference when comparing the Finland-Åland relationship to that between mainland China and Taiwan.

The Council of the League of Nations approved the agreement on Åland's autonomy in 1921. A year later, a separate Åland Guarantee Act incorporated the agreement into the Finnish legal system, stipulating farreaching provisions protecting Åland residents' rights concerning language, provincial citizenship, and land ownership. The 1921 agreement included the possibility of Åland's applying to the Council of the League of Nations for membership. Under pressure from Finland, however, it never did. The Åland Islands were demilitarized with international guarantees because of their strategic location. Located between Sweden and Finland at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia, they dominate access to St. Petersburg, Russia, and are therefore of potential importance to Sweden, Finland, and Russia. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Åland Islands were described as a "pistol aimed at the heart of Sweden," just as Taiwan would be perceived by Japan if forces under the control of the People's Liberation Army were to be stationed on Taiwan.⁵

Although Finland handles Åland's foreign affairs, the Åland Islands are represented separately in the Nordic Council, a forum for interparliamentary cooperation among Nordic countries. Åland vessels use the Åland flag, Åland has its own postal stamps, and people holding the separate Åland regional citizenship carry Finnish/EU passports marked with the word "Åland."⁶

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Although the Åland Islands are demilitarized, Finland still has the right to defend them. Åland has no naval or army bases, and the Finnish naval and air forces are responsible for surveillance of the area and defending the islands against military aggression.⁷ Finland is legally bound to demilitarization through formally specified mutual assent provisions, which cannot be altered except through majority agreement of the legislatures of the central

Finland and the Åland Islands provide a precedent for internationally guaranteed demilitarization. government in Helsinki as well as the federacy government in Åland.⁸

Could Taiwan be similarly demilitarized by an international treaty? This question may seem rather far-fetched. Not only does Beijing dismiss the idea of Taiwan's demilitarization as a breach of China's sovereignty, but China also officially rejects the need for international guarantees for Taiwan's security. Yet, discussions with Chinese officials and scholars have revealed that at least researchers in Beijing's think tanks are considering accommodating

Taiwan's security concerns by some form of loosely worded international guarantee. Although one Chinese ministry official first stated that "China would not accept the kind of hands-on international guarantees that have been applicable in the Balkans, for example, Kosovo," he went on to say, "But could Beijing one day in the future accept a statement or document approved by the United Nations General Assembly, which acknowledges a treaty negotiated between both sides of the Taiwan Strait? If that would resolve China's long-standing desire to achieve some form of unification? Certainly."⁹

If Taiwan were to be demilitarized, with China retaining the right to defend the island from attack, it would have profound implications for the South China Sea and could reassure the security concerns of a unified China's neighbors, especially those of Japan and Korea. The notion of demilitarization guaranteed by international treaty fits into several proposals, including one put forth by Chen in May 2004 for transforming the Taiwan Strait into a "peace zone."

Taiwan's demilitarization would also address Beijing's security concerns. Despite outsiders' claims to the contrary, the goal of reunification is not merely a reflection of Beijing's obsession with nationalism. Taiwan is located some 200 kilometers from the mainland. It would be unreasonable to expect China to accept a full-fledged sovereign Taiwan that would have the option of making its territory available to other states, such as the United States or Japan. Even as part of a Greater Chinese Union, Taiwan could legitimately be expected to continue to demand security guarantees from the United States and possibly from the international community as well. The Taiwan Relations Act would have to be revised, or the U.S. Congress would have to pass a similar act to indicate that the United States acknowledges the formation of a Greater Chinese Union with a demilitarized Taiwan as one party of the new entity. The United Nations would be a natural second guarantor.

ASYMMETRIC INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION

To achieve political integration, China should pave the way for Taiwanese representatives from a Greater Chinese Union to participate in the UN. Such representation would go a long way toward satisfying popular demands to acknowledge Taiwan's special status in the world and would fulfill the of-ten-stated requirement that unification must give Taiwan "something it does not already have."¹⁰ UN membership could conceivably serve as an incentive for a majority of Taiwanese to accept a form of loose political integration with the mainland.

In this scenario, the Chinese seat in the UN, which the People's Republic of China has held since 1971, would be occupied by a representative of the Greater Chinese Union. Beijing would remain the sole representative of the Chinese seat in the General Assembly and Security Council, but the delegation to the General Assembly would include Taiwanese delegates. In the UN's suborganizations and specialized agencies falling under the Economic and Social Council, such as the World Health Organization, the UN Children's Fund, and the UN Development Program, Taiwan would have its own separate delegation or at least observer status, which could be called "Taiwan, Greater Chinese Union." At present, 17 entities and intergovernmental organizations have received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and in the work of the General Assembly and maintain permanent offices at UN headquarters in New York.¹¹ Even though only one of these entities (Palestine) is in any form reminiscent of Taiwan, China, as a member of the Security Council, would have the clout necessary to take the initiative to modify any existing rules that stand in the way of facilitating Taiwan's participation.

The same formula of asymmetry could be applied to participation in other international organizations or in regional settings, such as summit meetings of ASEAN Plus Three (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan, and South Korea) and the APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) forum. Taiwan could either be represented alongside representatives of the mainland as part of a Greater Chinese Union delegation or separately as "Taiwan, Greater Chinese Union." Under that name, Taiwan

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could have its own representatives within diplomatic missions or establish separate general consulates and trade and cultural affairs offices, but not embassies. China's need to maintain the image of one China would be satisfied as long as each world capital had only one Chinese embassy. By maintaining an asymmetric relationship in international affairs, Beijing would be the more powerful component in the Greater Chinese Union.

FORM BEFORE SUBSTANCE: SAVING FACE

The Greater Chinese Union model also draws upon centuries-old Chinese practices of governance and political philosophy. Any viable political solution in the Taiwan Strait will require an elastic interpretation of what it means to

UN participation could serve as an incentive for Taiwan to accept a form of integration. be Chinese, in which ritual and appearance are more profound than is actual substance. Social institutions and the importance of ceremony are part of the glue that has held the Chinese together over the millennia. In the far-flung corners of the vast Chinese empire, Chinese identity "involved no conversion to a received dogma, no professions of belief in a creed or a set of ideas."¹² Rather, it stressed ritual form. The Confucian concept of *li*, defined as civility or ritual behavior, had an institutionalized role

in the state and implied acceptance of a mutual set of understandings that allows peaceful interaction even when people disagree.¹³

China has traditionally had a dual approach to governance, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the last imperial dynasty, the Qing, when the empire expanded significantly. Officials engaged in direct administration whenever possible. Where circumstances were not suitable for direct administration of an area, usually because of long distances or cultural incompatibilities between the local residents and imperial rulers, imperial governance was implemented indirectly. In this case, a highly refined system of ceremonial protocols bound the local leader to the emperor's authority and, by conferring a noble title, delegated responsibility to him.¹⁴

Deriving inspiration from imperial China's philosophy of multilayered governance, political integration across the Taiwan Strait would be based on the loosest of loose federation models in which form would be more important than substance. In a Greater Chinese Union, each side would retain a high level of independence in managing its own affairs. Taiwan would give Beijing face by acknowledging this sense of belonging to a Greater Chinese Union in return for Beijing's acknowledgment of Taiwan's need not only to safeguard its political system and way of life but also to enjoy more international space. The Greater Chinese Union would be formally administered by a Supreme Council holding annual ritualistic meetings, perhaps scheduled on the birthday of modern China's founder, Sun Yat-sen, a revolutionary leader revered on both sides of the Taiwan Strait; on the anniversary of the May 4th Movement, which is commemorated on both sides; on Confucius's birthday; or on specific occasions designed to officially announce a prenegotiated cooperative project. China and Taiwan would be equal political entities in this largely ceremonial Greater Chinese Union, which could have all of the symbolic trappings necessary to facilitate the image of a unified China, such as its own anthem and its own flag. Both China and Taiwan would be represented on the Supreme Council, with each entity responsible for the jurisdiction and governance of its own territory, just as they are de facto today.

The Unsustainable Status Quo

Without a doubt, Taiwan is today a de facto independent society, with its own army, political system, and currency. At the same time, Taiwan lacks de jure independence and is, to a large degree, isolated in the international arena as a result of Beijing's opposition. The status quo across the Taiwan Strait, however, is not static. The situation consists of an evolving set of conditions in a dynamic environment. Taiwan's status is open to interpretation, depending on whether the view is coming from Beijing or Taipei.

Many observers warn that the risk of armed conflict across the Taiwan Strait has grown, partly based on the perception that Chen has been rocking the boat and jeopardizing peace. Chen asserts that Taiwan is not only a separate political entity from China but also an independent sovereign country, the Republic of China (ROC). The seat of the ROC, founded in 1911, moved to Taipei in 1949 when Chiang Kai-shek lost the civil war to the Communists. During Chen's first term of office, "Taiwan" was added to Taiwanese passports and a new law facilitating referendum was passed. Moreover, Chen proclaimed that a new constitution should be drafted to strengthen Taiwan's democracy. Although Chen succumbed to pressure from Washington and discarded his initial plan to have a new constitution approved by referendum in 2004, he continues to advocate it, well aware that Beijing considers such a move a step toward Taiwanese independence.

Although Chen will do his utmost to cement Taiwan's separate status further during his last term in office, Beijing shares the blame for current tensions. Every month, China takes its own unilateral steps by deploying new missiles on the mainland coast facing Taiwan. The Taiwanese naturally feel threatened and marginalized. The antisecession law mandating the use of force only strengthened the feeling among the Taiwanese that Beijing is not sincere in its promises that it will "do its utmost with maximum sincerity to achieve peaceful reunification," as the law itself claims. Moreover, the Chinese leadership skillfully manipulates the outside world, including the United States, by leveraging its growing global influence and Washington's need for Beijing's support in the war against terrorism as well as its dealings with North Korea. Whenever Chen makes a move that Beijing staunchly opposes, U.S. officials from President George W. Bush down hasten to reiterate that the United States does not want to see Taiwan taking unilateral steps to change the status quo.

China currently seeks unification with Taiwan based on an integration model that was used in 1997 to return Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty—the "one country, two systems" formula. Under this model, the people of Hong Kong were promised a high degree of autonomy in matters pertaining to Hong Kong's governance and assured that its separate political system would be safeguarded for 50 years. Beijing's actions to curb political reform in Hong Kong during the past two years, however, have convinced the Taiwanese that, contrary to rhetoric, this model does not genuinely allow two different political systems to exist within the framework of one country. Beijing has to discard the one country, two systems formula. It is a nonstarter for the Taiwanese. It is unrealistic to presume that Taiwanese society will change so dramatically as to prompt the majority voluntarily to accept unification based on the one country, two systems model.

In off-the-record conversations, several researchers and midlevel officials in Beijing admit that the current model needs to be replaced. Various levels of the Chinese central government have commissioned a number of research institutes on the mainland to contemplate alternatives. There is evidence that at least thinking, if not politics, may be changing in Beijing. Despite the dismay that the clause stipulating the use of force in Beijing's antisecession law evoked in Taiwan, other clauses of the new law were clearly worded to portray Beijing's leaders' willingness to compromise. For example, the one country, two systems model was not mentioned in the law. Instead, "flexible and varied modalities" were proposed. In addition, the law stated that reunification should be achieved through negotiations on an equal footing between the two sides, a prerequisite that Taiwan has persistently demanded and to which China has been reluctant to concede.

Why a Greater Chinese Union?

The heightened sense of anxiety in Taiwan following the passage of the Chinese antisecession law serves as an apt reminder that small-scale crises, often stemming from domestic concerns, could rapidly snowball into a catastrophe. Discord over Taiwan's unresolved status will not disappear. Political tensions remain potentially explosive despite deepening economic integration across the Taiwan Strait. The need for a political settlement grows with each passing crisis.

BEIJING'S PERSPECTIVE

Why should Beijing be willing to accept a Greater Chinese Union as a model of unification with Taiwan? The short answer is that Beijing's leaders desperately need to maintain peace. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership is facing tremendous challenges,

including rising unemployment, a growing income gap, rampant corruption, and environmental degradation, to mention just a few. Ordinary Chinese across the country are protesting against social injustice in increasing numbers.¹⁵ These problems alone pose a viable threat both to stability and to Communist Party rule in this vast country of 1.3 billion. The shaky foundation on which the

The model draws on centuries of Chinese governance and political philosophy.

CCP's legitimacy rests could also be tipped by the Taiwan issue. Trying both to manage the domestic agenda and maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait will, in the long run, prove too difficult a balancing act.

Taiwan is intricately intertwined in the Chinese psyche. Chinese leaders have made Taiwan a question of life and death because the goal of unification is directly linked with national identity and China's ability to overcome the stigma left by a century and a half of humiliation and weakness. If the status quo in the Taiwan Strait is allowed to continue, the level of tension will escalate, with each war of words making military conflict more possible. In a crisis, the probability that China would use force grows for two reasons. First, an independence-minded leader in Taiwan could use a domestic crisis in Beijing as an opportunity to try and cement the island's separate status, forcing China's leaders into a corner at a time when differences in opinion among them are already fraught with tension. Second, every top leader in Beijing will do the utmost to avoid appearing weak.

This near-obsessive fear among Beijing's leaders of losing face on the question of Taiwan's unresolved status will continue to strain cross-strait relations. A plausible explanation for Beijing's decision to pursue the antisecession law was Chinese president Hu Jintao's need in the spring of 2004 to prove his credentials as a strong leader. At the time, his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, had not yet agreed to let Hu take over the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (he did so in September 2004). The process of drafting the law was set in motion at that time when Chen was also very vo-cal about his intention to have a new Taiwanese constitution drafted, and Beijing assumed that Chen's party would gain a majority in the December 2004 legislative elections. Although this prediction did not materialize, it was too late for Hu to stop the drafting process seven months later for fear of appearing weak.

In reality, China is in a state of perpetual crisis as a consequence of rapid economic growth and societal transformation. In an acute situation, numerous domestic constituencies will use any approach that is perceived to be soft on Taiwan to criticize or undermine the country's political leadership further. The CCP leadership should seek to resolve its paramount goal of unification simply as a means to eradicate a highly explosive source of domestic friction. The emotionally charged issue of Taiwan is too powerful a weapon to be left lying on the table.

TAIPEI'S PERSPECTIVE

A Greater Chinese Union offers Taiwan peace as well. It would eradicate the cloud of continuous uncertainty that hangs over Taiwanese society today. It would make Taiwanese business investments in China more secure and would encourage deeper economic integration with the mainland from which Taiwan stands to benefit. The formation of a Greater Chinese Union would facilitate Taiwan's participation in UN suborganizations from which it has been barred for more than 30 years. The union would offer an opportunity for the Taiwanese, who crave more international space both as individuals and collectively, to feel that their society has a respected place within the international community.

A Greater Chinese Union is the best that Taiwan can hope for, taking into account the reality of the island's geography. Regardless of changes that may take place in Beijing and of what kind of regime is in power, it is inconceivable that any top leader in China in the next 25 years could accept a de jure sovereign Taiwan that has full international recognition. This would be as unrealistic as it would be to expect Taiwan to accept the one county, two systems model as the basis for its future. The Taiwanese must accept, however, that achieving peace means agreeing to the notion that, in one form or another, their destiny is linked to that of mainland China. Even Chen has not ruled out the notion of political integration¹⁶ in the long term.

A Greater Chinese Union would also address the fear of many Taiwanese that their society is becoming marginalized to the point of insignificance. Allaying these fears alone could make an extremely loose form of political integration acceptable to the majority of Taiwanese voters, although diehard advocates for independence will always exist. If China's economy expands and its international standing grows stronger, Taiwan will find fewer and fewer foreign sympathizers and increasingly will become economically dependent on the mainland. The lure of belonging to a "Greater China" could appeal to Taiwanese artists, entertainers, academics, scientists, and diplomats seeking a global audience and international acclaim.

Sovereignty with Chinese Characteristics

Developing a national identity is an evolving, never-ending process. Leadership matters. A Taiwanese president intent on finding a peaceful solution to the impasse in the Taiwan Strait would emphasize a multidimensional or a multi-Chinese identity, embracing several unique Chinese identities, rather than a distinct Taiwanese one.¹⁷ After all, the vast majority of Taiwanese continues to speak many of the same dialects, pray to many of the same dei-

ties, and eat many of the same delicacies as do mainland Chinese living across the strait in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. The social and cultural base of Taiwan is unmistakably Chinese.

Finding a formula for political union across the Taiwan Strait is feasible, as long as both sides are genuinely interested in finding a solution and are willing to compromise in a creative manner. At present, a po-

litical settlement seems unlikely because both sides are stuck in a rut, in part constrained by domestic constituencies and in part as a result of the leaderships' emphasis on identity politics. The thorniest issue relates to sovereignty, but international interpretations of sovereignty also evolve. Even though Beijing claims to be adamant in its refusal to make any concessions over sovereignty in dealing with Taiwan, Beijing's actual behavior in the past two decades reveals a pragmatic approach to sovereignty when it is in China's best interests to do so.

During the past 20 years, China has already shown increasing flexibility in its previously rigid practice of sovereignty, by integrating itself into the international system through joining international organizations, ratifying international treaties, and making concessions to global economic forces. Because of its membership in the World Trade Organization, for example, China has relinquished some of its economic sovereignty. In addition, China has signed international treaties on human rights, acknowledging, even if not complying with, the notion of respect for universal human rights across territorial boundaries. When the goal of reunification with Hong Kong was given top priority, China was prepared to adopt a pragmatic approach and conceded some of its sovereignty, but not as much as it will have to concede

I he one country, two systems formula is a nonstarter for the Taiwanese. to unify with Taiwan. For a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan question, China must be prepared to compromise and negotiate further and share its national sovereignty.¹⁸

Of course, it would be naïve to expect China to accept a postmodern view of sovereignty overnight, but proposing a new model for political integration

Beijing's behavior in the past two decades reveals a pragmatic approach to sovereignty. and actually achieving consensus across the Taiwan Strait to implement political integration are two separate processes. Simply proposing a Greater Chinese Union could conceivably set in motion the process of normalizing political relations between Beijing and Taipei, which would then help markedly decrease tensions across the Taiwan Strait. Actually reaching a consensus on the details of political integration will probably take several years, perhaps even a decade. By replacing the defunct one country,

two systems model with a Greater Chinese Union, Beijing would undermine independence activists in Taiwan, address the concerns of many middle-ofthe-road Taiwanese voters, and put pressure squarely on Chen to seek constructive ties with Beijing.

Notes

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- 9. Unnamed Chinese official, interview with author, Beijing, 2003.
- 10. Unnamed Taiwanese officials, interviews with author, Taipei, 2002–2003.
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- 14. Thomas Bartlett, "The Role of History in China's View of the World Today," *Pacific Review* 13, no. 1 (February 2001): 118.
- 15. See Murray Scot Tanner, "China Rethinks Unrest," *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 137–156.
- 16. Chen has spoken of long-term "political integration" (*zhengzhi tonghe*), not "unification" (*tongyi*). Although the concepts are different, in Chinese they share one common character (*tong*).
- Linda Jakobson, "Taiwan's Unresolved Status: Visions for the Future and Implications for EU Foreign Policy," *FIIA Report*, no. 8, 2004, p. 45, www.upi-fiia.fi/julkaisut/upi_raportti/ raportit/FIIA%20Report%208.pdf.
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