

The Formation of the “2021 Arrangement” regarding Taiwan

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The year 2021 was a year of major shifts in international politics surrounding Taiwan. China’s military threats escalated in response to Taiwan’s refusal to accept unification. The United States stepped up its support for Taiwan’s defense in order to deter China’s use of force. Japan, too, began to take precautions against a contingency in the Taiwan Strait. The series of developments surrounding Taiwan seem to have changed the framework of the “1972 arrangement,” which had lasted for 50 years. The new framework could be called the “2021 arrangement.” With this in mind, the author would like to summarize what has changed in the intervening years and what continued to change in 2021.

The “1972 Arrangement”

International politics surrounding Taiwan have undergone major changes since the 1970s. In the 1970s, new frameworks for U.S.-China and U.S.-Taiwan relations as well as for Japan-China and Japan-Taiwan relations were formed. The 1972 U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqué and the Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People’s Republic of China set the direction for the new frameworks. Since then, the international situation surrounding Taiwan stabilized for a long period of time and an international arrangement regarding Taiwan was formed. This is the “1972 arrangement.”¹

In the “1972 arrangement,” the People’s Republic of China’s “one China” claim was largely accepted, and Republic of China (Taiwan) was pushed to the margins of international politics; however, the fact that China did not govern Taiwan remained unchanged. Taiwan was able to develop its economy, achieve democracy, and survive in that small space.

The United States and Japan broke off relations with Taiwan but continued economic and social exchange.² This allowed Taiwan to develop the ability to maintain the status quo. China did not have

¹ Wakabayashi Masahiro, “Taiwan no seiji: chuka minkoku taiwan ka no sengo shi [Politics of Taiwan: A Postwar History of the Taiwanization of the Republic of China], (translated by author)” (University of Tokyo Press, 2008), and Kawashima Shin, Shimizu Urara, Matsuda Yasuhiro, and Yang Yongming, “Nichi-tai kankei shi [A History of Taiwan-Japan Relations 1945: 2020 Expanded Edition],” (translated by the author) (University of Tokyo Press, 2020).

² Japan normalized diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1972, at the same time as the Joint

the power to force the U.S. and Japan to stop private exchanges with Taiwan. In addition, although China's goal of Taiwan unification has been consistent since that time, China did not have the ability to make Taiwan, which had its own independent state apparatus and military, accept unification. Thus, the "1972 arrangement," which was initially seen as a provisional framework, was fixed as the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and continued for almost 50 years.

50 Years of Change

The "1972 arrangement" is (1) a framework in line with the "one-China principle" asserted by China, but (2) a situation in which Taiwan is not governed by the People's Republic of China. A delicate balance was formed when Deng Xiaoping announced "peaceful unification" and Japan and the United States gave a certain amount of consideration to China on the Taiwan issue. However, over the past 50 years, three changes have occurred: (1) Taiwan's democratization, (2) China's growing national power, and (3) the decline of U.S. influence.

In 1972, Taiwan was under the one-party rule of the Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the ideology of "Taiwan is part of China and all people in Taiwan are Chinese" (Chinese nationalism) permeated from above. Fifty years later, the number of people in Taiwan who support unification with China has decreased to 15.6%,³ and the number of people who self-identify as Chinese⁴ has decreased to 3.6%. Any survey clearly shows that the Taiwan public does not want unification led by the Chinese Communist Party.

As the CCP promoted reform and opening-up and achieved economic growth, it placed greater emphasis on Chinese nationalism as a pillar of its ideology. The value of absorbing Taiwan and achieving the complete unification of the motherland increased. During Jiang Zemin's reign, the country was poised to bring in Taiwanese companies, forge closer economic ties between China and Taiwan, and incorporate Taiwan. During Hu Jintao's reign, by putting "peaceful development of cross-strait relations" in the foreground, the impression was created that unification was not urgent, and to some extent this succeeded in lowering Taiwan's sense of caution. This led to the emergence and re-election of the KMT government of Ma Ying-jeou. However, this did not mean that any concrete institutional progress was made toward unification. The man who was not satisfied with that was Xi Jinping.

Statement, while the U.S. normalized diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1979, after a time lag from the first Joint Statement. Although Japan broke off diplomatic relations with the ROC government, it created a framework that allowed it to continue exchanges with Taiwan as a "region," and the U.S. used that approach to maintain real relations with Taiwan.

³ The average of the United Daily News' 10-year opinion polls from 2010 to 2019. The 10-year average of support for independence in the same survey is 29.3%, and the average of support for the status quo is 49.4%.

⁴ Average of 10-year public opinion surveys from 2010 to 2019 by the Election Research Center of the National Chengchi University. The average of self-identification as "Taiwanese" in the same survey was 56.3%, and the average of self-identification as both Taiwanese and Chinese was 36.4% (Ogasawara Yoshiyuki, "An Overview of Seven Taiwanese Presidential Elections," *Journal of the Japan Society for Taiwan Studies*, No. 23, 2021).

The Xi Jinping Regime

Although Xi Jinping has expressed a strong will for unification with Taiwan and has emphasized cross-strait ethnic ties under the slogans of “Cross-Strait Unity” and “Spiritual Harmony,” he has not listened to Taiwan’s voice. Early on after seizing power, Xi Jinping expressed his determination to resolve the Taiwan issue during his term in office (meeting with former Vice President Siew Wanchang in 2013) and to promote “one country, two systems” (meeting with pro-unification groups in Taiwan in 2014). Both of these are claims that Hu Jintao avoided mentioning in his speeches to Taiwan in consideration of Taiwan’s opposition.

Xi Jinping used his powerful political power to shake Ma Ying-jeou, whose support base had weakened in his second term in power, and succeeded in winning over the KMT. However, as a result, the voters in Taiwan elected the DPP to power because of its uncompromising stance toward China. This is normal in a democracy where the government is decided by elections, but China does not understand this mechanism.

In her inaugural speech in May 2016, Tsai Ing-wen made some last-minute concessions as the DPP government, such as maintaining the framework of the Republic of China and respecting the understanding that emerged in 1992,” but she did not mention the 1992 Consensus itself. The Xi Jinping administration shut down the dialogue because it was insufficient.

Xi Jinping’s policy toward Taiwan has been based on two pillars: pressure and intimidation through hard power, and inclusion through soft power. However, with regard to the former, Taiwan has grown “accustomed” to intimidation, and with regard to the latter, the attractiveness of the benevolent Taiwan policy has been limited, and neither has been successful.

In an important speech in January 2019, Xi Jinping expressed his strong determination to unify Taiwan in the context of “one country, two systems” and that he would “never promise to abandon the use of force,” putting psychological pressure on Taiwan. In response, Tsai Ing-wen contested the 2020 presidential election on a platform of rejecting “one country, two systems” and was re-elected with the largest number of votes in Taiwan’s electoral history. The more effort Xi Jinping put into his campaign, the further away from unification Taiwan became. The “Taiwan identity” has solidified, and now there is little chance that Taiwan will be persuaded by China to accept unification. Therefore, Xi Jinping’s policy toward Taiwan has shifted to “forcible peaceful unification,” in which force is used to force peaceful unification. In the future, China’s basic aim will be to further intensify pressure on Taiwan, frighten Taiwan by demonstrating its military offensive capabilities, force the United States and Japan to back down, and force Taiwan to come to the table for unification negotiations.

The Biden Administration

Since the latter half of the Trump administration, the United States has launched a series of policies that emphasize Taiwan. U.S. growing involvement in Taiwan is occurring in multiple layers, including the government, Congress, and public opinion, and is no longer a trend of one political party and one

administration.⁵

The Biden administration, which began in January 2021, has taken a course of restraining China by getting involved in Taiwan while cooperating with its allies. This has been embodied in the Japan-U.S. 2+2 summit in March, the Japan-U.S. summit in April, the G7 summit in June, the launch of AUKUS in September, and the Quad summit in the same month.

There is a view that these talks are not capable of countering China, as there are varying degrees of awareness toward China and some of them do not mention Taiwan. However, the multilayered accumulation of individual parts provides a framework for watching China's activities and makes it difficult for China to move.

In November 2021, President Biden and President Xi had an online meeting. Xi warned that “repeated attempts by the Taiwan authorities to look for US support for their independence agenda as well as the intention of some Americans to use Taiwan to contain China ... are extremely dangerous, just like playing with fire. Whoever plays with fire will get burnt.” Biden expressed that he “strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo... in the Taiwan Strait.

Xi Jinping said the “one-China principle” is the political foundation of U.S.-China relations, and successive U.S. governments have explicitly agreed to it. Biden said he would continue to adhere to the “one-China policy” as stipulated in the Taiwan Relations Act, the three joint statements and the Six Assurances.⁶ According to the Chinese announcement, Biden “stated that he does not support Taiwan’s independence.”

If we look at this point alone, it appears that the framework of the Biden administration’s policy toward Taiwan has not changed. However, this is a superficial view. The point is how the “one-China policy” is used. When successive U.S. administrations up to the Obama administration emphasized the “one-China policy,” they gave a certain amount of consideration to China and used it in the sense of giving Taiwan a cold shoulder. On the other hand, the Biden administration’s policy is to recognize Taiwan’s international presence to a certain extent within the framework of the status quo and to strengthen Taiwan’s self-defense and defense capabilities. The “one-China policy” is used in a way that encompasses this.

This can be seen as intended to have the effect of not inviting an extreme reaction from China. In other words, the Biden administration’s “one-China policy” functions like a “charm” or “self-

⁵ Sahashi Ryo, “Bei chu tairitsu” [U.S.-China Confrontation: America’s Strategic Shift and the Divided World], (translated by the author) *Chuokoron sha*, 20212006.

⁶ For more information on China’s “One China Principle” and the U.S. “One China Policy,” see Ogasawara Yoshiyuki, “Hitotsu no chugoku gensoku to hitotsu no chugoku seisaku no chigai” [The Difference between the ‘One China Principle’ and the ‘One China Policy’] [Ogasawara HP] (translated by the author), http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/ogasawara/analysis/one_china_principle_and_policy.html for more information.

defense card.” China is very annoyed, but it will not openly overturn the negotiating table because it is better than having the “one-China policy” itself abandoned.

Movement in the International Community

The year 2021 was characterized by growing support for Taiwan in the international community: the recognition of Taiwan’s efforts to contain the spread of the Novel Coronavirus in 2020 led to a growing interest in Taiwan’s democracy and notice of threats from China, which became a trend in 2021.

As a result of Taiwan’s provision of masks, EU leaders, ministers, American celebrities, and other people who had rarely mentioned Taiwan before expressed their gratitude and praise for Taiwan on social networking sites.

In August 2020, Czech Senate Speaker Vystreil visited Taiwan and expressed solidarity with Taiwan, saying, “I am a Taiwanese.” China strongly accused the Czech Republic of “crossing the line” (Foreign Minister Wang Yi), and it was reported that the Czech Republic partially retaliated, but it seems that this did not hurt the Czech Republic.

In 2021, Lithuania and Taiwan agreed to mutually establishing representative organizations, and in November of the same year, the “Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania” was opened in Vilnius. China severely criticized Lithuania’s decision to open a representative office in the name of Taiwan, and downgraded the Chinese representative in Lithuania from “ambassador” to “deputy minister.” There are also reports that China has imposed sanctions on Lithuanian companies operating in China.

In response to these acts of Chinese retaliation, Lithuania’s prime minister and foreign minister criticized China’s pressure and stated that Lithuania would continue to develop relations with Taiwan. The importance of relations with Taiwan can also be seen in Slovakia. These small countries in Central Europe and the Baltics express the idea of “working together against authoritarian powers” (statements by politicians in Lithuania and the Czech Republic). These efforts are also having an impact on the EU.

In October, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel jointly issued a letter expressing regret over China’s pressure on Lithuania. Also in October, the European Parliament overwhelmingly passed a report calling on the EU to strengthen relations with Taiwan. The report also calls for a response to the military pressure that Taiwan is facing from China. Commenting on the resolution, a Swedish member of the European Parliament noted that “Taiwan is to be commended not only for being a model of democracy in East Asia, but also for being a champion of the rights of sexual minorities (LGBTQ+).

In October of the same year, Taiwan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jaushieh Joseph Wu (equivalent to Foreign Minister), visited Brussels and met with members of the European Parliament. In November, a delegation of members of the European Parliament visited Taiwan for the first time and met with President Tsai Ing-wen and others. It is interesting to note that both Lithuania and the

EU have stated that their exchanges with Taiwan do not violate their respective “one China policy.” This can be seen as a mimicry of the Biden administration’s use of the “one-China policy.”

Conclusion: Characteristics of the “2021 arrangement”

As described above, the international politics surrounding Taiwan moved significantly in 2021, and a new framework that could be called the “2021 arrangement” was formed. I would like to summarize the features of this framework.

(1) Formation of a loose coalition to deter armed attacks by China

This is a framework in which the U.S., conscious of the need to deter a Chinese armed attack on Taiwan, loosely cooperates with Japan, Australia, and European countries such as the United Kingdom. This is not so strong that it could be called “encircling China,” nor can individual alliances counter China. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it has become more difficult for China. Perhaps the characteristic of the “2021 arrangement” is to form a loose deterrence by incorporating loosely coordinated parts in a multilayered manner. In the 1972 arrangement, little thought was given to deterring China’s armed aggression. Although the U.S. began to focus on Taiwan in 2018, it would not be until 2021 that such cooperation was expressed in the form of a joint statement.

(2) Allow Taiwan a certain presence

Taiwan’s international presence was restricted under the “1972 arrangement” and, although it expanded under the “2021 arrangement,” it is still limited. Japan, the United States, Australia, and Europe have not abandoned the “one-China policy.” Therefore, they do not support Taiwan’s independence, nor do they support Taiwan’s full membership in the United Nations. Up to this point, the “1972 arrangement” has continued. However, in the “2021 arrangement,” the U.S., Japan, Australia, Europe, and other countries are encouraging Taiwan’s observer participation in the WHO, ICAO, and other UN-related organizations. In order to create international space for Taiwan, Secretary of State Blinken uses the phrase “support for meaningful participation in the UN system.” And the Biden administration has invited Taiwan to participate in a new international conference called the “Summit for Democracy.” Allowing Taiwan to have a certain presence will lead to greater interest in and support for Taiwan in the international community and contribute to a loose deterrence. The function of the “one-China policy” has changed from “treating Taiwan coldly” to “allowing Taiwan a certain presence.”

(3) China steps up military threats

In the first five days of October, 150 Chinese military aircraft entered Taiwan’s ADIZ. China has also increased its military capabilities to project toward Taiwan, including the construction and training of amphibious assault ships, and is stepping up its pressure. However, China has carefully avoided any action that could lead to war. It has avoided penetrating Taiwan’s territorial waters and airspace. For

China, the cost and risk of a Taiwan invasion operation remains too high. However, this is due to the deterrence of the U.S. and Japan and the monitoring of the international community, and if these are weakened, China will probably move its military. China's attempt at "forced peaceful unification" will be part of the characteristics of the "2021 arrangement."

The "2021 arrangement" inherits the outer framework of the "1972 arrangement" but reconfigures its contents. In the "1972 arrangement," Japan, the United States, and China agreed on a framework, but there is no agreement in the "2021 arrangement." China's intention to unify Taiwan is serious. In order to respond to this, the U.S., Japan, Australia, and Europe have formed a loose alliance to stare down China. Hereafter, as the stage is moving on according to the power relations and tactics, the sense of crisis could heighten at any time. However, China also has no choice but to calculate the costs and risks of using force, so deterrence will be possible until the last moment. The question of how to maintain this balance will be of vital importance to Japan.

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