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Taipei city night with famous landmark, 101 skyscraper, under blue and dramatic colorful sky in Taiwan, Asia.

Canada needs a *Taiwan Relations Act*

Author Dean Karalekas, an adjunct professor at Taiwan's National Chengchi University suggests that Taipei is starved for international attention and would be extremely responsive to overtures from Canada aimed at boosting bilateral relations. Karalekas makes the case for a Taiwan Relations Act modeled on one passed by the US Congress in 1979 and on one currently being explored by Japanese lawmakers. Karalekas argues that allowing fear of Beijing's reaction to deter us from enhancing relations with Taiwan would be misguided and points to Singapore as an example of a country that has managed to maintain relations with both Beijing and Taipei.

Dean Karalekas

In its early years, the Harper government vowed to make democracy promotion a larger part of its foreign policy agenda, and its approach to the People's Republic of China (PRC) reflected that intention. The turn toward Beijing that began in late 2008, and intensified in 2009, has had many questioning the underlying philosophy guiding policy. The Harper government's failure to enunciate a concrete China policy is not necessarily a bad thing — at best, it approximates in effect the

strategic ambiguity embraced by Washington on the Taiwan Strait issue, and thus can lead to greater stability in the region. Unfortunately it can also lead to an ad hoc approach that does disservice to the importance of this relationship.

Canada's greatest advantage in its relationship with the PRC is, in fact, not one for which the government can take much credit: it is on the people-to-people level, with a great many Canadians having strong personal or professional ties with China. This, more than any official

banquet or high-level summit, reflects Canadian values and helps us to reach out to the people of China, who in the lack of a representative government, are the true subjects of our ties.

As Canadians, we like to think of our country as one whose foreign policy is driven primarily by the ideals of liberal internationalism, but historically we have failed to live up to these ideals when it comes to our government's foreign policy as regards the Middle Kingdom. If we are to rectify that situation, then the time has come to re-examine our approach to dealing with Beijing, and specifically our approach to Taiwan. It is for that reason that this discourse on Canada-Taiwan ties begins with a focus on our relationship with China.

By being more proactive in developing closer ties with Taipei, Ottawa would not only be practicing principled foreign policy, but it would increase our leverage with both Beijing and Taipei. China, it must be remembered, needs Canada more than Canada needs China.

It is in Canada's interests to have Taiwan remain in the American orbit. Like us, Taipei should continue to develop good relations with Beijing; like us, Taiwan should have a strong economic relationship with China, something short of outright dependence, as this leads to trust-building and reduced tensions. But Taiwan must not be so ostracized in the international community that it is left with no choice but to fall into the PRC orbit. There are many reasons for this, inter alia its key position in the First Island Chain.

And yet this is what many in the American commentariat would let happen when, like John J. Mearsheimer writing in *The National Interest* last month, they recommend a pre-emptive selling out of Taiwan to China in exchange for some goodwill from Beijing. This "Abandon Taiwan" school of thought emerges every few years, only to be shouted down by cooler, and more principled, heads. The observations of writers in the Abandon Taiwan School are not wrong, however: only their conclusions. It would perhaps be far more profitable to adopt an "Embrace Taiwan" approach as a means of instructing China, rather than attempting to mollify it.

In determining Taiwan policy, there are a few aspects of the situation that must be kept in mind. For one thing, and by now this point should be obvious, it is inextricably linked with China policy. Beijing's insistence on nations having a "One China" policy and its contention that Taiwan is rightfully a part of China — historically false, although that is an argument for another day — make this fact a necessity. In practice, this has meant a gradual reduction in the profile of Taiwan-Canada ties at a pace with the growth of the Ottawa-Beijing relationship.

Another is that we cannot treat Taiwan as a homogeneous set of

needs, intentions, and political and international aspirations. "Taiwan wants independence," we read, or "Taiwan has always been a part of China." Neither of these statements is accurate in that the polity's diversity and its competing identities, beliefs and hopes for the future make analysis difficult, and while exegetically useful at times, such simplifications can lead to the implementation of counterproductive policy.

That the nation's China and Taiwan policy are inseparable is a two-way street, and thus our ties with Taipei can be used to rectify certain deficiencies in our relationship with Beijing. Taking a broad perspective, since the 1990s, the argument has been that engaging China would turn that country into a responsible international stakeholder, and that our support of its economic growth would act as a catalyst for concomitant political liberalizations — after all, we had just witnessed the fall of European communism, and thus surely the end of the one-party state in Asia was likewise inevitable. We now know this was never the case, and we are left with an addiction to cheap manufactured goods and the uncomfortable dissonance of knowing that we assisted an authoritarian state to hone its ability to more efficiently oppress its own people.

By being more proactive in developing closer ties with Taipei, Ottawa would not only be practicing principled foreign policy, but it would increase our leverage with both Beijing and Taipei. China, it must be remembered, needs Canada more than Canada needs China. For one thing, its relationship with Canada confers international respectability on the regime, and as Bruce Gilley rightly points out, a moral agenda of liberal internationalism, on which much of our Canadian identity depends, is wholly consistent with China's needs.

Likewise with Taiwan: a de facto independent country — a democracy, no less — effectively ostracized from the international community. Taipei is starved for any international attention and therefore would be extremely responsive to overtures from Canada aimed at boosting bilateral relations.

What form could such overtures take? Overt support for Taiwan's inclusion in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, for one, as well as opening negotiations — albeit through the necessary Track II channels — on the sort of regulatory and procedural bilateral agreements that, while they barely make the news in Canada, are trumpeted loudly and proudly in recognition-starved Taiwan. These latter would be more symbolic than substantial, but then such is the language of diplomacy in East Asia.

The centerpiece of Ottawa's relationship with Taipei should be serious consideration devoted to the enactment of a *Canadian Taiwan Relations Act* (TRA), similar both to the one passed by the US Congress in 1979 and to one being considered right now by lawmakers from Japan's Liberal Democratic Party.

Of course, unlike the American TRA (and presumably the Japanese one being debated), this would not entail the sale of arms to Taiwan — Canada is not in the business of selling weapons — or even a directive for future governments to assist in the defense of the island should the Chinese attack. Rather, it would focus more on soft-power

aspects of the relationship, such as the initiation of military exchanges, intelligence-sharing, and public diplomacy.

Military exchanges would not run counter to Canada's One China policy — indeed, the ROC's closest military partner is Singapore, with the two sharing a high degree of cross-training and exchanges, including active-duty Singaporean soldiers training on Taiwanese soil. Obviously, Singapore's neutrality on the cross-strait issue has not led to blowback from China — Singapore is the PRC's biggest ASEAN trade partner, and is often held up by leaders in Beijing as an example of a democratic system for which China may strive. Clearly, Singapore has been able to resist Chinese pressure to sever all ties with Taiwan: surely Canada can do likewise, and slowly begin to institute modest military exchanges that would serve both as a confidence-building measure with our Pacific partners and as a message to Beijing about its actions in the region's littoral.

The benefit of these exchanges would be more on the person-to-person level and the transfer of experience, rather than of technology. There are a number of areas in which the ROC military would benefit from Canadian operational expertise, including but not restricted to command-and-control integration and cross-environmental joint operations.

The ROC military is currently on the cusp of major structural changes, including changes to the relationship it has with Taiwan's wider society. The major expression of this is in the stated goal of ending conscription and establishing an all-volunteer force. At the current time, the ROC is looking to the US military for a blueprint on how to make this transition. This overreliance on the American model is something of a default fallback position for many institutional initiatives in Taiwan. But for a number of reasons, including the relative economic resources, sizes and makeup of the militaries, as well as their primarily defensive nature, the Canadian Forces stands as a much better potential role model for Taiwan to emulate. Indeed, there are many more valuable and practical lessons that the Republic of China's military could learn from the armed forces of Canada than it could from the military of a global superpower, which has a very different mandate and a very different ethic.

In terms of intelligence sharing, Taiwan is already an integral component of our allies' efforts in the region, with the radar installation atop central Taiwan's Leshan Mountain — based on the USAF Pave Paws early warning radar system — going operational last year, as well as a history of supporting signals intelligence operations monitoring Chinese communications and activity.

China's espionage activities in Canada are perhaps more pervasive than any other country's, and are focused not — as is the mandated limit of many Western nation's intelligence agencies — solely to detect threats to the state, but to give Chinese businesses an unethical leg up by stealing industrial and corporate secrets from Canadian businesses. Taiwan is also on the receiving end of China's espionage efforts, but it has far more counter-intelligence experience and capacity to identify and deal with this particular threat — experience that Canada could leverage to protect its own citizens.

Indeed, even more robust intelligence gathering on Chinese firms of the sort Communications Security Establishment Canada is alleged to have conducted on actors in the Brazilian mining sector would not be amiss. These firms are, by the very fact of their success, akin to — if not overtly linked to — arms of the Chinese Party-State, and therefore valid targets against whom protection should not be deemed unethical.

Cultural exchanges are perhaps the most important aspect of our relations with Taiwan, as they should be in China as well. It is the citizen-centred, as opposed to government-centred, ties that confer legitimacy on our relationships abroad, and this is especially true in the Taiwan/China scenario. It has been said that as Canadians, our people are our best ambassadors: this is doubly true for the Taiwanese people, who are not constrained by the geopolitical necessities tying the hands of ROC government representatives.

More attention therefore must be paid to track II and III channels, making it easier for individuals and private groups to engage in cooperative engagements, cultural activities and exchanges of academics, businesspeople, nongovernmental organizations and individuals, the better to influence social change in line with our values — values that, by and large, this generation of Taiwanese already share. Furthermore, a Canadian Taiwan Relations Act (or indeed, even just raising the idea up the flagpole) would send a strong message to China about Canadian expectations regarding its responsible use of power.

China is the world's second largest economy: it is developing a blue-water navy, and — if the analysts are to be believed — it is poised to become the globe's next superpower. And yet its recent actions in the South and East China Seas, as well as its intentions on making Taiwan the next Tibet, speak to a worldview that is a century out of date. Canadians have never been squeamish about speaking truth to American power, so we should not shrink away from telling other powerful nations, including China, that we expect more mature and responsible behavior from them.

Ottawa must endeavor to maintain positive, fruitful relations with both Taiwan and China, driven by policy which reflects our values as Canadians. If China has reasonable objections, then these must be taken into account. But the emphasis is on the word reasonable.

Because of its precarious international position, Taipei is not going to initiate closer ties with Canada. It behooves Ottawa therefore to take the first step. Ultimately, there is only one argument against adopting such a principled foreign policy vis-à-vis Taiwan, and that is "it would upset Beijing." And that's not good enough. ❁

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