

A summary of Su Chi's presentation, March 20, 2023

The U.S., China's, and Taiwan's Choices of Core Policy Lines: Struggle, Procrastination, or Moderation

I. Taiwan's Choice: "Struggle"

--Ma administration moved from "Moderation" to "Procrastination."

--My personal thinking:

1. "Struggle" would lead to a divided Taiwan and dangerous Strait.
2. "Procrastination" would only postpone the final cross-strait showdown until a point when Taiwan becomes too weak to bargain.
3. "Moderation" and cross-strait negotiation is the best approach, but it requires three steps – forging "intra-party consensus," "inter-party consensus," and lastly, cross-strait negotiations.

In early 2014, I began to advocate openly the approach of "Moderation," based on the following reasoning:

1. China's new leader Xi Jinping was busy with anti-corruption drive, economic growth, and consolidation of his power.
2. On the occasion of meeting Wu Po-Hsiung, honorary chairman of the KMT, Xi declared that unification should be based on the "meeting of the minds and hearts" of the peoples of Taiwan and the Mainland. This was and still is the most moderate statement ever put out by PRC's top leader.
3. In terms of power balance, Taiwan still enjoyed some leverage at the time.

The Taipei Forum which I chaired began to sponsor quite a few activities, all covered widely by the media, that featured Blue/Green or even Blue/Green/Red cooperation, as shown in the photos. In one instance, I sponsored a conference in Taipei which managed to put together some Americans (including Richard Bush, Michael O'Hanlon) with Blue/Green/Red scholars in one forum, a first-ever and only occurrence thus far. Until that time, the Chinese scholars had refused to show up in Taipei in the same forum with the Americans. Unfortunately, since 2016, it has not been possible to sponsor these activities any more, as the DPP scholars declined to participate.

During the last few years, as my anxiety over the rapidly shifting military balance grew, I began to write op-eds trying to alert the readers in Taiwan about the impending danger. Most people didn't care. For years I remained in distinct minority. The war in Ukraine and the August, 2022 military crisis in the Strait finally changed some minds.

--Tsai's cross-strait policy line has always been "Struggle" since Day 1, cutting off dialogue and reducing people-to-people exchanges, except trade, leaning completely to the U.S., more so than Japan and Korea. Ever since she announced in her 2021 National Day speech that the two sides "do not belong to each other," the possibility of resumption of cross-strait dialogue dropped to zero. And so is "Moderation."

II. The Mainland's Choice: moving from "Moderation" to "Struggle"

Toward the U.S., Beijing's policy line was originally "Moderation." It moved toward "Struggle" in reaction to Trump's trade war, 3/2018. When Biden won the 11/2020 election, Beijing quickly signaled its intent for "Moderation" thru Fu Ying's article in NYT, 11/2020. But it hardened its policy after it became clear that Biden largely followed Trump's anti-China policy. The "balloon incident" was probably the last straw in sealing China line of "Struggle." Xi has now completed building a team on Taiwan (Wang Huning, Li Qiang, Wang Yi, Qin Gang, He Weidong) which will enable China to "talk or fight with the U.S." in the future. As Biden is seen as driven by domestic anti-China consensus, Beijing may estimate that "Procrastination" would not lead to an improved relationship, "Struggle" is thus likely the basic policy toward the U.S. in the future.

Toward Taiwan, Tsai's 10/10/2021 statement was the turning point. After that, dovish voices completely disappeared. Hostility among the Mainland people toward Taiwan is most worrying. After 12/2022 election, Beijing began to separate the Taiwan "people" from the "government" – "hard" on the Tsai administration and "soft" on the people. It is my estimate that Xi will strive for reunification in his third term. There will be "soft landing," if the winner of the 1/2024 presidential election adopts "92 consensus" and "opposing Taiwan Independence." If he insists on "the two sides not belonging to each other," there will be "hard landing."

III. The U.S. Choice: "Struggle" + "Procrastination"

Overall policy toward China switched abruptly from "Moderation" to "Struggle" in 3/2018. Hawks are predominant in the Trump and Biden administrations and the Congress. But power is diffused, rendering a weaker President than previously. U.S. military remains preeminent globally, but it is spread thin, suffers from "tyranny of geography," and being in transition from counterinsurgency operations to fighting a "peer competitor." Besides, the weaponry, bases, military-industrial infrastructure are

not adequately available in the next 5 or more years. So there is a window of vulnerability for the U.S. and Taiwan. Allies of the U.S., though quite a few, are either too distant or too constrained by their economic and other interests with China. Worst of all, Taiwan's morale, training, weaponry, ammunition, and logistics (e. g. energy and medical needs) are ALL insufficient. This makes the "fait accompli" Taiwan scenario high likely, should the push come to shove. So the current U.S. position is "Struggle" politically and economically, but "Procrastination" militarily.

IV. Conclusion

Taiwan has turned itself into the "bone of contention" between two dogs. One dog is barking much but biting little. The other is barking less, but grinding its teeth hard. The "bone," unaware of the impending danger, even takes pleasure in the attention paid globally to its new role. With all the three players – the U.S., China, and Taiwan – inclined toward "Struggle," the possibility of "Moderation" is very low. And it is doubtful that any effort at "Procrastination" will be able to last beyond Xi's third term. In the near term, 2023-2024 will see the first crunch.