



## **Koo-Wang Talks: Can the "Use of Force" Dispute be Resolved?** by Ralph A. Cossa

The upcoming visit of the chairman of Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation, Koo Chen-fu, to mainland China on October 14-19 marks the long-overdue resumption of high-level cross-straits dialogue between the SEF and Beijing's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), headed by Wang Daohan.

The Koo-Wang Talks, initiated in 1993, were suspended by Beijing since mid-1995 to protest Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's high-profile visit to Cornell University in the USA. Both sides have cautioned against expecting too much from this meeting but the mere fact that the talks have finally resumed is promising. Both Koo and Wang are highly trusted close personal advisors to their respective Presidents. The decision to schedule a courtesy call for Koo with PRC President Jiang Zemin is a sign of the importance that Beijing attaches to resumption of the talks.

There are a number of outstanding issues to be addressed, to include the eventual signing of a peace treaty between the two sides (technically still engaged in a civil war). Beijing is also interested in arranging direct cross-straits trade and more Taiwanese investment on the mainland. But there are two core issues that must also be addressed before real progress toward cross-straits reconciliation can be experienced. One involves each side's different interpretation of "one China." The other concerns Beijing's refusal to renounce the use of force as a means of achieving reunification.

In the mainland's definition, there is but one China and Taiwan is a part of that China. Beijing sees Taiwan as a renegade province that must be recovered, hence its insistence on the "three no's" – no independence, no two China's (or one China, one Taiwan), and no membership for Taiwan in international governmental forums.

Taiwan accepts "one China" as a goal but not a current reality, pointing out that two separate political entities exist today with neither exercising jurisdiction over what Lee prefers to call "one divided China." A recent statement by Lee Teng-hui, largely overlooked in the West, may indicate some new flexibility on this issue, however.

In an August 1998 *Asian Wall Street Journal* editorial, Lee stated that accusations that Taiwan was pursuing "independence," "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan" are "a total distortion of the truth." In this major policy pronouncement, Lee in effect validated two of the three no's, adding that "China must reunify in the future, but it must be reunified under a democratic system." Even with the "democratic system" caveat, Lee's statement should be welcomed in Beijing. It should help set the stage for more

productive cross-straits dialogue and may even provide a key to defusing the "use of force" issue.

It is important to note that both sides presently subscribe to the concept of "peaceful reunification." However, the PRC refuses to completely rule out the use of force for what from Beijing's perspective are sound reasons -- to do so limits Beijing's sovereign options and, more importantly, might encourage Taipei to be even bolder in challenging the current status quo.

This creates problems not only in Taipei but also with Washington since U.S. acceptance of "one China" is, in fact, predicated on peaceful resolution. Even President Clinton's contentious "three no's" comment in Shanghai in June 1998 was immediately followed by the reminder that "our only policy is that it has to be done peacefully. That is what our law says."

Defusing this issue could help improve the atmosphere for cross-straits dialogue and remove a major impediment in Sino-U.S. cooperation. One option is for Beijing to issue a statement that, "as long as Taiwan continues to pursue the goal of eventual reunification and rejects a 'two China' or 'one China, one Taiwan' solution, Beijing can envision no scenario under which the use of force would be required to bring about this mutually-desired end state." Implicit in such a statement is the recognition that a change in Taiwan's currently-stated policy would negate this pledge. But also implicit is a continued willingness by Beijing not to force the issue or to establish an artificial timetable or deadline for reunification.

Such a statement should be acceptable to Taipei (given Lee Tung-hui's earlier quoted comments) and should be seen as a positive gesture in Washington and elsewhere. It would help create a more positive atmosphere and perhaps open the door for a bit more flexibility regarding the third no, which is especially important to Lee Tung-hui.

Many in Beijing fail to understand that, while Lee's personal mandate as the first popularly elected leader of Taiwan is unquestioned, his Party's political base is less secure. As a result, Lee no doubt feels compelled to broaden his own and his Party's appeal by playing to the genuine aspirations of the people of Taiwan for greater international recognition of their accomplishments and unique status.

Neither side appears to fully understand or appreciate the other's concerns. The fact is, any long-term solution must take Taiwan domestic attitudes and conditions into account, just as Taipei (no less than Washington) must continue to recognize the unyielding nature of Beijing's commitment to eventual reunification.

Whatever the solution, it can only be reached through direct dialogue between Beijing and Taipei. The surest way to get Washington out of the middle is for the two sides to work

together for a solution that respects the concerns of all parties. Otherwise, the U.S. cannot help but be involved in this otherwise internal Chinese affair, given its moral and legal obligations regarding a peaceful solution.

Both China and Taiwan have proven they can coexist with differing interpretations of “one China.” What’s needed now is a mutually acceptable common definition that addresses mainland sovereignty concerns and Taiwanese aspirations. Putting the “use of force” issue behind them will facilitate this all-important dialogue.

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