



## Is Frank Hsieh a moderate? by David G. Brown

Frank Hsieh Chang-ting has been nominated by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as their presidential candidate. Many in Taipei now believe he has a good chance of winning the election, assuming he does not withdraw as he has said he would if indicted on the corruption allegations now being investigated. If elected, the prospects for improved cross-Strait and U.S.-Taiwan relations will hinge on whether he pursues moderate policies.

Hsieh is widely perceived to be a moderate, by which is usually meant that he takes a pragmatic rather than ideological approach. One person who worked with him, in the 1990s said he was then open to options for Taiwan's future other than formal independence. He has for years been linked to the idea of a "constitutional one China" under which the fact that Taiwan's current constitution is based on the concept of "one China" is seen as a basis for addressing cross-Strait relations. As mayor of Kaohsiung, Hsieh proposed in 2000 to travel to Xiamen to discuss a possible sister city arrangement. Chen Shui-bian's administration denied Hsieh permission to make this trip. When appointed premier in January 2005, Hsieh announced that "conciliation and cooperation" would be the hallmarks of his approach both domestically and in cross-Strait relations. When talks on Chinese tourism to Taiwan began, Hsieh voiced the initial goal of 1,000 tourists a day. When President Chen replaced Hsieh in December 2005, Hsieh voiced restrained but clear criticism of Chen's restrictions on his handling of cross-Strait relations. When running for Taipei mayor in 2006, Hsieh explicitly discouraged Chen from campaigning for him.

Such indications are said to mark Hsieh as a moderate. But if so, he is a moderate within the context of the DPP and contemporary Taiwan. He supports the party's 1999 "Resolution of Taiwan's Future." This resolution embodies mainstream DPP policy, which asserts that "Taiwan" is already an independent sovereign state, rejects Beijing's "one China" principle, and envisages Taiwan and China as two countries that should strive to coexist.

While Hsieh has credentials as a DPP moderate, he is now under intense pressure from the party organization led by ideologue Chairman Yu Shyi-kun. Party secretariat officers believe that the presidential election can only be won by its mobilizing the party's fundamentalist base for Hsieh. To do so, Chairman Yu and the secretariat are promoting a variety of proposals that are clearly intended not just to mobilize the base but to tie Hsieh's hands on cross-Strait policy should he be elected.

President Chen, too, seems intent on shaping the upcoming campaign. He favors a campaign that will again focus on the polarizing ethnic issue and he has warned both candidates to have no illusions about the PRC. The

fundamentalists' tactics in the recent DPP Legislative Yuan primary have polarized the party, with the result that many well-known pragmatic party members failed to win nomination. Yes, Hsieh emerged the winner in the DPP presidential primary, but so many cross-cutting factors were at work in the primary that one cannot conclude that he won because he was seen as a moderate.

Frank Hsieh's visit to the US in mid-July will give Americans an opportunity to assess him. More importantly, how Hsieh handles key aspects of his campaign in the months ahead will provide important indications of the policies he would pursue if elected. First will be how he addresses "constitutional one China." During the primary, he was under considerable pressure to reject this view. Hsieh did not reject his long-held position but he significantly modified it by saying that, while the current constitution is based on "one China," his long-term goal is to remove the "one China" aspect but to do so by working through constitutional procedures. The long-term goal is a bow to the views of fundamentalists; the requirement to work through constitutional procedures assures there is no short-term prospect for such change. What Hsieh will say on this and other cross-Strait issues during the campaign will be crucial to keeping open the prospect for resuming cross-Strait political dialogue, should he be elected.

Second, will the DPP fundamentalists wrest control of the campaign from Hsieh? Chairman Yu has set up a committee to draft a new party resolution on making Taiwan a normal country. Yu envisages the resolution replacing the party's 1999 resolution with a new and more fundamentalist one that will bind Hsieh to President Chen's goal of a new Taiwanese constitution. Long-time independence advocate Trong Chai has launched the party on a campaign to gather signatures for a referendum coincident with the election endorsing Chen's plan to seek UN membership under the name Taiwan. This is a quixotic goal designed to mobilize the base, bind Hsieh, and provoke Beijing. In a hopeful development, indications are that Hsieh has told the party leadership that he believes the proposed normal country resolution would not help his campaign. Another hopeful sign is that Hsieh has succeeded in having one of his supporters, Hsu Jen-tu, named deputy secretary general. Whether Hsieh succeeds in deflecting hardline proposals from the secretariat will be a key indicator of his success in sticking to moderate positions.

Third, will Hsieh continue to avoid President Chen's hardline rhetoric that has convinced Beijing that the president is not someone they can deal with? The party organization believes that such rhetoric is key to mobilizing the base. One focus of their efforts is a referendum on joining the UN under the name "Taiwan." Hsieh supports joining as Taiwan but has not yet specifically endorsed the referendum. More

moderate elements believe that a coincident referendum on KMT party assets will be sufficient for mobilization. As a close campaign proceeds, Hsieh will be pressured and tempted to use hardline rhetoric. Whether he does so will be another key test.

Both Beijing and Washington believe Hsieh may well emerge the winner. Many in both capitals believe that if elected there is a possibility for improved cross-strait and US-Taiwan relations. So the stakes in how Hsieh handles his campaign are high.

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