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Discussion Paper  
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**New diplomatic approach to external affairs involving Mainland China  
and Taiwan**

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For well-known reasons, mainland China and Taiwan had experienced a troublesome and controversial period of cross-strait relations before the middle of 2008. In the field of external affairs, Taiwan tried to apply for membership of some inter-governmental international organizations and even re-enter the UN under the name of Taiwan of Republic of China. It also tried to establish bilateral diplomatic relations with more countries. All these practices were opposed firmly by China's government and caused tension and hostility across the strait. Fortunately, the situation has changed a lot since Mr. Ma Yingjiu took office as Taiwan's leader in May 2008. Since then, both sides of the strait have adjusted their respective diplomatic approach to external affairs involving cross-strait relations which has brought about some positive developments. I will focus on the analysis of the new approach, its practical effects and limitations, and I will put forward some remarks on the future development.

## I. New approach and new development in external relations involving Mainland China and Taiwan

As many people have noticed, in general and overall, cross-strait relations have improved a lot since June 2008. ARATS and SEF held three rounds of talks in less than one year and signed numerous agreements on issues such as weekend charter flights, tourism, direct shipping, air transport, postal services, food safety, regular flights, cooperation in finance and cracking down on crime. The decades-long aspiration of comprehensive, direct and two-way links between the two sides will soon be realized. Meanwhile, rapprochement in mainland and Taiwan relations is also manifest in some positive developments with respect to the interaction of both sides in the dimension of external relations. The most remarkable ones include:

1. Taiwan got invited by the Secretary-General of the World Health Organisation [WHO] and participated in the World Health Assembly as an observer. This is really a big breakthrough in cross-strait relation and a clear sign of rapprochement. As you know, Taiwan had applied for observer status since 1997 and had been unsuccessful until this year due to China's objection. This year (2009), after the negotiation between two the sides of the strait and under the acquiescence of mainland China, Taiwan finally received an invitation from the WHO and participated in this year's WHA. Taiwan's presence at the 2009 annual meeting of the WHA marked the first time that Taiwan has been allowed to participate in a meeting or activity of a specialized UN agency since China's succession to Taiwan's seat in the UN.
2. Lien Chan's presence at APEC. As for the issue of the representative sent by Taiwan to attend the APEC summit, China was strongly opposed to any

representative with political background in previous years. But in November 2008, China changed its stance on this issue and agreed tacitly that Taipei chose Lien Chan, Honorary Chairman of the KMT and Taiwan's former "vice president", as Ma's special representative to attend the APEC summit. This is a new phenomenon in relations across the strait.

3. Both sides of the strait have been trying to avoid unnecessary internal strife in diplomatic relations with other countries. Since Ma took office, Mainland China and Taiwan both adopted a self-contained foreign policy with regard to their diplomatic allies. For instance, Beijing suspended the request from one of Taiwan's allies for establishing formal diplomatic relations. Since 2008, both sides have so far stopped to compete with each other to try to establish diplomatic relations with countries which have formal diplomatic relations with the other side. This new phenomenon is very different from the previous practice in last 20 years. According to statistics, between 1988 and 2000, China gained 10 new allies but lost 17; between 2000 and 2008, China gained 9 new allies and lost 3. Some countries took advantage of this kind of diplomatic competition between the two sides of the strait to swing their diplomatic recognition in pursuit more benefits.

These changes and developments contribute much to the new approach adopted or proposed by both sides and a certain kind of tacit consensus with respect to external relations.

1. On the mainland side, the new approach toward external affairs involving the two sides across the strait can be found especially in President Hu Jintao's Speech at the Forum Marking the 30th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan on December 31, 2008. In this speech, President Hu expressed the mainland's understanding of the feelings of Taiwan's people on the issue of participation in international activities and the willingness to pay attention to solving relevant issues. President Hu also advanced some suggestions and basic principles regarding dealing with external affairs as follows:
  - The two sides of the Strait should avoid unnecessary internal strife in external affairs;
  - Allow Taiwan's further negotiations as needed on the prospect of Taiwan's people to people economic and cultural interactions with other countries;
  - Fair and reasonable arrangements regarding the issue of Taiwan's participation in the activities of international organizations can be arrived at through

consultation between the two sides, provided that this does not create a situation of “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan”.

- Settling the Taiwan question and realizing the complete reunification of the country is an internal affair of China.

China’s approach has laid a foundation for both sides to negotiate some sensitive issues in external affairs and expressed mainland’s goodwill to Taiwan’s people.

2. On the Taiwan side, Mr. Ma put forward some new ideas and suggestions on the external affairs as well as internal affairs which reduced the direct conflicts between both sides in this area and paved the way for both sides to cope with some controversial issues over a long period of time. Mr. Ma’s new ideas and suggestions mainly include:

- Recognize the “1992 Consensus”. “One China” principle is the mainland’s prerequisite for any possible negotiations, and if only Taiwan accepts “One China” principle, just as President Hu said in the above-mentioned speech, “this will form the cornerstone on which to build mutual political trust and anything at all will then be open to discussion.” On March 3, 2008, President Hu told former US president Bush that the mainland would like to restore consultation and talks on the basis of the “1992 consensus”. The Ma administration accepted the “1992 consensus” and Mr. Ma defined cross-straits relations as “not state-to-state relations” but “regional to regional relations.” This provided the possibility and basis for further cooperation between both sides.
- Acceptance of “Chinese Taipei” as the name to participate in the activities of WHA. Concerning Taipei’s participation in the activities of WHO, Ma’s administration changed Taiwan’s previous position. He did not insist on using the name ROC or Taiwan but accepted the name “Chinese Taipei”, which is also acceptable to mainland.
- Pursue non-political and realistic goals in participating in international activities and not to seek dual recognition.
- Diplomatic truce. Mr. Ma proposed the idea of *modus vivendi* and diplomatic truce and strongly suggested the end of so-called money diplomacy. This proposition is similar to President Hu’s proposal avoiding unnecessary internal strife in external relations. Although diplomatic truce is not the ultimate goal of both sides, it has suspended the vicious competition in this area and contributed a lot to reducing potential conflict and hostility across the strait.

The essence of the new approach is to find minimum common ground for both sides to reduce tension and hostility between each other and find a mutually accepted way to deal with external affairs. Without doubt, this new approach produced some positive effects on bilateral relations and rapprochement of cross-strait relations provided a basis for both sides to make some progress in external affairs. Between the new approach, the improvement of bilateral relations and progress in external affairs, there is a kind of inter-linkage, just as Mr. Ma said when he made remarks on the invitation from the WHO that “there is a clear link between cross-strait relations and our international space”.

## II. Sensitive issues and the need to further develop the current approach

Surely, the new approach toward external relations of both sides has achieved some positive results and is welcomed by many people. However, it should be noted that there are still some fundamental differences and disparities between the two sides’ policies, ideas and proposals and potential conflict still exists. It also should be noted that the current mechanism of dealing with external relations cannot guarantee that the on-going improvement of the situation and tendency in the field of external affairs is irreversible.

So far, the progress in cross-straits relations has been achieved in some less sensitive fields in terms of internal relations as well as external relations following the principles of “easy issues before difficult issues” and “economy before politics”. But both sides cannot avoid difficult and political issues forever. When these sensitive issues come up, the two sides will have to face several fundamental disparities. Just avoiding conflicts is not enough, since some issues cannot be solved only by avoiding conflicts but they require positive agreement on some fundamental principles. Therefore, policies in external affairs under the new approach at the current stage are not enough to solve the fundamental problems. These fundamental issues mainly include the following.

1. The one China principle and the status of the Republic of China. One of the mainland’s fundamental principles is the “one China” policy, that is, there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of it. Ma’s administration acceptance of the “1992 consensus” has been seen as Taiwan’s acknowledgement of the “one China” principle. However, the 1992 consensus only provided a minimum consensus that there is only one China, for both sides have different interpretations of “one China”. Taipei insists that “one China” is the “ROC” and not “PRC”, and still insists on so-called Taiwan’s sovereignty. In the current situation, both sides avoid to speak about the interpretation of “one China” and refrain from adopting provocative measures or rhetoric. The 1992 consensus (“one China, respective interpretations”) only offered a basis for both sides to sit together to negotiate on cross-straits issues,

but because it does not solve the status of the ROC, it is only a starting point but not the final solution of the “one China” issue. If someday the Taipei administration insists on participating in international organizations, new controversies and conflicts will emerge.

2. The arrangement of Taiwan’s participation in the WHA has limited relevance for solving the problem of Taiwan’s desire to participate more in international activities. To be an observer of the WHA does not mean recognition of Taiwan as a nation, for Taiwan was invited by the Director-General of WHO. This kind of observer status is mainly granted to international organizations and is not of a permanent nature. Therefore, there is not much political meaning in Taiwan’s participation in the WHA as an ad hoc observer. Mr. Ma also stressed that the purpose of Taiwan’s participation in the WHA is to better protect the health of the people in Taiwan, which should not involve any unnecessary confrontation to highlight some specific ideology. But if Taiwan applies for membership of inter-governmental international organizations or requires participating in activities of international organizations which only consist of sovereign nations, the WHA participation model will not be applicable.
3. Diplomatic truce can only serve as a temporary strategy to avoid direct conflict in external relations. It cannot solve the inherent conflicts caused by the reality of political antagonism across the strait. Diplomatic truce is not an end in itself, and “truce” itself means a kind of temporary arrangement which can be given up when necessary or under certain conditions. Therefore, it does not provide a long-term and stable way to solve the competition between the two sides of the strait.
4. Many policies related to external relations are of ad hoc nature and based on friendly goodwill by both sides. These policies are possibly easily affected by other factors, especially by Taiwan’s political situation and cannot serve as stable and long-term foundations to deal with external affairs involving the two sides. On the one hand, different leaders from different parties in Taiwan hold different opinions and views on many controversial issues which are vital to the development of bilateral relations. Therefore, Ma’s “three Nos” and his redefinition of cross-strait relations cannot provide enough and reliable political assurance for the mainland to make more compromises in external relations for fear that these compromises may be taken advantage of by some separatists in the future.

### III. Concluding remarks

The current approach of cooperation and conciliation instead of competition and confrontation has been and will be helpful to improve cross-strait relations and

solve some problems in external affairs involving both sides of the strait. But this is not enough.

The future of the settlement of controversial issues in external as well as internal affairs needs further bilateral cooperation based on fundamental common ground. My suggestions are:

1. To establish an institutionalized mechanism to discuss and negotiate all controversial issues regarding external affairs under the one China framework step by step, explore constructively and creatively more schemes for solving the real problems regarding external relations involving both sides, and build consensus on these issues gradually.
2. To legalize the consensus arrived at by the two sides so as to prevent reversion or backing down. The forms of legalization could be discussed by the two sides, including signing agreements and legislation.
3. Not to put forward any provocative and controversial new claims unilaterally before getting certain agreements by both sides of the strait beforehand.