

Taiwan Today: Background

As concerned American citizens who are interested in world affairs, we strongly support Taiwan's fledgling, young democracy, which was achieved through the hard work and sacrifice of many in Taiwan, with the support of the overseas community and international friends.

- Taiwan held its first presidential election only a little more than a decade ago in 1996 and is going through a crucial transitional period to deepen its democracy. We urge the U.S. government to support Taiwan's democratic consolidation efforts. Taiwan's success is important to the United States, as it serves as a beacon for other countries in Asia aspiring to liberalize their political systems.
- Taiwan is not a part of China, and has never been ruled by the People's Republic of China. Taiwan is a sovereign nation, with its own political, economic and military systems, independent from that of China. The future of Taiwan is for the 23 million Taiwanese themselves to decide, not for authoritarian China to dictate. Their right of self-determination conforms to the fundamental principles of freedom and democracy to which the U.S. subscribes.
- Taiwan is strategically critical to the U.S. because Taiwan straddles the sea lanes that are the lifelines of Asia. We want Taiwan to be able to defend its sovereignty and freedom and democracy. We want the people of Taiwan to live their lives free from outside coercion. We want China to dismantle its 1,400-plus missiles aimed at Taiwan.
- Taiwan matters to the U.S. and the world because of the solid strength of the island's computer and information technology (IT) industries. The American and "*global economy couldn't function without it.*" (Business Week, May 16, 2005.) We want to avoid Taiwan's over-reliance on opening to China as the only solution to Taiwan's current economic woes. Preserving Taiwan's free enterprise is in the interest of the U.S. as well.
- We are deeply concerned that the strategic shift of Taiwan's current Ma Ying-jeou administration toward China comes at the expense of Taiwan's sovereignty and of good relations with the U.S. and Japan. Ma won the March 2008 presidential elections due to the electorate's discontent with the state of the country's economy. Ma's victory did not imply a desire of the Taiwanese people to move towards closer "political" ties with China, let alone "unify" with it.
- Several incidents that took place last fall suggest that Taiwan's human rights and judicial justice have been trampled upon by the Ma administration as Freedom House, Amnesty International and other Taiwan watchers in the U.S. issued statements expressing concern. Ma's hasty implementation of China-friendly policies warrants a thorough review by the U.S. government because experts have warned that such a sudden shift towards China may inadvertently undermine U.S. interests in the region.
- We support Taiwan to become a full and equal member of the international community. Taiwan is a peace-loving nation and is willing and able to participate fully in organizations such as the U.N. and the WHO.
- We urge the US administration and Congress to recognize Taiwan's de facto independence and expand ties between Taiwan and the U.S. It is unjustifiable that Taiwan today shares the ranks with rogue nations such as North Korea, Cuba, and Iran whom U.S. does not recognize. The U.S. and the larger international community should give Taiwan's democracy its due recognition.

Meeting Request: To issue an extension of remarks on “Self-Determination for the People of Taiwan”

Sample Draft

Madame Speaker,

The island nation of Taiwan is located in the Western Pacific between Japan and the Philippines. With a total area of nearly 14,000 square miles, Taiwan is the same size as the Netherlands or as Maryland and Delaware combined.

From the 1600s to the mid-1700s, Taiwan was settled by different European colonial powers. For the next two hundred years, the island was engulfed in civil unrest and constant rebellion until 1895 when it became a Japanese colony. The Japanese surrender at the end of World War II left Taiwan under the temporary administrative control of Chiang Kai-Shek, who, at the time, was ruling China with his authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) regime. When the KMT lost the Chinese civil war to the Communists in 1949, the KMT moved to Taiwan. From 1949 to 1987 the KMT kept Taiwan under martial law.

Though a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 (under the anachronistic “Republic of China” title), Taiwan lost its seat to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1971. That precipitated Taiwan's diplomatic de-recognition by the global community, culminating in the US' normalization of relations with the PRC and breaking off ties with Taiwan in December 1978. In 1979, the U.S. enacted into law the Taiwan Relations Act (the “Law of the Land”) to safeguard Taiwan's security and to signal continued US support of Taiwan, despite the absence of diplomatic relations. While enduring significant political isolation internationally, winds of change also swept Taiwan domestically. The lifting of Martial Law in 1987 signaled the liberalization of Taiwan's political system. In 1996, Mr. Lee Teng-hui became the nation's first democratically elected president. When former president Chen Shui-bian was elected in 2000, a peaceful transfer of power took place between the KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). In March 2008, the KMT was voted back into power.

Today's Taiwan enjoys de facto independence. Taiwan is under an ominous shadow though, cast by over 1400 missiles that the PRC has aimed at it. The PRC continues to refuse to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, continues to claim Taiwan as a renegade province, and ratified its “Anti-Secession Law” in 2005 mandating military action if Taiwan moves towards formal internationally recognized de jure independence.

Madame Speaker. Ultimately, the future of Taiwan must not be decided by the PRC, but solely by the Taiwanese people exercising their right of self-determination, which is enshrined in the Charter of the UN. As a matter of fact, Article 1 of the charter states that one of the purposes of this august body is “To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”

I believe that self-determination for the people of Taiwan is an idea whose time has come. As a nation built on freedom and democracy ourselves, I believe that we should not only support and promote the right of self-determination for the people of Taiwan, but also actively work for full and equal membership of Taiwan in the international family of nations.

Thank you, Madame Speaker.