



Balance of Power in East Asia: A View from Taiwan

On July 9, 2007, the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies and the CSIS International Security Program hosted Dr. Joseph Wu, Chief Representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in the United States, in his first public speech in Washington, D.C. following his appointment on April 12, 2007.

Dr. Bates Gill, the Freeman Chair in China Studies, gave the opening remarks. **Dr. Stephen Flanagan**, Director of the International Security Program, introduced Dr. Joseph Wu. Prior to holding public office, Dr. Wu led a distinguished academic career at the National Chengchi University, specializing in cross-strait relations and Taiwan's democratization. In 2002, Dr. Wu became the Deputy Secretary-General to the President. In 2004, he moved on to lead the Mainland Affairs Council of the Executive Yuan, and remained there until his appointment as the Chief Representative.

Dr. Joseph Wu outlined three areas of U.S. interests that allow for cooperation with Taiwan. First, with regards to the security need of the United States to contain terrorism, maintain sole superpower status, and check unexpected threats against the homeland, Taiwan, situated in the security corridor in East Asia, has been a "loyal ally" and critical partner. Second, Washington seeks to promote market economy and fair trade in the Asia-Pacific region. Taiwan is the ninth largest trading partner of the United States and indispensable for U.S. promotion of market economy. Third, on the question of freedom and democracy, Taiwan is an important beacon, especially for China. According to Dr. Wu, China could learn many things from Taiwan, such as market economy, nationalized army, the strengthening of the middle class and civil society, an independent judiciary, and respect for human rights.

Dr. Wu stressed that Taiwan is under pressure from China's triple warfare: military, media, and psychology. He pointed out that China's overwhelming modernization effort in submarine, air force, and surface fleet capability all seemed to target Taiwan. China has also tried to deny Taiwanese sovereignty and diplomatically isolate Taiwan. As examples, Dr. Wu cited a letter by the Chinese Representative to the UN that claimed Taiwan as an inalienable part of China, and China's attempt to reduce Taiwan to non-sovereign regional member status in the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), changing its membership title to "Taiwan, China" or "Taipei, China."

Dr. Wu believed that these circumstances have subtly shifted the balance of power in East Asia, and offered policy recommendations for Washington. First, the United States should negotiate a free trade agreement (FTA) with Taiwan, as it has done with South Korea. Second, Dr. Wu hoped that the Washington live up to its security commitments to Taiwan, and counterbalance the Chinese military threat. Third, Dr. Wu wished the United States would support more international engagement with Taiwan. Fourth, it should persuade Beijing to deal directly with the Taiwanese government, which China has so far refused to do.

During the Q&A session, Dr. Wu further elaborated the following themes:

- 1) Taiwan hopes for two commitments from the United States: on security and safeguarding the island's democracy. In terms of security, Washington should consider what is necessary for Taiwan to respond to spontaneous actions taken by China. It should also encourage further dialogue between Japan and Taiwan. On U.S. commitment to democracy, Dr. Wu noted that Taiwan became a democracy because of U.S. support, as cited in the Taiwan Relations Act. Dr. Wu sought U.S. understanding that while democratization has unfolded in Taiwan, it has also brought about some uncertainty. Dr. Wu reiterated that any resolution to the Taiwan issue will have to be a result of direct cross-Strait negotiations and occur through democratic processes.
- 2) While the U.S.-Taiwan security, economic, and cultural relations are very good, there are difficulties, especially on the issue of an upcoming referendum on Taiwan's application to the United Nations. Dr. Wu said that the issue is just as difficult this time as it was in 2003. The difficulty requires intense consultations on both sides. However, Dr. Wu would also like to point out that Taiwan has its own domestic momentum, and U.S. opposition to the referendum may feed the drive for more support behind the referendum.
- 3) Dr. Wu hoped to help the United States better understand Taiwan's position and the increasing complexities behind U.S.-Taiwan relations. Dr. Wu explained that some of Taiwan's provocative actions are a result of aggressive China behavior. As such, it is important for the United States to reassure Taiwan and its security. Dr. Wu also acknowledged the importance of U.S.-China cooperation on many key issues, but some U.S. policymakers are beginning to realize that Beijing may have limited capacity to help on certain politically sensitive issues.
- 4) Whereas economic interdependence across the Taiwan Strait has intensified, political and security relations have worsened. Dr. Wu believed that there are signs that economic development may lead to more political change in China, and if such trends continue, he was sure that economic relations will bear fruit in the long run.