

## One-China Principle: A Key to Maintaining Peace and Stability in the Taiwan Strait

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**Abstract:** The one-China principle is a collection of ideas: there is only one China in the world, the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government of the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. Indisputable historical facts and irrefutable legal documents have rendered this principle a universal consensus of the international community and a basic norm governing international relations. To address cross-Strait relations, the Chinese government has introduced "one country, two systems" as a peaceful solution but will not dismiss non-peaceful means in the face of separatist forces and foreign interference.

**Keywords:** one-China principle, "one country, two systems," peace, Taiwan

The Taiwan Strait was not a stranger to hot wars during the Cold War as it was located at one of the forefronts of the East–West confrontation in the Asia Pacific. The Cold War ended with no solution to the Taiwan question, which has become even more complicated along with changes in Taiwan's political ecology and the international landscape, as illustrated by multiple crises. In 2022, then Speaker Nancy Pelosi of the United States (US) House of Representatives visited Taiwan, triggering high tensions with China. Undoubtedly, maintaining peace in the Taiwan Strait is a critical issue for the international community, and the key to it lies in upholding the one-China principle.

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## Basis for One China, de Facto and de Jure

Taiwan has belonged to China since ancient times when it was called Yizhou or Liuqiu. In 230 AD, the kingdom of Sun Wu (or Eastern Wu), which ruled southeast China at that time, sent troops to Taiwan. Chen Shou briefly mentioned this event in his work *Records of the Three Kingdoms*.<sup>1</sup> Shen Ying, a Wu general, left the earliest description of Taiwan in *Seaboard Geographic Gazetteer*.<sup>2</sup> According to *Book of Sui*, more than 300 years later, in 607, 608, and 610, the royal court of the Sui Dynasty dispatched troops to Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> These activities were organized and conducted by governments, thus demonstrating extremely strong official connotations. The following centuries witnessed an expansion of migrant flows between the mainland and Taiwan, increasing socioeconomic ties. China's imperial central governments gradually established administrative bodies to exercise jurisdiction over Taiwan. In the mid-twelfth century, the government of the Southern Song Dynasty placed Penghu under the administration of Jinjiang County, Quanzhou, Fujian Province, and sent troops to guard the territory. Later, the government of the Yuan Dynasty officially set Penghu Xunjiansi, a local administration and inspection agency, to manage civil affairs in Penghu and Taiwan. In the early Qing Dynasty, Taiwan remained under the jurisdiction of Fujian Province, although additional administrative bodies were set up to strengthen and improve governance. In 1885, with the progress of Taiwan's administration and socioeconomic development, the Qing government separated Taiwan from Fujian and upgraded it into China's 20th province, which covered three prefectures (Taiwan, Tainan, and Taibei) and one subprefecture (Taidong), incorporating eleven counties (Taiwan, Danshui, Xinzhu, Yilan, Zhanghua, Yunlin, Jiayi, Miaoli, Anping, Fengshan, and Hengchun) and five cantons (Penghu, Jilong, Pulishe, Port of Hualian, and Beinan). Chinese scholar Zhang Haipeng opined that “the

<sup>1</sup> Zhao Youwen, *Annotations to Records of the Three Kingdoms* (Chengdu: Bashu Publishing House, 2001), “Fascicle II: Biography of Sun Quan,” 1534; “Fascicle XIII: Biography of Lu Xun,” 1850–1851; “Fascicle XV: Biography of Quan Cong,” 1892–1893.

<sup>2</sup> Shen Ying (Annotated by Zhang Chonggen), *Annotations to Seaboard Geographic Gazetteer* (Beijing: Agriculture Press, 1988), 1–5.

<sup>3</sup> Wei Zheng et al., *Book of Sui* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1973), “Fascicle LXIV: Biography of Chen Suo,” 1518–1519; “Fascicle LXXXI: Record of Liuqiu,” 1822–1825.

new administrative divisions unified various parts of Taiwan, facilitating the effective administration of Taiwan by the Qing government and laying down the foundations for later administrative divisions in Taiwan.”<sup>1</sup> Under the leadership of Liu Mingchuan, its first governor, the provincial government of Taiwan laid railways, opened mines, installed telegraph services, built merchant ships, started industries, and established new-style schools. These resulted in considerable social, economic, and cultural advancement in Taiwan, strengthening its ties with the mainland. Despite being separated by a strait, Taiwan Province was administered by governors directly appointed by the central government as in the case of other provinces, rendering Taiwan an inalienable part of the Qing Empire.

In 1895, the Qing government suffered defeat in the Sino–Japanese War and was forced to sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki and cede Taiwan to Japan. Later, the Chinese people’s war of resistance against Japanese aggression, as part of the worldwide struggle against fascism, reached a reckoning with Japan. On December 9, 1941, the Chinese government declared war against Japan and proclaimed the abrogation of all treaties, conventions, agreements, and contracts regarding relations between the two countries. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, the most important treaty governing China–Japan relations at that time, was of course nullified, which meant that China would recover its full sovereignty over Taiwan. Concurrently, the Chinese government solemnly demanded the return of the territories Japan had stolen, such as Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, to China. This expressed the just position and legitimate demands of the Chinese nation, receiving wide support from the international community. Most importantly, it was endorsed by a series of key documents that ended World War II and shaped the postwar international order. For instance, the Cairo Declaration, which was issued by China, the US, and Great Britain on December 1, 1943, clearly stated that Japan should be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which it had seized or occupied since the beginning of World War I in 1914, and that all the territories Japan had stolen from the Chinese, such as Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, should be restored to China. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Haipeng and Tao Wenzhao eds., *A Brief History of Taiwan (Vol. I)* (Nanjing: Phoenix Publishing House, 2012), 131.

Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation, which was signed by China, the US, and Great Britain on July 26, 1945 (subsequently recognized by the Soviet Union), reiterated that “the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out.” Under strong political and military pressure, Japan announced its capitulation and signed the official Instrument of Surrender on September 2, 1945, which stipulated that Japan hereby accepted “the provisions set forth in the declaration issued by the heads of the Governments of the United States, China and Great Britain on 26 July 1945, at Potsdam, and subsequently adhered to by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.” On October 25, 1945, the ceremony for accepting Japan’s surrender in Taiwan Province of the China war theater of the Allied powers was held in Taipei (Taipei). On the occasion, the chief officer for accepting the surrender proclaimed on behalf of the Chinese government that Taiwan and the Penghu Islands would again be incorporated into the territory of China and that the territory, people, and administration would now be placed under China’s sovereignty. From that day forward, Taiwan and Penghu were returned to the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty and restored to their original status as part of China. From 1945 to 1949, the central government of the Republic of China (ROC) exercised effective and full sovereignty over Taiwan in the exact same way it did over other provinces or administrative regions.

However, not long after Taiwan’s return to the motherland, the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) started the civil war. Leading the Chinese people, the Communist Party of China (CPC) proclaimed victory and founded the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, while the Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan after its defeat and continued to rule there using the designation “ROC.” Here, we can observe that China has been in a state of separation since 1949, and its reunification has been long delayed. Nonetheless, the country’s sovereignty and territory have never been divided, and Taiwan’s status as part of China’s territory has never changed. In 1972, after discussions with Chinese leaders, the US stated in a Joint Communiqué (known as the Shanghai Communiqué), “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People’s Republic of China,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d203>.

This attitude echoed the objective reality of that time from the perspective of the international community, and that reality has persisted to the present. The current Constitution of the PRC, which was promulgated in 1982, proclaims in its preamble, “Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People’s Republic of China. It is the sacred duty of all the Chinese people, including our fellow Chinese in Taiwan, to achieve the great reunification of the motherland.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Article 2 of the 2005 Anti-Secession Law stipulates, “There is only one China in the world. Both the mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division.”<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in Taiwan, the Kuomintang upheld the one-China principle and opposed “two Chinas” and “Taiwan independence,” although it rejected the PRC government as the sole legitimate representative of the whole of China. In 1990, the National Unification Council (NUC) was established, which drafted its Guidelines for National Unification the following year. In 1992, the mainland’s Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits and Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation reached what is widely known as the 1992 Consensus, with official authorization, through consultations, and based on the one-China principle that “both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, and work together to strive for national unification.” On November 7, 2015, in a meeting between leaders of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan’s leader Ma Ying-jeou reaffirmed that “the consensus reached between the two sides in November 1992 was that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait insist on ‘one China,’” and that “our side’s interpretation does not involve two Chinas; one China, one Taiwan; or Taiwan independence.”<sup>3</sup> The Kuomintang, despite turning into an opposition party now, continues to adhere to the 1992 Consensus and oppose “Taiwan independence.” On September 26, 2021, Eric Chu replied to General Secretary Xi Jinping’s congratulatory message on his election as chairman of the Kuomintang, expressing hope that the two parties

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, accessed December 10, 2023, [https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2018-03/22/content\\_5276318.htm](https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2018-03/22/content_5276318.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Secession Law, accessed December 10, 2023, [https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2005-06/21/content\\_2602175.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2005-06/21/content_2602175.htm).

<sup>3</sup> “Opening Remarks by ‘President’ Ma Ying-jeou at His Meeting with Mainland Chinese Leader Xi Jinping in Singapore,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/4779>; “Opening Remarks by ‘President’ Ma at an International Press Conference Following Meeting with Mainland Chinese Leader Xi Jinping in Singapore,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/4780>.

can build mutual trust, exchanges, and cooperation upon the foundation of upholding the 1992 Consensus and opposing “Taiwan independence.”<sup>1</sup> Hou Yu-ih, the Kuomintang’s candidate in the 2024 Taiwan leadership election, wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* during his US trip in September 2023, also expressing support for the 1992 Consensus and opposition to “Taiwan independence.”<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which was formed in 1986, has adopted a separatist stance and rejected both the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus. Nevertheless, the DPP has been unable to detach Taiwan de jure from China, which is a testament to the deep-rootedness and firm entrenchment of the one-China principle. In Taiwan, the current legal provisions on territory and cross-Strait people-to-people contacts continue to stipulate that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China and that Taiwan is part of China. In Taiwan’s administrative structure, the policies associated with cross-Strait relations belong to the “Mainland Affairs Council” and not the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” While taking their oath of office, Chen Shui-bian and Tsai Ing-wen still needed to swear to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who had firmly advocated Chinese reunification and fought for it all his life. These realities also reflect the basis of one China, both de facto and de jure.

### **Universal Consensus of the International Community and Basic Norm Governing International Relations**

On October 1, 1949, the Central People’s Government of the PRC was proclaimed, replacing the previous Kuomintang regime to become the only legal government of the entire China and its sole legitimate representative in the international arena. This took place in a situation where China, as a subject under international law, did not change and China’s sovereignty and inherent territory did not change. As a natural result, the PRC government should fully

<sup>1</sup> “Eric Chu Expressed Thanks to General Secretary Xi Jinping’s Congratulatory Message on His Election as Kuomintang Chairperson,” accessed December 10, 2023, [http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2021-09/26/c\\_1127904222.htm](http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2021-09/26/c_1127904222.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Hou Yu-ih, “Taiwan’s Path between Extremes: The Kuomintang ‘Presidential’ Candidate Lays Out a Plan to Avert War with China,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/taiwan/taiwans-path-between-extremes>.

enjoy and exercise China's sovereignty, including its sovereignty over Taiwan. Even though the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have yet to be reunified, the PRC government has never wavered on the one-China principle in its foreign relations. Whether shortly after the PRC was founded, when the country just "stood up" and had to rebuild itself on the ruins of decades of war, or in the present day, when China has become the world's second largest economy and the nation is transforming from "growing prosperous" to "becoming strong," the PRC government has always upheld the one-China principle as the prerequisite for establishing and developing relations with other countries whether they are capitalist or socialist, global powers such as the US or small island countries from the South Pacific such as Nauru. With dramatic transformations shaping the global landscape over the past seven decades, the one-China principle has become an increasingly recognized international consensus and a widely observed norm governing international relations.

Currently, the China–US relation is one of the world's most important bilateral ties, heavily influencing the well-being of the Chinese and American people, peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, and the resolution of many global challenges. This bilateral relation is founded on the one-China principle. The Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the PRC and the US, issued on January 1, 1979, clearly stated,

The United States of America recognizes the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. Within this context, the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan....The Government of the United States of America acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China.<sup>1</sup>

In the Joint Communiqué issued on August 17, 1982, the US government reiterated that "it has no intention of infringing on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, or interfering in China's internal affairs, or pursuing a policy

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<sup>1</sup> "Address by President Carter to the Nation," accessed December 10, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d104>.

of ‘two Chinas’ or ‘one China, one Taiwan.’”<sup>1</sup> The three Joint Communiqués between the PRC and the US<sup>2</sup> fully expressed the one-China principle, representing the solemn political commitments of the US government, commitments that subsequent administrations have all maintained. While in China for a summit in June 1998, President Bill Clinton chose an informal forum to declare: “I had a chance to reiterate our Taiwan policy, which is that we don’t support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan—one China. And we don’t believe that Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement.”<sup>3</sup> President Joe Biden’s bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum on November 15, 2023, reiterated that “our one China policy has not changed” and that the US does not support “Taiwan independence.”<sup>4</sup> In the past half-century, the Taiwan question has lingered over the China–US relationship at its every twist and turn. China has maintained a firm and clear-cut stance, and the US, as a world power, has also expressed solemn political commitment to the one-China principle.

The United Nations (UN) is at the core of the international system, and the purposes and principles of its Charter provide the foundation for the norms governing international relations. The one-China principle has long been fully recognized and observed by the UN. Thanks to decades of strenuous efforts by the PRC government and the support of many peace- and justice-loving countries, the UN General Assembly adopted, with an overwhelming majority, Resolution 2758 at its 26th session in October 1971, which undertook “to restore all its rights to the People’s Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of China to the UN, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang

<sup>1</sup> “U.S.–P.R.C. Joint Communiqué (1982),” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.ait.org.tw/u-s-prc-joint-communication-1982/>.

<sup>2</sup> Namely, the Shanghai Communiqué of February 28, 1972; the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations of January 1, 1979; and the Joint Communiqué of August 17, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> “China/Taiwan: Evolution of the ‘One China’ Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL30341.html>.

<sup>4</sup> “Readout of President Joe Biden’s Meeting with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/15/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>; “Xi Jinping Holds Talks with US President Joe Biden,” accessed December 10, 2023, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202311/t20231116\\_11181125.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202311/t20231116_11181125.shtml).

Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the UN and in all the organizations related to it.” Guided by this resolution, UN specialized agencies adopted further actions restoring to the PRC its lawful seat and expelling the representatives of the Taiwan authorities. For instance, the official legal opinions of the Office of Legal Affairs of the UN Secretariat clearly stated that “the UN considers ‘Taiwan’ as a province of China with no separate status,” and the “‘authorities’ in ‘Taipei’ are not considered to...enjoy any form of government status.” At the UN, the island is referred to as “Taiwan, Province of China.”<sup>1</sup>

Resolution 2758 finally settled the political, legal, and procedural issues of China’s UN representation, covering the whole country including Taiwan. It also specified that China would occupy a single seat in the UN, suggesting that there is no such thing as “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan.” Overall, Resolution 2758 is a political document that encapsulates the one-China principle and governs international relations; its legal authority leaves no room for doubt and has been acknowledged worldwide since its adoption by the UN General Assembly, the highest policymaking organ of the most authoritative international organization in today’s world. Nonetheless, 50 years after its enactment, a negative trend seems to have emerged in the international arena distorting Resolution 2758. In March 2022, Bonnie Glaser, Director of the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, co-authored a report arguing that “the only question that was resolved by member states was that the PRC would hold the ‘China’ seat at the UN and that the ‘representatives of Chiang Kai-Shek’ would be expelled,” and member states “did not make a UN-level determination on the status of Taiwan.”<sup>2</sup> However, nine years before Glaser’s report was published, Chinese scholar Zhu Jie had explained that the phrase “representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” in Resolution 2758 can only be considered an alternative expression in an international relations context, which did not imply any space for the so-called ROC or Taiwan to participate in the

<sup>1</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office and Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2022), 5–6.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Drun and Bonnie Glaser, “The Distortion of UN Resolution 2758 to Limit Taiwan’s Access to the United Nations,” accessed December 10, 2023, [https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Drun%26Glaser-distortion-un-resolution-2758-limit-taiwans-access\\_1.pdf](https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Drun%26Glaser-distortion-un-resolution-2758-limit-taiwans-access_1.pdf).

UN and its specialized agencies. “Representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” referred to the so-called ROC or Taiwan region. At that time, however, most countries no longer recognized the so-called ROC, and the name “Taiwan” was not a symbol of a “country.” The reason Resolution 2758 used the phrase “representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” was to avoid relatively complex procedures through the separation between a state and its government. To expel the so-called ROC, the UN General Assembly would have needed the consent of more than two-thirds of member states upon the recommendation of the Security Council. Before the vote on Resolution 2758, the UN General Assembly had rejected the US proposal regarding China’s “dual representation,” fully demonstrating the UN member states’ intent to endorse the one-China principle at the international level.<sup>1</sup> Zhu’s analysis had provided deep insights into the essence of Resolution 2758 based on historical contexts and facts. By contrast, Glaser completely disregarded the real background of the resolution; based on a preset stance, her arguments were deliberately misleading and distorting; her intent was to cater to the theoretical needs of separatist activities aimed at “Taiwan independence.” In fact, as stated in the acknowledgment, her report was made possible by the “generous support” of “Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs” and the “Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office” in the US. Therefore, it is not surprising that the report came to conclusions that are in conflict with the one-China principle.

Glaser’s false arguments did not convince the mainstream of the international community. Driven by Resolution 2758, a growing number of UN member states have adjusted their foreign policies to conform with the one-China principle, abandoning the Taiwan authorities and establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC. For example, in January 2024, shortly after the DPP’s victory in the Taiwan election, Nauru severed its “diplomatic relations” with Taiwan and resumed official ties with the PRC, becoming the 183rd country out of 193 UN member states to have diplomatic relations with China. This fully demonstrates the international community’s broad support for and recognition of the one-China principle. As the sole legitimate representative

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Jie, *Positioning of Cross-Strait Relations and International Space: A Study on Taiwan’s Participation in International Activities* (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2013), 310–311.

of all Chinese people, including compatriots in Taiwan, the PRC has fulfilled its responsibilities and duties as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, safeguarded the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and supported the UN's core role in international affairs. With China's active participation in UN peacekeeping operations, development agenda, and human rights cause, its role has been increasingly recognized by the international community.

### **Peaceful Reunification and “One Country, Two Systems”**

Although the one-China principle has become the consensus of the international community, reflecting the original history and objective reality, the Taiwan question has remained unsettled, and China is yet to be reunified for various reasons. Therefore, to achieve national reunification while maintaining regional stability, the Chinese government has introduced the concept of “one country, two systems” as a peaceful solution to the Taiwan question.

As early as the 1950s, the Chinese government had conceived a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question. In 1956, the political report to the Eighth National Congress of the CPC declared, “We are willing to bring Taiwan back to the embrace of the motherland through the peaceful means of negotiation, and avoid the use of force.”<sup>1</sup> China's policy of peaceful reunification concerning Taiwan during this period could be summarized as “one guiding principle and four points.” The guiding principle was that Taiwan must return to the motherland. According to the four points, after the reunification, except for foreign affairs, which must be unified in the hands of the central government, Taiwan's political and military authority, personnel arrangements, and other matters would be under the control of Chiang Kai-shek; the central government would supplement all military, governmental, and economic expenditures that Taiwan could not afford; and the reform of Taiwan's society could proceed slowly and would be carried out when conditions were ripe, with due consideration to Chiang Kai-shek's views.<sup>2</sup> Although these wishes did not

<sup>1</sup> “The Political Report of the Party Central Committee to the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” *People's Daily*, September 17, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Central Literature Research Office of the Communist Party of China, *The Chronicle of Zhou Enlai (1949–1976) (Vol. II)* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1997), 321.

materialize because of historical constraints, they nevertheless left behind a lasting legacy. As Sun Yafu opined, “The formulation of the ‘one guiding principle and four points’ indicated that the policy of the Central Committee of the CPC on settling the Taiwan question had approached maturity, providing valuable conceptual wealth for realizing China’s complete reunification.”<sup>1</sup> Historically, the “one guiding principle and four points” was the earliest concept from which “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems” originated.

More than two decades later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, national reunification was once again put back on the agenda as China launched its reform and opening-up program and established diplomatic relations with the US. In 1980, the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping outlined three major tasks that China needed to accomplish in the 1980s: besides “opposing hegemonism and striving to preserve world peace” and “stepping up economic construction,” “we must work for the return of Taiwan to the motherland, for China’s reunification.”<sup>2</sup> To this end, the Chinese government committed itself to “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems.” Under the “one China” prerequisite, these principles fully respect Taiwan’s specific circumstances, protect its realistic interests to the maximum possible extent, and grant it a high degree of autonomy. On January 1, 1979, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) issued a “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” which firmly declared that the Chinese government “will take present realities into account in accomplishing the great cause of reunifying the motherland and respect the status quo on Taiwan and the opinions of people in all walks of life there and adopt reasonable policies and measures in settling the question of reunification so as not to cause the people of Taiwan any losses.”<sup>3</sup> The remarks of NPC Standing Committee Chairman Ye Jianying on September 30, 1981, and Deng Xiaoping on June 26, 1983, illustrated a more detailed and systematic policy for the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question. In their vision, Taiwan will enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special administrative

<sup>1</sup> Sun Yafu, Li Peng, et al., *Cross-Strait Relations over the Past Four Decades (1979–2019)* (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2020), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “The Present Situation and the Tasks before Us,” accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1980/217.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” *People’s Daily*, January 1, 1979.

region after reunification, having some exclusive powers that distinguish it from the other provinces or regions of China. Taiwan can also retain its current socioeconomic system, way of life, and economic and cultural ties with foreign countries. Private property, including houses and land, business ownership, legal inheritance, and foreign investments on the island, will be fully protected. In effect, this would mean “one country, two systems”; that is, on the premise of national reunification, the nation’s main body would continue with its socialist system, while Taiwan could retain capitalism.<sup>1</sup> The concept of “one country, two systems” was first applied in Hong Kong and Macao, which has achieved great success, enabling the smooth and peaceful return of Hong Kong and Macao to the motherland, ensuring sustained prosperity and stability in the two regions after their return, and leaving a constructive impact on the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question. On January 2, 2019, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech on the 40th anniversary of the release of the “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” urging efforts to explore a “two systems” solution to the Taiwan question:

In terms of how the principle should be carried out in Taiwan, we will fully consider Taiwan’s reality, give full consideration to the views and proposals from all walks of life on both sides, and fully accommodate the interests and sentiments of our compatriots in Taiwan. Provided that China’s sovereignty, security, and development interests are ensured, after peaceful reunification, Taiwan’s social system and its way of life will be fully respected, and the private property, religious beliefs, and lawful rights and interests of our compatriots in Taiwan will be fully protected.<sup>2</sup>

Sun Yafu noted, “The concept of ‘one country, two systems’ conforms to the principles of realizing national reunification and safeguarding China’s

<sup>1</sup> “Chairman Ye Jianying Further Elaborated Policy and Principles for Peaceful Reunification of China’s Mainland and Taiwan,” *People’s Daily*, October 1, 1981; Deng Xiaoping, “An Idea for the Peaceful Reunification of China’s Mainland and Taiwan,” in *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. III)* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1993), 30–31.

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China’s Peaceful Reunification—Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” accessed December 10, 2023, [http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412\\_12155687.htm](http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412_12155687.htm).

sovereignty and at the same time demonstrates a high degree of flexibility, giving full consideration to both history and reality. Therefore, it can be deemed an organic unity of principles and flexibilities.”<sup>1</sup> The fundamental objective of such “an organic unity” is to reunify the country peacefully instead of through the use of force.

“One country, two systems” is a democratic plan dedicated to resolving the Taiwan question through consultation and discussion involving the two sides of the Taiwan Strait as equals. To this end, the Chinese government has persistently shown extreme patience and sincerity. In 1993, it released its first white paper on Taiwan, proclaiming that “on the premise of one China, both sides can discuss any subject, including the modality of negotiations, the question of what Parties, groups and personalities may participate as well as any other matters of concern to the Taiwan side.”<sup>2</sup> Fully considering Taiwan’s political realities and the request of its authorities concerning equal status in negotiations, the Chinese government has successively proposed that talks be held on equal footing between the CPC and the Kuomintang and that such talks can absorb representatives from all political parties and sectors of society in Taiwan; it has never used the phrase “central–local negotiations.” Furthermore, the Chinese government has advocated that the two sides start with dialogues, including political ones, before gradually addressing the procedures, such as title, topics, and modality, of political negotiations. Only then can political negotiations commence. “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era,” published in 2022, clearly stated,

We can phase in flexible forms of consultation and discussion. We are ready to engage with all parties, groups, or individuals in Taiwan in a broad exchange of views aimed at resolving the political differences between the two sides based on the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus. Representatives will be recommended by all political parties and all sectors of society on both sides, and they will engage in democratic consultations on peaceful development of cross-Strait

<sup>1</sup> *Cross-Strait Relations over the Past Four Decades (1979–2019)*, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office and Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, “The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China,” August 1993.

relations, integrated development of the two sides, and the peaceful reunification of our country.<sup>1</sup>

Should both sides of the Taiwan Strait adopt such an approach and engage in consultation and discussion, the Taiwan question will be progressively and peacefully resolved, the crisis will be over, war will go away, China will be reunified without firing a shot, and stability will be preserved in the Asia-Pacific region. Regrettably, for complex reasons, various forces within Taiwan have stigmatized and boycotted the “one country, two systems” formula. Such rejection is tantamount to turning down a peace plan, which is precisely what causes lasting tensions and turmoil in the Taiwan Strait, a region that frequently experiences crises.

### Never Giving Up the Use of Force

Given Taiwan’s stubborn opposition against “one country, two systems” and peaceful reunification and, even worse, intention of seeking “independence,” the Chinese government cannot exclude the use of force. In fact, to uphold the one-China principle, it must be ready to achieve national reunification through non-peaceful means.

On November 11, 2016, in his speech at the conference commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, President Xi proclaimed, “We will never allow any person, organization, or political party, at any time, in any form, to separate any piece of Chinese territory from China!”<sup>2</sup> On August 1, 2017, he reiterated this message at the rally marking the 90th anniversary of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), stating that “no country should expect China to swallow the bitter fruits that undermine our sovereignty, security, and development interests.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era” stated, “We will not renounce the

<sup>1</sup> *The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Conference to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen,” *People’s Daily*, November 12, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> “Xi Delivers Important Speech at Rally Marking PLA’s 90th Anniversary,” accessed December 10, 2023, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2022-07/31/c\\_1128879071.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2022-07/31/c_1128879071.htm).

use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all necessary measures... We will only be forced to take drastic measures to respond to the provocation of separatist elements or external forces should they ever cross our red lines.”<sup>1</sup> All these solemn statements demonstrate the strong resolve of the Chinese government to reunify the country even through non-peaceful methods. Most importantly, the Chinese government has translated such determination into the will of the state through relevant laws. On March 14, 2005, the NPC adopted the Anti-Secession Law with a large majority. Mindful of worst-case scenarios, Article 8 of the law stipulates that “the state shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” when necessary, that is, should “Taiwan independence” secessionist forces act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan’s secession from China, or major incidents entailing Taiwan’s secession from China occur, or possibilities for a peaceful reunification be completely exhausted.

It is because of the incessant provocations from “Taiwan independence” separatists and external forces interfering in Taiwan affairs that the Chinese government does not renounce the use of force and reserves the option of taking all necessary measures. Since the 1990s, Taiwan has undergone unprecedented changes, notably the growing influence of separatist forces. Lee Teng-hui, the former leader of Taiwan who used to be a member of the Kuomintang, progressively betrayed the one-China principle and strove to promote a separatist policy after rising to political power. Departing from his previous position that “China should be reunified and we uphold the one-China principle,” Lee openly defined the cross-Strait relations as “state to state relations, or at least special state to state relations.”

The DPP has gone further. In its platform, “Resolution on Taiwan’s Future” (1999), and “Resolution on Normalization of Taiwan as a Nation” (2007), the party blatantly asserted that “Taiwan is a sovereign state” and “not a part of the People’s Republic of China,” called for “establishing the Republic of Taiwan as a sovereign, independent, and autonomous nation,” and sought to “join international organizations such as the UN and the World Health Organization

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<sup>1</sup> *The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era*, 32–33.

under the name of Taiwan.”<sup>1</sup> These propositions are completely at variance with the one-China principle. As a separatist party, the DPP has gained power and promoted the “Taiwan independence” policy. During his two terms from 2000 to 2008, Chen Shui-bian de facto abolished the NUC and its guidelines, held a referendum on whether the government should seek UN membership under the name “Taiwan,” and constantly pressed for “de-Sinicization” in the social and cultural realms. Since 2016, Tsai Ing-wen has refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus and upgraded the pro-independence propositions of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian, reversing the cross-Strait policy of her predecessor Ma Ying-jeou. On October 10, 2021, Tsai Ing-wen explicitly referred to Taiwan as “the Republic of China (Taiwan),” arguing that “the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China should not be subordinate to each other.”<sup>2</sup> This constituted a new “two states” theory. Lai Ching-te, who has long been hailed as a “golden grandson of Taiwan independence” and self-proclaimed as a “pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence,” openly stated that “Taiwan is already a sovereign, independent country” and that his political objective is to “walk into the White House as Taiwan ‘President.’”<sup>3</sup> He won the latest Taiwan election on January 13, 2024, and will lead the island in the upcoming four years. Repeatedly ruling in Taiwan, the DPP has used the power of Taiwan authorities to challenge the one-China principle over cross-Strait relations in the international arena. Its policy to seek “Taiwan independence” has harmed peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, the DPP is an obstacle to stability in the region that must be removed.

One key reason behind the growing influence of “Taiwan independence” separatists has been the encouragement and support of foreign forces. Some countries with selfish interests are using Taiwan to contain China and have encouraged and instigated their provocative actions. For instance, the US has been committed to the “one China” policy through the three Joint Communiqués and formal statements of successive administrations. However,

<sup>1</sup> “Part 2. Party Platform,” accessed December 10, 2023, [https://www.dpp.org.tw/en/upload/download/Party\\_Platform.pdf](https://www.dpp.org.tw/en/upload/download/Party_Platform.pdf); “Part 3. Resolutions,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.dpp.org.tw/en/upload/download/Resolutions.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> “‘President’ Tsai Delivers 2021 ‘National Day’ Address,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6175>.

<sup>3</sup> “Lai Ching-Te: Should Taiwan ‘President’ Walk into the White House, Our Political Objective Will Have Been Achieved,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://udn.com/news/story/6656/7290907>.

shortly after establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979, the US Congress passed a so-called Taiwan Relations Act; while signing the third Joint Communiqué with the PRC on August 17, 1982, the US made the so-called Six Assurances to Taiwan. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, fundamental changes have taken place in the strategic needs of the US vis-à-vis China. Significantly, containment has been on the rise. Both Donald Trump and Joe Biden have labeled China as a major strategic competitor of the US. Against the backdrop of profoundly shifting relations with China, the US has stepped up efforts to use Taiwan as a pawn against China. Then President-elect, Trump engaged in a direct telephone conversation with Tsai Ing-wen, and during his presidency, approved the sale of F-16V fighter jets to Taiwan; dispatched US warships to routinely transit the Taiwan Strait; signed the Taiwan Travel Act to enlarge the space for political and military exchanges between the US and Taiwan; and signed the TAIPEI Act, in attempt to block other sovereign countries from severing ties with Taiwan and establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC. In Biden's case, he has inherited the policy of his predecessor by challenging UN Resolution 2758, urging UN member states to support Taiwan's "participation throughout the UN system," and inviting the Taiwan authorities to the so-called Summit for Democracy. In 2022, then US House Speaker Pelosi provocatively visited Taiwan. Recently, given the context of the Ukraine crisis, the US has intensified its military support for the DPP authorities. Biden has repeatedly stated that US forces would defend Taiwan. In 2023, the US government greenlit the 12th arms sale to Taiwan since Biden took office in 2021. Moreover, the Biden administration has innovated methods of security assistance. For the first time, Biden used the Presidential Drawdown Authority to provide military aid to Taiwan, and approved a military transfer to Taiwan under the Foreign Military Financing program. These moves have contradicted the US government's own words and violated its political commitments. They are eroding the one-China principle and compromising its integrity, thus aggravating tensions in the Taiwan Strait and posing serious challenges to regional peace.

It is precisely because of the separatist activities and the instigation and encouragement of foreign forces that China must engage in the struggle against "Taiwan independence" and foreign interference to defend the one-China

principle while exploring a peaceful “two systems” solution to the Taiwan question. The large-scale military exercises around Taiwan in August 2022 aroused international concern as to whether peace in the region could last. Such high tensions were due to a collusion between the DPP authorities and the anti-China forces in the US, which had led to Pelosi’s high-profile visit to Taiwan, openly challenging the one-China principle and infringing on China’s sovereignty. Looking ahead, should the one-China principle continue to be eroded, the PLA will definitely take more resolute actions, and should the one-China principle be completely abandoned, the Taiwan Strait will be doomed to war, and peace will be lost. In 1865, US President Abraham Lincoln took his oath of office for the second time. When discussing the causes of the US Civil War, Lincoln stated, “Both parties deprecated war but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.”<sup>1</sup> In the face of the growing influence of pro-independence separatists and the foreign forces behind them, one cannot exclude the possibility of a similar scenario occurring in China. In this sense, to secure peace and stability in the region, the international community should join China in safeguarding the one-China principle and opposing “Taiwan independence” as well as the actions of some countries aiming to undermine China’s peaceful reunification.

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<sup>1</sup> “Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm>.