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China's White Paper on Taiwan

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Introduction

As China claimed Taiwan as its inalienable part, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan on August 02, 2022, pushed China to initiate the largest military exercise ever, resulting in its issuing a 'White Paper' on Taiwan. The visit pushed China to end its cooperation with the US on key issues like the military talks, the climate crisis, and anti-drugs efforts.¹ Since 1949, China's claim on the island has caused three Taiwan Strait crises. However, Taiwan still continues as an enigma in China's unification process despite the Chinese armed forces being well advanced compared with the earlier crisis. The White Paper titled "The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era" emphasises peaceful unification. It highlights the advantages people on both sides will enjoy under the 'One Country-Two Systems' policy. The paper argues that it will use force against external and separatist forces if they contravene the 'One China' policy.

Background

As Taiwan has been governed independently since 1949 and is run by a democratically elected government, the '1992 Consensus' remains a political issue which treads a fine but controversial line on the definition of 'One China'. Taiwan is seen as a renegade province of China and its unification with mainland China will allow President Xi Jinping to achieve 'Chinese National Rejuvenation' under his 'Chinese Dream'. Meanwhile, under the current Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen, who is a more pro-independent leader compared to her predecessor, Ma Ying-jeou, the ties between mainland China and Taiwan have soured. The three Joint Communiques (1972-1982), Six Assurances (1982), UN Resolution 2578 and the 'One-China Policy' under the Taiwan Relations Act 1979² define the current status-quo and US-China understanding of Taiwan. As China deterred Taiwan's independence, US ambiguity on the 'One China' policy, and the recent statement by US President Joe Biden cautioned and alarmed China. This was reflected in the military exercise and white paper.³

A visit by Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan carries political weight and historical significance and provides the Biden administration with an opportunity to reassure its allies in the Pacific theatre. The US, on the other hand, used the visit to strengthen its position against China and labelled the visit as a symbolic gesture, and not to provoke China militarily.⁴ Pelosi's visit helped the US to gauge China's military threat, giving the White House political gains, the cancellation of the visit could have impacted the US as a dependable ally.⁵

Feature of China's White Paper on Taiwan

The release of the White Paper on Taiwan became the first under President Xi Jinping. It didn't rule out the use of power to unify the island with mainland China. As the White Paper stresses, China will not tolerate foreign interference and separatist forces, and it will blame the Democratic Progressive Party's independence-seeking stand for any such disturbances in the strait.⁶ China naturally didn't want the visit to take place. The visit created a crisis in the strait at a time when China is engaged with the 20th Party Congress to be held in November. This event is a top priority for Xi Jinping as it will help him to stabilise his regime, strengthen his power and control, and help boost the country's economic growth.⁷ The response to Pelosi's visit projects China's response to any such unwarranted visits by US lawmakers, which is seen as a hinderance to Xi Jinping's aim to achieve 'Chinese National Rejuvenation'.⁸

The first White Paper on Taiwan was published when the US and China reached a consensus (orally) on the One-China policy in 1992. The second came when Macau became a part of China in 2000, leaving Taiwan as the missing piece to achieve Chinese national rejuvenation. In this regard, the latest White Paper claims that with 5,000 years of rich history, the reunification of Taiwan carries great advantages, as people on both sides will be able to cherish their history.⁹ It covers five themes to justify China's position on reunifying Taiwan with mainland China:

1. Persistent with the earlier two White Paper on Taiwan, the current sees Taiwan as an inalienable and indisputable part of China since ancient times. China argues its claims are supported by archaeological discoveries and research along with UN Resolution 2758.
2. Since 1921, the CCP has worked for the well-being of the people and made efforts for the complete reunification of China with Taiwan, which is essential for national rejuvenation in a new era.
3. The CCP considers that the reunification process cannot be halted and is necessary for national rejuvenation to fulfil the greatest dream of the Chinese people. The paper argues that foreign interference and separatist forces will fail, as separation will take Taiwan into an abyss. China intends to reunify Taiwan peacefully with force deployment only against external or separatist forces if they cross China's Red Line.
4. Today, national reunification has become a priority for the CCP, which is needed for peaceful cross-strait relations to have integrated development so that the Chinese

people on both sides can utilise the benefits under the 'One Country-Two Systems' principle.

5. If the prospect of reunification persists, it will not only protect Taiwanese rights but also the people's ability to share the triumph of national rejuvenation. In addition, it will also provide a vast space for Taiwan's development, resulting in peace and development in Asia-Pacific and the world.

China sees the US using Taiwan as a pawn against China.¹⁰ Therefore, the release of the White Paper becomes relevant for the CCP to implement its strategy to resolve the Taiwan issue. The release of the new paper on Taiwan was urgently needed as a lot has changed since the last paper was released in 2000. Chinese scholars argue that, the paper was also seen as a warning to the Taiwan authorities, as under new circumstances, China has the ability to solve the Taiwan Question.¹¹

Conclusion

In recent times, the security narrative in East Asia has changed. This is being led by the Chinese threat and great power competition between China and the US. As a result, Taiwan under President Tsai Ing-wen and her relationship with the US prompted China to respond with a military exercise to counter Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. With 2022 remaining an important year for Chinese President Xi Jinping's leadership, the visit not only impacted his power and control within the CCP but also his image in China. On the other hand, the release of the Third White Paper on Taiwan could be viewed as a countermeasure to protect Xi Jinping's image and redefine the power equation in the Sino-US relationship. Taiwan can be treated as the ground zero in the US-China great power competition. The US emphasises the stability in the Taiwan strait with the launch 'US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade' in June 2022. On the other hand, China sees US actions as contrary to its 'Anti-Secession Law, 2005' and didn't formally recognise the One China Policy alarming China¹² In such a situation, the role of the US as a dependable ally has heightened to ensure that the sovereignty of Taiwan remains intact and avoid conflict to counter China's call for peaceful unification of Taiwan with the use of force against external and separatist forces

NOTES:

¹ David Smith “Pelosi’s ‘reckless’ Taiwan visit deepens US-China rupture – why did she go??”, *The Guardian*, August 07, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/07/nancy-pelosi-taiwan-china-visit-military>. Accessed on August 14, 2022.

² Pak K. Lee and Anisa Heritage, “China Refuses to ‘Acknowledge’ US One-China Policy”, *9-Dashline*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.9dashline.com/article/china-refuses-to-acknowledge-us-one-china-policy>. Accessed on August 19, 2022.

³ Mark S. Cogan, “Is Biden Bringing ‘Strategic Ambiguity’ on Taiwan to an End?”, *The Diplomat*, June 02, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/is-biden-bringing-strategic-ambiguity-on-taiwan-to-an-end/>. Accessed on August 19, 2022.

⁴ Sana Hashmi, “Why Pelosi’s trip is more about Taiwan than China”, *Times of India*, August 04, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/why-pelosis-trip-is-more-about-taiwan-than-china/articleshow/93329262.cms>. Accessed on August 13, 2022.

⁵ Vivek Mishra, “Taiwan: The Albatross around President Biden’s Neck”, *ORF*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/taiwan-the-albatross-around-president-bidens-neck/>. Accessed on August 16, 2022.

⁶ “China releases white paper on Taiwan question, reunification in new era”, *China Daily*, August 10, 2022, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202208/10/WS62f313a8a310fd2b29e7160d.html>. Accessed on August 16, 2022.

⁷ Zhenze Huang, “Beijing’s Strategic Dilemma on Cross-Strait Relations”, *The Diplomat*, August 11, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/beijings-strategic-dilemma-on-cross-strait-relations/>. Accessed on August 16, 2022.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Alex Millson, “China’s First White Paper on Taiwan Since Xi Came to Power — In Full”, *Bloomberg*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-10/china-s-first-white-paper-on-taiwan-since-xi-came-to-power-in-full>. Accessed on August 16, 2022.

¹⁰ Cyril Ip, “Beijing’s Taiwan white paper: the messages for home and abroad” *SCMP*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3188367/mainland-china-releases-white-paper-declaring-beijings-greatest>. Accessed on August 17, 2022.

¹¹ Wang Qi, Yang Sheng and Bai Yunyi, “China releases white paper on Taiwan question and reunification, outlines irreversible historical process, stronger capability and rock-solid resolution in new era”, *Global Times*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202208/1272637.shtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2022.

¹² Lee, n.2.