

## Taiwan and the International Order

BERLIN, 22 FEBRUARY 2018

Since Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration as President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in May 2016, relations between Beijing and Taipei have deteriorated substantially. Island encirclement flights, live-fire drills and an upsurge in bellicose rhetoric have raised concerns about stability across the strait. At the international level, the conditions for political order in East Asia pose distinct challenges for Taiwan. Competing territorial claims in the Western Pacific, incidents in Sino-Taiwanese airspace or calculated provocations by paramilitary forces at sea could lead to a series of frictions with the potential to escalate the differing interpretations of Taiwan's sovereignty status. What chances and risks emerge from the international order for the self-governing island?

About 100 attendees discussed this subject at the conference "Taiwan and the International Order" on 22 February 2018, in Berlin. The event was jointly organised by the Taipei Representative Office in Germany and Martin Wagener from the Federal University of Applied Administrative Sciences of Germany. The representative of Taiwan, Jhy-Wey Shieh, received the participants on the delegation's premises. Bundestag members Anita Schäfer, Mark Hauptmann and Klaus-Peter Willsch delivered the opening remarks.

A summary of Taiwan's current situation and the first months of Tsai's presidency was provided by Jhy-Wey Shieh. Since Tsai's inauguration, contact with mainland China has been fraught with Beijing's rising leverage. China's position toward Taiwan, diplomatically and otherwise, is increasingly coercive, and Beijing has been ratcheting up the pressure on Taipei. Its continuing efforts to isolate the island nation are the most intense in decades. The easing of bilateral tensions from 2008 to 2016 during the tenure of then-president Ma Ying-jeou, whose conciliatory approach led to unequivocal reassurances across the strait and the suspension of competition for diplomatic allies, has been reversed. China is sceptical about the newly elected leadership in Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province. Shieh remarked that Taipei prefers solid democracy over reunification. Security provisions by the United States remain essential for Taiwan's survival. The common democratic values Taiwan shares with several Western countries need to be transformed into diplomatic backing.

Martin Wagener addressed Taiwan's position in East Asia's security architecture. Taipei's military expenditure is too low to contain China and is incapable of countering the rising power asymmetry. Taiwan's security depends on risk-coverage by Washington. Tsai might indirectly "tame" China by emphasising Taiwan's similarity with liberal states, using democratic values rather

than military force as a counterweight to Beijing. Western governments will be more willing to support Taipei once they perceive Taiwan as a consolidated democracy, Wagener presumes. If solidarity measures against China are easy to legitimate domestically, they will become more likely.

An introduction to Taiwan's role in international security was provided by Enrico Fels from the University of Bonn. The security dilemma in East Asia has not been overcome, and the promotion of confidence-building measures is necessary to strengthen the rules-based international order. Taiwan is seldom integrated into international institutions and barely benefits from the established multilateral consultations on regional security. Despite Taipei's long-standing pursuit of participation, the island state is continuously confronted with minimisation in terms of security policy.

Michael Zickerick, former director general of the German Institute Taipei, commented on both talks concerning Taiwan's security environment. Germany has long refused to be tougher with China over the principle of Taiwan's national sovereignty, Zickerick emphasised. Berlin could afford gradual emancipation from its "One China" principle.

The discussion that followed was moderated by Manfred Bohr from the Federal Academy for Security Policy in Berlin. There was a strong consensus among the attendees on Taiwan's insufficient defence spending. It is within the responsibility of Western allies to substantially unburden the US military to strengthen Washington's power projection in East Asia. The European Union should not quietly endure Chinese naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean or Baltic Sea. Brussels should react robustly and show a willingness to discipline China's practice of encroaching into Europe.

Dirk Schmidt from the University of Trier reported on Taiwan's economic vulnerabilities. The Republic of China is to a large extent dependent on integration into transnational value chains and contract manufacturing on the mainland. Taipei is threatened by potential US–China trade tensions and the massive industrial programs of the People's Republic designed to climb the value chain.

A further perspective on economics was provided by Gunter Schubert from the University of Tübingen, who presented new approaches to economic policy for Taiwan. Comparatively low real wages and decreasing competitiveness in key industrial sectors, together with budgetary limitations due to the high public debt, have led to the large-scale emigration of Taiwanese employees. Governmental programs for the stimulation of industrial production networks, socio-political reforms and bilateral free-trade agreements are appropriate measures to reduce Taiwan's economic vulnerability, Schubert declared. Foreign economic emancipation from China would mean consciously accepting a range of disadvantages at short notice, however.

Markus Taube from the University of Duisburg-Essen commented on both contributions on Taiwan's economic relationships and outlined Taipei's extensive dependence on value chains controlled by foreign agents. The inner rationality of Beijing's urge for economic expansion aims to crowd out foreign competitors. Taube expressed scepticism about Taipei's New Southbound Policy, which serves the development of geoeconomic spaces south of Taiwan. If Taipei were to view itself instead as a technology incubator concentrating on national economic strengths, the available resources could be invested with more impact on domestic industries.

The German ambassador to Luxembourg, Heinrich Kreft, moderated the subsequent debate. Most participants supported a more structural Taiwanese innovation policy. Although Taiwan benefits from substantial process innovations, large national markets are essential for the scaling of network effects. The Republic of China lacks the innovative impulses to compensate for the insufficient domestic demand and can thus scarcely maintain sustainable competitiveness in the global market.

Hanns W. Maull from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs gave his thoughts on turbulence as a structural characteristic of international politics. Processes of globalisation systematically overwhelm political decision-makers, he stated. The legitimacy, efficacy and authority in the international order are in precarious condition. Their cohesion is eroding. Taiwan lies in between the competing poles of liberal democracies and authoritarian systems. The future of the international order depends on the build-up of effective multilateral coalitions and the cooperation of international partners along shared values.

Another participant from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Gudrun Wacker, outlined future perspectives on the state of security in the Taiwan Strait. The "diplomatic ceasefire" brokered during Ma Ying-jeou's presidency seems to have been abolished. Beijing's campaign to fulfil its "Chinese Dream" by 2049 indirectly sets a deadline to finally settle the dispute over Taiwan's sovereignty status. Wacker considers it unlikely that Beijing and Washington will embark on a cooperative strategy to edge closer to an accord on clearly defined zones of influence in the Western Pacific. China will not likely make concessions on US President Donald Trump's priorities on Taiwan.

Reinhard Wolf from Goethe University Frankfurt commented on both presentations on Taiwan's future role in the international order. The stabilising effects of the liberal world order on the international system are paramount, Wolf insisted.

The discussion that followed was led by Siegfried Schieder (Heidelberg University). The participants outlined an urgent need for innovations to the

state order and asserted that emerging powers should be given equal opportunity to introduce demands into multilateral cooperation formats.

The event's outcomes illustrate how the security architecture in East Asia limits Taiwan's strategic options to ensure its national security. The attendees agreed on the preservation of the status quo as the most favourable option for Taiwan to ensure stability in cross-strait relations.

*Kevin Kälker*

## **8th Annual Meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography**

COLOGNE, 19 – 20 JANUARY 2018

The eighth annual meeting of the South Asia Working Group of the German Society of Geography (Arbeitskreis Südasiens in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie [DGfG]) took place from 19 to 20 January 2018 at the Institute of Geography, University of Cologne. The meeting, which included thirty participants, was organised by Carsten Butsch and Alexander Follmann. The presentation of the “Geographies of South Asia” research prize for the best geographic thesis on South Asia was the highlight of the event. Raphael Pinheiro Machado Rehm received the award for his master's thesis presented at the University of Augsburg entitled “Small Scale Variability in Soil Hydraulic Properties in Headwater Catchment of the Indian Western Ghats”. This is the first time that a work on physical geography was awarded the prize, which was initiated by the working group in 2015. The selection was made by a jury consisting of Martin Franz (Osnabrück), Markus Nüsser (Heidelberg) and Matthias Schmidt (Augsburg).

The conference began on Friday afternoon with a presentation by Tatiana López Ayala (Cologne) titled “Workers in Global Production Networks: Local Labour Control Regime and Trade Union Organisation in the Bangalore Export Clothing Cluster”. She outlined how the control regime in the clothing production network at the local level is shaped by the complex interaction of strategies between actors at different levels. Three presentations from the field of high mountain research followed: first, Juliane Dame (Heidelberg), Julia Poerting (Bonn) and Stefanie Raschke (Heidelberg) talked about perspectives and challenges in introducing standardised cultivation systems in the high mountain regions of South Asia. In particular, they addressed power issues in (inter)national standardised food chains and the relationship between chang-