

Taiwan Nationalists Seek Closer Relations with China. Bad News for America

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In the the Kuomintang (KMT), the Nationalist Party of Taiwan, election held on Saturday, Jiang Kai (commonly known in the West as Johnny Chiang) was selected as a new head of the political party. According to Taiwanese media, Jiang Kai will change the KMT's policy towards mainland China.

The press draws such conclusions based on the KMT's new president's statement about the 1992 consensus, also known as the One China Consensus, as "somewhat outdated." In the presidential election held on January 11, KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu, a former mayor of Kaohsiung City, lost to Tsai Ing-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), becoming Taiwan's first female. In addition, the DPP still occupies the majority of seats in the Legislature.

In the election for the new party chairman, Jiang Kai only had a single opponent - the former Taipei mayor, Zhu Lilun (commonly known in the West as Eric Chu). He overcame his opponent with 84,860 votes compared to 38,483 votes, however it is worth noting that only 35% of voters bothered to vote. Taiwanese authorities claim that such a low rate is due to the coronavirus epidemic. In his speech after announcing the conclusion of voting, Jiang revealed that the KMT needs to make some changes to meet the spirit of the times, and he will make these changes within a year. The KMT are no longer as conservative as they once used to be, and in this way, Jiang is hoping to attract a part of the DPP's voters who are generally younger and more progressive than the KMT.

For example, the KMT opposes same-sex marriage, but the law is still valid because the DPP legislature occupies the majority of seats. And among young Taiwanese, not just in the LGBT community, the legalization of such relationships is considered the greatest achievement since democracy reached Taiwan. An even more important contradiction between the two parties: the so-called 1992 consensus and the concept of "one China" (united China). The DPP does not recognize this consensus and the KMT has supported relations with mainland China, something the DPP are extremely hostile to. Clearly, the KMT now wants to move on to resolve internal issues, such as attracting new voters, and then resolve relations with Beijing. That's why the KMT must begin entertaining the idea of making some changes to the 1992 consensus.

How will the new KMT party chairman and changes in the party's policy affect Beijing? The last election showed that the DPP won the populist wave in the context of social disturbances in Hong Kong, and now they are also using the Covid-19 epidemic for political purposes to prove the validity of not strengthening relations with Beijing. The anti-Beijing DPP has prevented relations from becoming closer with Taipei, despite Taiwan's economy suffering greatly just because its relationship with mainland China has cooled. This

economic factor was especially felt when Beijing stopped granting licenses to travel companies to go to Taiwan which saw the number of tourists decrease by nearly a third. Agricultural imports into mainland China have plummeted, even though two years ago China purchased 20% of agricultural products worth nearly \$1 billion. Taking into account the damage that coronavirus outbreaks has caused worldwide, economic development may become the most important task. The KMT will then try to balance domestic political interests and not move too far away from mainland China.

This spells bad news for the U.S. as they have been the main backers of Taiwan since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 when the KMT were defeated by communist guerrillas and forced to leave the Chinese mainland. Taiwan's modern history lays with the U.S.-backed authoritarian regime of General Chiang Kai-Shek, the leader of the KMT. Chiang then imposed martial law and became dictator of Taiwan for the next 38 years, before a gradual democratization was achieved and presidential elections in 1996. The resentment of losing mainland China to the communists and the permanent deployment of tens of thousands of American soldiers has ensured that Taiwan, an island located just off the coast of China's Fujian province, is a major U.S. pressure point against Beijing.

Although the days of Chiang and the KMT believing they are an exile government is long over, they still believe in One China, a stark difference to that of the DPP who want complete sovereignty and independence in their own right and reject One China. With the KMT seeking closer relations with Beijing despite once being mortal enemies, their inevitable return to power in the future could mean that they will begin to deAmericanize Taiwan as they seek closer relations, particularly for stability and economic reasons, with China, recognizing that we now live in a multipolar world order.

A deAmericanized Taiwan effectively means that the U.S. will lose a major submissive partner that acted as a thorn to Chinese hegemony in the South China Sea, and it is unlikely that Washington will accept this reality so easily. None-the-less, as the KMT changes its policies to attract the younger generation, it can see a real potential for One China to be achieved and the U.S. expelled from the island just as calls for the U.S. military to leave South Korea and Japan also intensify.

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