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## China's Foreign Policy Directions: a Quixotic Break (?) In the Aftermath of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress

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### Introduction

China's foreign policy directions since 1949 have gone through three distinct turns or changes from 1955 on, following an initial period of seclusion. As will be seen below, neither of the first two turns was as adversarial, and chivalrous, as the one emerging from the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which met on October 18-24, 2017.

◁▷The first turn came in 1955, as a result of the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia. The 29 attending Asian and African countries were concerned with a number of issues in the Cold War setting and anti-colonialism. In addition, they were also concerned with China's diplomatic isolation stemming from the non-recognition policy of the United States and many of its allies. For the first time, the People's Republic of China (PRC) had a chance to intermingle with a large enough group of nations that accounted for a quarter of the world's land space and 54% of world population. As such, the meeting was sometimes facetiously dubbed the *bar mitzveh* for the Chinese Communist government since it came to power in 1949.

At the Bandung Conference, Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai), the Chinese Premier, announced his country's willingness to talk with the United States, despite the absence of diplomatic relations, on the issue of reducing tensions in Pacific Asia, especially in the Taiwan Strait. And, 90 days later, representatives from the two countries did start to meet in what turned out to be a marathon talk, first in Geneva, later moved to Warsaw, lasting off and on till 1971.

◁▷The second turn/change came with Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening Up" policy that began as from 1978. The "Opening Up" move paved the way for a globalizing approach in China's foreign relations, as it called for Chinese markets to be opened up to foreign trade and investments and, in return, also for China's own outreach to all corners of the world.

Deng was careful, however, to maintain a deliberate restraint over the country's external posture, lest its newly-gained and fast growing economic clout should pose a threat to foreign powers. In Chinese, the policy was known as *taoguang yanghui* (韬光養晦, or keep a low profile and skew over-extension), described in English as a "hide and bide" posture. Looked at from an alternative angle, moreover, one might take it as an option to avoid getting into an unnecessary geopolitical competition with the United States, considering China's power deficit at the time, notably in the military and technological arenas. The same strategy was continued in the post-Deng era, by a succession of CCP's General Secretaries, from Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, to the first term of Xi Jinping, that is, until the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (2017).

Before discussing the third change in China's foreign-policy directions introduced in Xi Jinping's second term, let us first examine how he carried on the Dengist strategy during his first term (2012-2017), while giving it a different twist, one of a geoeconomic sort.

After being elected for his first term by the Party's 18<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2012, Xi Jinping followed in spirit the Dengist low-profile policy. He went ahead, however, to introduce three initiatives with the specific aim of carrying on a non-symmetric competition with the United States, crafting a non-zero-sum geoeconomic game, to avoid blundering into a geopolitical (e.g. military) strife, which would be zero-sum.<sup>1</sup>

### Xi Jinping Adding a Geoeconomic Twist to Deng's Low-Profile Policy

The three geoeconomic initiatives Xi introduced during 2013-2014 included (a) the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), (b) the New Development Bank (NDB) under the joint auspices of the BRICS,<sup>2</sup> and (c) the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) project, which is alternatively known by the BRI acronym (Belt and Road Initiative).

While the NDB with its \$100 billion initial capitalization is

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the differences of geoeconomics from geopolitics, see James C. Hsiung, "Age of Geoeconomics, China's Global Role, and the Prospects of Cross-Strait Integration," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 14, issue 2 (2009), 113-133.

<sup>2</sup> BRICS stands for the conglomeration of the five emerging markets, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. For more on NDB, see NDB press release entitled: "Press Conference by NDB on the Eve of Signing the Headquarters Agreement with China" (<http://www.ndb.int>).

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professedly designed to help the developing countries by making loans easier and less restrictive like the “conditionality” requirements of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the other two initiatives have broader and more ambitious goals.<sup>3</sup>

The AIIB, which has 57 participating nations, incl. UK and other European and Asian allies of the United States that joined over the Obama administration’s overt objection, was created following an earlier report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that the Asian region had room for an \$8 trillion infrastructure construction, if the region’s nations wished to continue their successful path of development. In effect, the AIIB evolved into an international financial institution to help finance the infrastructure projects as a part of the OBOR initiative, with a focus on building links across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

The main objective of OBOR (or BRI) is to link 65 to 77 economies across these same regions, with a combined population of 4.4 billion. The One Belt, in fact, is the new Silk Road, to join China with inland countries in these regions through the creation of highways, railways, pipelines, aviation facilities, and telecommunications and power networks. And, the One Road, which is actually a maritime route, is to link together the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean.

Total investment is given at \$4-8 trillion. And, the time frame for completion is a decade. While the strategic goal is given as combating a perceived post-2009 rising protectionist trend in the post-Cold War world, a more significant (though hidden) strategic concern, to reiterate, is to launch China on a geoeconomic path, staying clear of a geopolitical competition, hence a military contention, with the United States.<sup>4</sup>

All this offered a new twist to the Dengist preference for keeping a low profile, one that was made necessary by the onset of what is sometimes called the Age of Geoeconomics, after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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<sup>3</sup> Hong Yu, “Motivation behind China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative, and the Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 26, issue 105 (2017).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

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## The Quixotic Turn in China's Foreign-Policy Directions

The latest, and third, turn in China's foreign-policy directions, amounting to what appeared to be a quixotic break with the past, emerged in the aftermath of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Xi Jinping, who was elected to a second term as the CCP general secretary, etched out the new directions in a report billed as a recount of the nation's achievements since the previous 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. In his long report, which lasted three and a half hours, he addressed seven large themes and outlined future policy goals for China.

It provided assessments of both the domestic and external environment, plus a sketch of broad initiatives and priorities in respect of foreign and defense policy, even postulating a visionary goal of building a "human community of common destiny" (人类命运共同体). It staked out an "omni-directional foreign policy layout" (全方位外交佈局), for what Xi described as a "new era" facing China and the world.

The main foreign policy themes Xi outlined in the report followed the very premise of the "new era," marked by global multipolarity, economic globalization, and changes in the global governance system and the international order. These comprehensive changes, he stated, included "deepening development" in the direction of the inter-connectedness and interdependence among nations. He noted "...relative international forces are becoming more balanced," amidst signs of the continued relative decline of U.S. power.

In unequivocal terms, Xi Jinping projected his own country as a "more powerful China on the world stage," and spoke of "Chinese wisdom" and the "Chinese approach" to major problems facing humankind. Punctuated by repeated mentions of "national rejuvenation" (fuxin, 復興) and the Chinese Dream, he declared: "This is an era that will see China move closer to the center of the world and make more contributions to humankind." <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The full text of Xi's report can be found at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\\_136725942.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm)

Xi was mindful of assuaging foreign (esp. U.S.) concerns about an overbearing China, and took care to echo a pledge that had been made, repeatedly, by past Chinese leaders, from Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, to Deng Xiaoping (Deng made it before the United Nations General Assembly), that China would never seek hegemony or engage in predatory expansion “no matter what stage of development it reaches.”

However, the next thing he said was not so reassuring or calming to the sensibilities of foreign powers, when he flaunted the goal of developing a “world-class military” by mid-century (2050). He elaborated on this point with a scary follow-up statement: “A military is built to fight,” adding: “And it must also be able to win wars.” He went on to explain that the CCP would oversee (a) the building of a “powerful and modernized army, navy, air force, rocket force, and strategic support force”; (b) the development of “strong and efficient joint operations commanding institutions for theater commands”; and (c) creation of a modern combat system with distinct Chinese characteristics.”

No wonder, as can be expected, some Western observers/analysts, foremost among them Michael D. Swaine, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, saw this explosive foreign policy posture etched out by Xi Jinping as confirming the unmistakable “end of China’s ‘hide and bide’ period,” turning instead toward an un-inhibited quest for the status of a more powerful player on the world stage.<sup>6</sup> Others saw the coming of a more “assertive” Chinese foreign policy.<sup>7</sup>

This new quixotic stance not only abandoned the Dengist low-profile approach, but also reversed Xi Jinping’s own discreet attempt not to let a perceived overbearing China generate a run-away China threat scare, as noted above. One might question what could have been the rationale for this drastic break with the past. We can only speculate on some possible reasons, both domestic and international. And, three came to mind at once.



<sup>6</sup> Michael D. Swaine, “The 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and Chinese Foreign Policy,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 16m 2017, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/10/19th-party-congress-and-chinese-foreign-policy-pub-734322>>; also carried in *China Leadership Monitor* (Stanford University), Winter 2018, issue 55 (January 23, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser and Matthew P. Funable, “The 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress: A More Assertive Chinese Foreign Policy,” *The Interpreter*, October 26, 2017.

<>First, the most obvious precipitating factor could be the emboldening effects of China's rise as the world's second largest economy and the consequential drop in the level of its previous power deficit. But, China reached that status as early as 2011. In that year, China's GDP overtook that of Japan, shattering the latter's record, kept for 42 straight years, of having a hefty economy next only to that of the United States. And in 2013-2014,, as noted above, Xi took care to advance his geoeconomic initiatives to steer clear of a military competition with any foreign power. That being so, then what caused him to reverse himself in 2017 still remains a perplexing puzzle.

<>Second, another possible stimulus may have come from a perceived mounting challenge brought on by poisonous shifts in U.S. policy toward China, more poignantly under Donald Trump after he assumed office in January 2017. Despite its simplistic overtones, this line of speculation may deserve a more serious consideration, for its potential of yielding a reasonable answer, provided the timeline is pushed much further back, say, to the collapse of Soviet power after 1990.

Let us recall that the "normalization" of U.S.-PRC relations in 1979, ending three decades of Washington's non-recognition policy, resulted ultimately from President Nixon's adoption of a strategy advanced by Henry Kissinger, his National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State. In essence it was a strategy calculated to play the China card against a Soviet Union that had reached primacy with the U.S. in the nuclear race. A little over a decade later, however, the China card lost its value, as the Soviet threat had vanished.<sup>8</sup>

It so happened that just as the Soviet threat vanished after 1990, China's post-1978 rise began to radiate signals of a looming threat in the perception of some U.S. analysts as early as 2001.<sup>9</sup> In 2006, some over-sensitive analysts in the United States, like Peter Navarro, began to sense an inevitable war with China.<sup>10</sup> Graham Allison even saw the peril

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<sup>8</sup> I have dealt with this point in Hsiung, *The South China Sea Disputes and the U.S.-China Contest, International Law and Geopolitics* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishers, 2018), 105-108.

<sup>9</sup> John Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 80, issue 5 (September-October 2001), 46-61; 47. Seeing China as a rising threat, Mearsheimer urged a U.S.-Japan collaboration to knock down China before it completes its rise. For more on Mearsheimer's argument, see Bill Calahan, "John Mearsheimer vs. Joseph Nye on the Rise of China," in *Diplomat*, July 8, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Navarro, *The Coming China War* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2006).

of a Thucydides Trap engulfing China and the United States, very much like the one that dogged the rising Athens vis-à-vis the predominant Sparta, on the eve of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S.-China contest at the governmental level became more pronounced after 2010, first as a result of mutual misreading of each other's intentions, but later rattled by naval confrontations in the South China Sea (SCS).<sup>12</sup> In July 2010, while attending a regional forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Hanoi, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered an address which the *New York Times* characterized as "a sharp rebuke to China."<sup>13</sup> Behind the diplomatic innuendo, she stiffened the backbone of the Southeast Asian nations by urging them to stand up to China in their disputes over claims to the SCS. Perhaps not by coincidence, right afterward, in both 2011 and 2012, the Philippines and China were locked in separate face-offs involving either fishing vessels or warships.<sup>14</sup> The Manila government even carried its fight with China to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Hague for an arbitration that was stacked in its favor.<sup>15</sup> Similar clashes erupted between Vietnam and China. One such clash took place on May 26, 2011, scarcely 10 months after Secretary Clinton's "pep talk" to the Southeast Asian nations at the Hanoi meeting.<sup>16</sup>

In 2012, the Obama Administration unveiled its Asia Pivot policy with its (unannounced) intent to line up Asian countries, including those in ASEAN plus Japan, to contain China, under the innocuous pretext of "power rebalancing". U.S. navy began in 2013 to patrol the South China Sea and to maintain surveillance on China, which actually preceded the start of Chinese artificial-island building by more than one year. In reporting on an encounter, in fact a near-collision, in the SCS between U.S. and Chinese naval vessels, the *New York Times* said the U.S. carrier *Cowpens* was "observing [trailing] the Chinese carrier, the *Liaoning*, as it made its first voyage in the South China Sea," causing a

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<sup>11</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> See Hsiung, *op.cit.*, n. 8 above, 131ff.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Landler, "Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenged China on Disputed Islands," *New York Times*, July 23, 2010, online; cited in *The South China Sea Disputes*, *op.cit.*, n.8 above, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Hsiung, *The South China Sea Disputes*, *op.cit.* 10ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

<sup>16</sup> "Vietnam Accuses China in Sea Disputes", *BBC News*, May 30, 2011, cited in *Id.*

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near collision with it.<sup>17</sup>

Things came to a head when U.S. naval ships started to challenge the Chinese building of artificial islands in SCS in 2015. Worse, the U.S. side intensified its naval challenge to the Chinese, even on what China considers as its legitimate claims to historic waters in the SCS, starting in May 2017. Media reports attributed this action to directions from the Trump White House.<sup>18</sup>

Considering this steady intensification of Washington's hostilities toward China, the obvious conclusion is twofold: (a) The U.S.-China tensions had a long history of brewing that did not seem to originate merely from the Chinese side; and (b) The Trump trade-war intimidation was much more about trade inequality issues per se.

If pushing this line of speculation to its logical end, one might conclude that the stepped-up U.S. hostility may have steeled the Chinese resolve to rise above their previous low profile and to put up a formidable adversarial stance, if it would help to deter a war. Xi Jinping's tough talk about a targeted Chinese military buildup, reversing even his own previous preferences, could very well be intended as such a deterrent.

But, one fatal flaw in this line of speculation is that Xi Jinping, being a by-and-large scrupulous leader with a known record of doing all he could to prevent a U.S.-China military contest, as noted earlier, should have been wary of the counter-productive effect of an overly assertive stance, especially if it be construed as being directed to the United States. So, his gung-ho rhetoric must have another more plausible reason, to which we shall now turn.

◁>A third possible reason----or alternative explanation----for the quixotic turn in China's foreign policy posture, as such, could be a calculated reaction to the increasing audacity in Taiwan's defiant attitudes and policy toward the China mainland in the last two years. Since 2016, Taiwan is ruled by a new government under Tsai Ing-wen, whose Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is noted for its maverick Separatist Platform, seeking a separatist independence for the island. Under the

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<sup>17</sup> "American and Chinese Naval Ships Nearly Collided in South China Sea" *New York Times*, December 14, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> "South China Sea: U.S. Warship Challenges China's Claims with First Operation under Trump," CNN News, May 25, 2017; and "U.S. Warship Challenges China's Claims in South China Sea," Aljazeera Mews. May 25, 2017; both cited in Hsiung, *op.cit.*, n.7 above, p. 145.

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Platform, the DPP renounces the One China concept that postulates an eventual reunification beyond the current division between Taiwan and the mainland, a legacy from China's civil war of the 1940s. The cross-Strait tension became more acute as Tsai Ing-wen engaged in an all-out endeavor to play the American card against Beijing, working with or through Taiwan's multiple lobbying channels.<sup>19</sup> Worse still, Trump seems to have responded by exploiting the opportunity to play the Taiwan card against China, while conducting his all-out trade war with it.

Because of its complexity, and the intriguing links between the worsening Taiwan situation and the mounting U.S.-PRC conflict, in the face of the unfolding round of the double card-playing against China, we will discuss the whole issue in a separate section below.

### The Taiwan Complication in China's Dealings with Trump

First, a few words are in order about the background. The Republic of China (ROC) government, headed by its elected President Chiang Kai-shek, under its 1947 Constitution, and seated in Nanjing (Nanking), lost the civil war to the Communist revolutionary forces led by Mao Zedong in 1949. The end result was the relocation of the ROC government to Taiwan, while Mao declared the birth of the new People's Republic of China, or PRC, on October 1, 1949. Hence began the ensuing division between the two sides of China separated by the Taiwan Strait, going forward till this day.

The United States, followed by many of its allies and supporters ---- plus the United Nations<sup>20</sup>----nevertheless, continued to recognize the ROC/Taiwan. Perceiving the PRC regime in Beijing as an extension of the Stalinist Communist empire, Washington refused to recognize it until, as noted before, President Nixon decided to exploit the deepening Sino-Soviet split by playing the China card against the Soviet rival.

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<sup>19</sup> Tsai was adroitly working with pro-Taiwan groups in the U.S., incl. the "Taiwan Lobby" on Capitol Hill; ten lobbying firms---incl. the Gephart Group, the Nickes Group, Alston & Bird, and the Daschle Group---; and the Formosan Association for Political Affairs (FAPA), which has ten branches throughout the U.S. The Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative's Office (TECRO), the islands de facto embassy in Washington, D.C., works closely with six of the ten lobbying firms on Taiwan's payroll.

<sup>20</sup> But, by U.N.G.A. Resolution 2758, passed on Oct. 25, 1971, the delegation from the PRC replaced that from the ROC as the representatives from China. Thus, mainland China is in, and Taiwan is out, as a member of the United Nations, as from that point on.

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Hence, Nixon made his ice-breaking visit to mainland China in 1972, when he signed the historic Shanghai Communique, by which the United States recognized “there is but one China and that Taiwan is part of China.”

. Normalization of relations with the PRC, nevertheless, was sidetracked by Watergate until 1979 under the Carter administration, but not before terminating the U.S.’s diplomatic relations with ROC/Taiwan, along with the mutual security treaty. One additional (hidden) rationale for this move toward China, I might add, was a fond hope that it might help induce a regime change (i.e., moving toward greater democracy) in China, although this, like other similar attempts, has turned out to be more like a wishful thinking.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the end of diplomatic relations with ROC/Taiwan dictated that henceforth U.S. relations with the de-recognized Taiwan (now the “ROC” terminology was dropped from all official usage) can only be “unofficial”. Nor should there be any official transactions, such as a treaty (or signed agreement).

History, however, often may have unexpected, ironic, twists and turns. On December 2, 2016, or 25 days after Donald Trump was declared the winner of the U.S. Presidential Election, Tsai Ing-wen, who herself was inaugurated only in May, after winning Taiwan’s presidential election in March the same year, made a trans-Pacific telephone call to congratulate the new 45<sup>th</sup> American President-elect. Going against the convention established by the U.S. State Department’s consistent practice since 1979, prohibiting any official contacts with Taiwan, Mr. Trump accepted the call from Tsai.<sup>22</sup>

In the 10 minutes that the call lasted, the two leaders spoke about politics, the economy, and security in Asia Pacific, incl. U.S. arms sale to Taiwan, according to information released by Tsai’s office.<sup>23</sup> The unprecedented nature of Trump’s decision to take the phone call from an official (in this case the President) of Taiwan was enough to ignite unusual publicity in the media. But, what elicited even more excitement,

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<sup>21</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 2 (March/April 2018), 60-70, at 70.

<sup>22</sup> The call is said to have been arranged by the Daschle Group, one of the ten lobbying firms working for Taiwan. See report by Megan R. Wilson, 12/07/2016, sourced from: <thhill.com.../lobby...lobbying/309120-taiwan-lobby-score-victory-with-trump-call>.

<sup>23</sup> As reported in Taiwan’s *Pinguo (Apple) Daily*, December 5, 2016.

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nay, controversy, was when China protested on the ground that it violated the One China principle that the U.S. accepted as the core foundation on which U.S.-China diplomatic relations were founded.

The strong Taiwan Lobby in the Republican-controlled Congress, moreover, was able skillfully to cast the incident in a light favorable to Tsai Ing-wen's DPP regime, casting the Taiwan-mainland rivalry as one between democracy and dictatorship. Hence, Senator Ted Cruz depicted Trump's decision to take Tsai's call as making more sense than Obama's accommodation to Cuba's dictator Raul Castro. In a broadcast report to China, the Voice of America (VOA) rounded up the views of Washington's elite commentators, from Vice President Michael Pence, House Speaker Paul Ryan, to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, an advisor to Trump. It made mention of a commonly raised question, like a refrain: "Why did we (the U.S.) abandon Taiwan for the sake of China in the first place?"<sup>24</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that the Taiwan Travel Act (HR 535) was introduced in Congress on January 13, 2017. On the surface of it, this Act was a mere harmless "sense of Congress" resolution calling for the removal of all obstacles to free contacts between "officials" of Washington and Taipei at all levels. But, in retrospect, it was the first subtle step of the Republican Congress, under the sway of the powerful Taiwan Lobby, to coordinate with President Trump in his Taiwan card playing. The Resolution was followed by the introduction of a sleuth of other not so subtle legislations in both chambers of Congress, plus one additional Resolution.

A breakdown of them follows below, in chronological order:

\*H. Res.271, introduced on April 6, 2017, by Rep. Ted Yoho (R. FL) was a resolution calling on the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to enter into a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan.

\*H.R. 2621, introduced on May 24, 2017, by Rep. Marc Thornberry (R.TX), was identified as Strengthening Security in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Act. Although this Act did not mention Taiwan

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<sup>24</sup> VOA broadcast (in Chinese), dated December 6, 2016.

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by name, the island conceivably could benefit from the radiating effects of some of the Act's general provisions. For example, the bill requires Pentagon to report to Congress regarding, among other things, U.S. defense priorities and challenges emanating from the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, including challenges from North Korea and China. In the Taiwan card-playing game, any such U.S. concerns about security threats from China would be a plus for Taiwan.

\*H.R. 2810, introduced on Je. 7, 2017 also by Rep. Marc Thornberry. Known as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2018, it contained a provision to consider establishing the "port of call exchanges" between Washington and Taipei's navies.<sup>25</sup>

\*H.R. 3320, introduced on July 9, 2017 by Rep. Ted S. Yoho (R.FL) was a bill "to direct the Secretary of State to regain observer status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization (WHO).

\*S.1620, introduced on July 24, 2017 by Senators Tom Cotton (R.AR) and Cory Gardner (R.CO). Known obtusely as the Taiwan Security Act, it goes far further than anything the pre-existing Taiwan Relations Act (adopted by Congress in 1979) sought to do for Taiwan's security (against a presumed China threat), in offering U.S. help to guarantee the island's security.

The last mentioned bill (S.1620) directs the Department of Defense (DOD) to carry out a program of exchanges of senior military officers and senior officials between the United States and Taiwan that are designated to improve military relations. The U.S. shall (1) conduct regular transfers of defense articles to Taiwan to support its efforts to develop and integrate asymmetric capabilities into its military forces, and (2) host senior officials of the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense for an annual strategic dialogue on arms sales to ensure the regular transfer of such articles.

In addition to inviting Taiwan's military forces to participate in U.S.-sponsored air force exercises, the DOD, under the bill, shall (a)

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<sup>25</sup> The PRC's violent reaction to this can be seen in remarks made by Chinese diplomat Li Kexin to U.S. officials that "the day a U.S. Navy vessel arrives in Kaohsiung (Taiwan's main port) is the day that our People's Liberation Army unifies Taiwan for force." By "unifies" in the context, he implied capture by force.

re-establish regular ports of call by the U.S. Navy in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's main port city, or in other suitable ports on the island, and (2) permit the United States Pacific Command to receive ports of call by Taiwan's navy in Hawaii, Guam, or other appropriate locations.<sup>26</sup>

While all the above introduced legislations were pending, the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress passed the FY2017 appropriations legislation (PL 115-31), on Sept. 30, 2017 to fund the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). It was passed amidst rumors that Washington might consider the re-sending of marines for the protection of the security of the AIT office in Taipei, which in the absence of an embassy, handles the U.S.'s nominally "unofficial" relations with the island. (Parenthetically, as it became known much later, the State Department did make such a request, but was swiftly turned down by the Pentagon.<sup>27</sup>)

In summing up, let us note that all these legislations were introduced in--- or in the case of PL15-31 adopted by--- U.S. Congress throughout the year 2017, Donald Trump's first year in office, but prior to the convening in China of the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress in late October. And, they highlighted the audacious, and diabolical, Taiwan-U.S. collaborative card-playing aimed at China as the intended target for different reasons.

The unavoidable obvious question, therefore, is: Whether together they may have cast a decisive influence on President Xi Jinping in his announced quixotic break with China's 39-year-old "hide and bide" foreign-relations posture. With all this kept in full view, a re-reading of Xi's report to the Party Congress, especially the part where he offered a blunt warning against any form or avenue of separatism involving Taiwan, seems to be very instructive, and revealing.

## Conclusion

By a process of natural elimination, we can write off the first two speculated reasons, given above, as the possible precipitator of the seeming quixotic break with the past "hide and bide" posture in the

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<sup>26</sup> Full text of S. 1620 can be retrieved from: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1620/text>.; The bill in identical form was later introduced in the House on Nov. 9, 2017, by Representatives Michael McCaul and Robert Pittenger.

<sup>27</sup> "Pentagon turns down request to send US marine to Taiwan," CNN , 13 Sept. 2018.

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Chinese conduct of external-relations. What may have prompted the third possible reason---- or competing explanation ---- may very well be the weighty effects of the Tsai-Trump double card-playing aimed at China. Hence, Xi Jinping's gung-ho rhetoric should come as no surprise, even though it in itself represented a reversal of his own previous prudent strategy of avoiding a geopolitical (i.e., military) contest with any foreign power.

This becomes more sensible if we re-examine his emphatic warning to Taiwan (direct), and to Trump (indirect), on the question of the future status of Taiwan, caught between two paths: pursuing separatism, on the one hand, and, on the other, remaining as part of the (abstract) One China, *qua* an ethnic- cultural-political entity.

The most telling passage in Xi' speech, addressing Taiwan's future, reads: "We have iron-clad will, unflinching confidence, and sufficient power and capability to defeat *any* form of a "Taiwan separatist" conspiracy. We will absolutely NOT permit *any* one, *any* organization, *any* political party, at *any* time, in *any* shape and fashion, take away *any* portion of our land from China" (my loose translation from the Chinese original; with emphases added) .

In this six-fold repetition of the word "any" used for emphasis, one can sense, and feel, the depth of Xi's anger (at the Tsai-Trump collaborative card-playing), and the firmness of his determination, aired on behalf of all Chinese, and the Chinese diaspora, on the matter of preventing any nativist separatist pursuit by Taiwan, or any foreign power's intervention in abetting a Taiwan separatist route. The next question is: How will China deliver what Xi promised?

This is why Xi spoke of China's goal of military modernization and having a "world-class military" in place by mid-century (2050), one that can 'win wars". To make sure all this would be understood by the card players, Xi continued in his warning that he meant China would have a "powerful and modernized army, navy, air force, rocket force, and strategic support force," etc. This part was to warn Tsai Ing-wen and her DPP cohorts that their blind faith in the U.S. military might as a guarantee of their security would be futile. To Trump and the Taiwan Lobby in the

Republican-controlled Congress, the message was a blunt reminder not to under-estimate China's military capability: In other words, to under-estimate China's determination and capability would be to undermine U.S.'s own interests.

In this light, therefore, the ultimate answer is that Xi Jinping's gung-ho rhetoric, aired at the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress, should NOT be viewed as a quixotic rupture of post-Mao China's low-profile policy, much less a departure from the repeated pledge by previous Chinese leaders never to seek hegemony, which President Xi also repeated in his long report. It was, ultimately, timed and calculated to serve notice on the maverick collaborative card playing by the Tsai-Trump duo, as illustrated above. Q.E.D.

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