

Appendix 177 -- Chen Washington Post Interview (2006)

Source: The Washington Post. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/13/AR2006031301504.html>

March 13, 2006

The following is a transcript of the interview with President Chen by Anthony Faiola, Northeast Asia Bureau Chief, and Edward Cody, Beijing Correspondent, Washington Post.

Q1. Thank you for taking the time to receive us. I know you have a lot of work to do. I appreciate it very much to have the opportunity to pepper you with questions.

A: Today is March 13. Exactly ten years ago today, the second missile of the Taiwan Strait missile crisis landed off the coast of Kaohsiung. The first missile was fired on March 8, and the second, five days later on this date ten years ago. The nearest missile landed about 55 km from Taiwan. I think both of you are fully aware that around this time ten years ago Taiwan was holding its first-ever direct election of its national leader, the president. While Taiwan was engaged in promoting, deepening, and consolidating democracy, China was using military force to intimidate Taiwan. This was unbelievable. China can refuse to practice democracy, but it should not oppose Taiwan practicing it. It should not have used missiles to intimidate Taiwan. Fortunately, the US government, under the leadership of President Clinton, sent two aircraft carriers to the region, successfully resolving the missile crisis and enabling Taiwan to complete its first-ever direct presidential election. Ten years have passed. We have deep thoughts and feelings. The 23 million people of Taiwan feel even more strongly and deeply about the situation. Everyone has noticed the emergence of China. We hope that it will be a peaceful emergence marked by the awakening of democracy in China.

In reality, China is like an elephant. When an elephant walks into a china shop, if it goes crazy, it may make a mess of, or even destroy, the china, antiques, or other valuable things located there. If China is an elephant, then Taiwan, being so small, is like a rabbit. Taiwan is a very timid rabbit. When China the elephant tramples upon Taiwan the rabbit, people throughout the world demand that Taiwan the rabbit not make a sound, that it not even yelp in pain, but that it silently endure being trampled upon. Everyone is afraid that China the elephant may go crazy, but they can only think of asking Taiwan the rabbit not to struggle. The more the rabbit struggles, the crazier the elephant becomes. Everyone has forgotten that the elephant has the rabbit under its foot, and the rabbit perhaps is even injured and unable to shout in pain. Today, on the tenth anniversary of the Taiwan Strait missile crisis, we urge the international community to incorporate China the elephant into civilized society. The international community should work to make China accept the universal values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and peace. Cross-strait differences should not be resolved by resorting to force or non-peaceful means. Instead, they should be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

It is regrettable that over the last ten years, China has continued to increase its military threat and refuse to engage in dialogue with the government of Taiwan and even ignore its existence.

US Deputy Secretary of State Zoellick expressed his hope that China could become a responsible stakeholder. For Taiwan's 23 million people, I, as the leader of the nation, and out of duty and to fulfill my expectations of myself, must play a role as an accountable contributor to peace. What Taiwan has to do is to safeguard cross-strait peace and stability. This is not only my personal mission and responsibility, but also that of the government and of the people. This is also the commitment that I have made in the past five or six years to the US government and to President Bush.

Q2. Well, I come from China, but I assure you that I am not a journalistic missile. I just wanted to ask you There are really two chapters here, one is that I hope to ask you about what's going on here in Taiwan, and my colleague from Tokyo is very interested in relations between Taiwan and Japan, which are flourishing, of course. So, if you don't mind, we'll sort of break this into two chapters. So, may we begin perhaps with asking you ... this recent episode about the National Unification Council, which I understand it, is now finished, and that the episode is done. Is that your understanding?

A: After very candid, responsible, and reasonable communication between the United States and Taiwan, it is very clear to both parties that Taiwan should play a responsible role contributing to the safeguarding of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Of course, we understand the United States has repeatedly expressed the hope that there should not be any change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and nor should there be any unilateral change to the status quo. This is not just in Taiwan's interest, but also that of the United States. We cannot only take Taiwan's national interests into consideration but must also not neglect the United States' national interests. It is very clear to us that, only when the interests of both sides overlap, or even coincide, is it really in Taiwan's national interest.

It is very clear to both Taiwan and the United States, therefore, that so-called maintenance of the status quo is, of course, maintenance of Taiwan's democracy, freedom, and human rights, as well as the maintenance of the status quo of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Both sides clearly understand, therefore, that the National Unification Council ceasing to function and the Guidelines for National Unification ceasing to apply do not involve any change to the status quo. In particular, regarding the careful choice of wording, originally we wanted to use the word "fei-chu" (abolish), but the United States suggested we use "dong-jie" (freeze) or "zhong-zhi" (suspend).

Finally we suggested using the terms "jhong-jhih yun-zuo" (cease to function) and "jhong-jhih shi-yong" (cease to apply) rather than abolish, freeze, or suspend. We thus brought our wisdom, creativity, sincerity, and sense of accountability to bear in our careful choice of the English terms "cease to function" and "cease to apply," so as to express our will and resolution to defend the stability of the Taiwan Strait. We hope that this issue will pass quickly. Moreover, as the United States is Taiwan's best friend and as President Bush pointed out last November in Kyoto that the United States treasures its partnership with Taiwan, communication and dialogue over this issue have been especially precious and important.

Q3. You have two years left in your mandate. During the last three or four months you have mentioned several things that you want to accomplish during this two-year period. One of

them was this Unification Council. There were two others that drew a lot of attention. One was the new constitution and the other was the application to the United Nations under the name Taiwan. So, would it be smart to say "one down, two to go" as we do in English?

A: Actually, the long-term goals that Taiwan's 23 million people have been striving toward are the aspiration for realization of the universal values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. Let them take deep root and bear fruit on the small island of Taiwan.

As especially mentioned by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the State Department's 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices released last Wednesday, the United States promotes democracy and human rights according to its own principle, and the US also provides assistance in building a more peaceful world. The United States and Taiwan are, without doubt, the best partners in terms of values and democracy. Consequently, in 2003, Taiwan finally passed its first Referendum Act and, on March 20, 2004, Taiwan held its first national referendum concurrently with the presidential election. I think people around the world cannot understand why a referendum, a universal value and basic human right for all countries and humans, is treated as a scourge in Taiwan. It is not only regarded as a scourge but also likened to a catastrophe or a war, and has become Taiwan's so-called political taboo. After holding the first referendum, we hope to have the right of free choice while enjoying the right of referendum.

This is real democracy. If enjoying the right of referendum means there is only one choice or conclusion, we think this is not real enjoyment of referendum but deprivation and limitation on the right of referendum.

Various opinion polls have shown that the majority of Taiwan's people, more than 80 percent, even as high as 85 percent, believe that the future of Taiwan should be chosen and decided by the people of Taiwan according to their free will. The main reason why we decided that the National Unification Council should cease to function and the Guidelines for National Unification should cease to apply is to return the right of freedom to decide their own future to the people of Taiwan.

Moreover, Taiwan's people have never demanded that the government of Taiwan treat cross-strait unification as the ultimate objective of the country. Of course, neither have the majority of Taiwan's people consented that Taiwan's government regard unification as the only and the final choice for how cross-strait relations should develop. If the international community applauds Taiwan's democratic development, then it should respect the freedom of Taiwan's 23 million people to choose and their resulting choice. The great majority, more than 80 percent, of Taiwan's people clearly expect, hope, and are pushing for Taiwan's admittance to the World Health Organization and the United Nations.

UN Resolution 2758 only dealt with the representation of the 1.3 billion people of China in the United Nations, but not the representation of the 23 million people of Taiwan in that world body. Taiwan has been very humble and has made concessions in attempting to join the World Health Assembly as an observer under the name Taiwan Health Entity. After nine years, however, our wish has yet to come true. Similarly, every September for each of the past 13

years, we have tried to present our case for representation at the United Nations before the General Assembly. We want to become a member of the big UN family. Although the 23 million people of Taiwan have a burning desire to participate in the international community, we have been excluded and suppressed because of China.

Take East and West Germany for example. Before unification, both were represented in the United Nations. That fact, however, did not affect the subsequent unification of Germany. By the same token, North and South Korea are both members of the United Nations, but this does not affect their desire to be eventually unified. China's approach to Taiwan's foreign policy has been composed of trying to uproot, block, and squeeze Taiwan. Taiwan has been excluded from the United Nations and the World Health Assembly due to this, to our deep regret. Any nation can choose not to establish formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but no country can deprive Taiwan's 23 million people of their basic rights and free will to participate in international society. To better facilitate governance as well as to enhance our national competitiveness, we need to review those parts of our Constitution that are not timely, relevant, or viable, and it is only natural for a democratic country to revise its constitution.

The current Constitution of Taiwan was enacted half a century ago in mainland China, and the 23 million people of Taiwan did not participate in the process of drafting this constitution. Similarly, even though this Constitution came into effect more than 50 years ago, the long period of martial law in Taiwan, and the fact that Taiwan for a long time was under the special statutes governing the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion, this Constitution was not actually put into practice. When Lee Teng-hui was president of Taiwan, he presided over six revisions of the constitution in 12 years; none of these revisions, however, was done with the consent of the people of Taiwan.

On June 7 last year, we completed our first stage of constitutional reforms by abolishing the National Assembly and also incorporating in our constitution the concept of referendum. This means that draft versions of the constitution proposed by the Legislative Yuan must be approved of by the 23 million people of Taiwan via national referendum. Next we will produce a new constitution. No matter whether this process is called revising the existing Constitution or drafting a new constitution, everything must conform to the constitutional procedures now in place. This is to say, a proposed constitutional change or even a new version of the constitution must first be approved in the Legislative Yuan by a three-quarters majority of a quorum of at least three-quarters of the total number of legislators, which is a high threshold, and then be subjected to the approval of the people of Taiwan via a referendum. We have a very strict rule concerning a national referendum on constitutional reform. For constitutional reforms to pass, more than half of the eligible voters must cast a ballot, and more than half of the valid votes must support those changes. That means any sensitive issue related to sovereignty, such as a change to the name of the nation, a change to the national territory, or a change to the national flag has to abide by very strict constitutional procedures currently in place.

Under such a strict rule, on the one hand we are further consolidating and deepening Taiwan's democracy, while on the other hand we have shouldered our responsibility to defend peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Everybody can rest assured, therefore, that the process and

final outcome of bringing forth Taiwan's new constitution will not be accomplished through revision or formulation by one political party or one individual. If proposed constitutional changes do not have the support of all political parties, both ruling and opposition, they will not possibly be passed by the Legislative Yuan.

Similarly, if political parties or factions in the Legislative Yuan, for their own self-interest, try to make compromises and secret pacts, it would be impossible for constitutional reforms to pass a national referendum. This is especially true right now in Taiwan, as the pan-blue and pan-green camps are of approximately equal strength. Therefore, it would be impossible for either camp to dominate the final outcome of a national referendum. In order for constitutional reforms to be passed in a referendum, the valid votes in favor of the constitutional reform must exceed half of the number of citizens of Taiwan eligible to vote. Therefore, any reform must be able to transcend the differences between the pan-blue and pan-green camps and between political parties. The constitutional reform process is a part of Taiwan's efforts to consolidate and deepen its democracy. It deserves the encouragement, affirmation, and support of the international community.

Q4. Just to make doubly sure that I understand what you said, the subjects you mentioned are sensitive subjects: questions of sovereignty, such as of territory, of the flag, of the name of Taiwan. Do you expect, as the President, for you are the person initiating them, do you expect them to be part of the constitutional revision that you envisioned?

A: Taiwan is a democratic nation and a pluralistic society. As President, I do not have the right to prohibit the expression of people's opinions. Just as in the case in which the National Unification Council ceased to function and the Guidelines for National Unification ceased to apply, we do not exclude any possibility for the future of Taiwan and any possible form the development of cross-strait relations may take. We should not exclude independence as one of the options nor should we exclude unification as a possible choice. Similarly, we should not make Taiwan independence the only choice, nor should we make unification the only choice. Regarding which version to use for our new constitution, whether it is to adopt the presidential system, cabinet system, dual-executive system, or current system, this should be decided by the people. In the same light, we should adopt an open attitude regarding these sensitive issues of whether to change the national moniker, national territory, or national flag. Whatever opinion, proposal, or version must pass the high threshold of three-quarters approval by members of the Legislative Yuan, as well as of the people through referendum. In other words, any sovereignty issue that does not follow due constitutional process will not be dealt with. In other words, without passing the high threshold of three-quarters of the Legislature, even should we want to change the national moniker, national territory, or national flag, we would not have the right nor position to have these issues circumvent the Legislature and hand them to the people for referendum. That is why, in the fourth point in the seven-point statement I made on February 27 regarding the NUC ceasing to function, I dealt with the issue of the future procedures for constitutional reform.

Q5. Any subject is open but given the procedure, some subjects are probably not practical? Is that correct?

A: I believe that so long as one understands Taiwan's procedures for constitutional reform, one can be assured that we would abide by due procedure for constitutional reform, and you should believe me and rest assured.

Consequently, we must wait until society is mature enough, with sufficient support from the people and the approval of the Legislature. Only then can we possibly deal with these sensitive issues regarding sovereignty.