

SIGUR CENTER ASIA REPORT

"Reassessing Taiwan's Strategic Position" - A Presentation by Scott Bates

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Scott Bates, president of the Center for National Policy, has proposed a new national security policy for Taiwan entitled "[Taiwan 21](#)." Mr. Bates discussed several elements of his "Taiwan 21" plan at a recent Taiwan Roundtable entitled "[Reassessing Taiwan's Strategic Position](#)" held by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies on January 23, 2013. Discussant **Joseph Bosco**, a former East Asia security specialist at the Department of Defense, voiced strong disagreements with Bates' proposals at the roundtable, while **Richard Fisher**, Senior Fellow at the International Assessment and Strategy Center, submitted a [written response](#) in which he offers alternative recommendations for strengthening Taiwan's security. An audio recording of the roundtable and Mr. Fisher's [Powerpoint slides](#) are available [here](#).

Strengthening Taiwan's Strategic Position

In his remarks, **Scott Bates**, president of the Center for National Policy, discussed what he saw as Taiwan's increasingly eroding strategic position vis-à-vis China, and put forth proposals on how Taiwan can best strengthen itself in response. Bates argued that since the late 1970s, Taiwan has gradually lost militarily, economic, and international leverage to China, as the latter's rapid economic growth in recent decades has fueled its military modernization efforts and has contributed to its increasing global influence. In order for Taiwan to best determine its future free of Chinese pressure, Bates argued that Taiwan must break out of its strategic decline.

To this end, Bates proposed two "provocative" proposals aimed at strengthening Taiwan's strategic posture. First, questioning the effectiveness of the ROC's large land based army and its 1,100 tanks as a credible deterrent, Bates called on Taiwan's military to place more emphasis on the development of its air and sea capabilities. In his view, focusing on air and sea power would strengthen Taiwan's anti-access and area denial capabilities and would serve as a more effective use of Taiwan's limited resources. A less prominent army could then help boost Taiwan's soft power by serving as a humanitarian assistance, first-responder force within the Asia-Pacific region. The second proposal is for Taiwan to make a pledge to never attack the Mainland, even if provoked. Pointing out that politics is always part of every military conflict, Bates argued that such a pledge by Taiwan would allow it to gain the moral high ground within the international community, especially in the event a conflict broke out across the Taiwan Strait. If Taipei stuck to its no use of force pledge and did not launch a counter strike in the face of Chinese aggression, Bates said Beijing would "lose face" within the international community and international public opinion would dramatically shift in Taiwan's favor.

A Rejoinder to Bates' Proposals

Joe Bosco, a former East Asia security specialist at the Department of Defense, expressed strong disagreements with Bates' proposals, arguing that they would weaken rather than strengthen Taiwan's security situation. Bosco began his remarks by challenging Bates' "sweeping assertion" that all actions to increase Taiwan's security are solely Taipei's responsibility. In arguing this point, he noted that Bates' plan overlooks the US role as Taiwan's ultimate security guarantor. With regard to Bates' call for a reduction in Taiwan's

ground forces, Bosco questioned whether the people of Taiwan would feel secure with their army dramatically reduced and transformed into a humanitarian force. Bosco also expressed strong disagreement with Bates' no use of force pledge, likening it to a partial unilateral disarmament on Taiwan's part. He argued that such a pledge by a society whose very existence is already under attack violates the concept of deterrence. Telling the enemy (which China would be if it attacked Taiwan) that all it had to lose was the weapons and personnel it put into the battle simply invites an attack, he said. Rather, the aggressor should have to worry that something it values highly, such as military bases, critical infrastructure, or energy supplies, could be destroyed by the attacked party in a military conflict.

In his concluding remarks, Bosco noted that the underlying premise of Bates' proposals seemed to be that Taiwan lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Noting that Taiwan is a democratic, peaceful, and responsible society that meaningfully contributes to regional and international global governance efforts, Bosco said that Taiwan already has moral superiority over an authoritarian China within the international community. In light of this, he argued that Taiwan does not need to disarm itself unilaterally in order to prove its moral or political legitimacy.

Alternative Suggestions for Enhancing Taiwan's Security

Due to an unexpected event interruption, **Richard Fisher**, a Senior Fellow on Asian military affairs at the International Assessment and Strategy Center, was unable to give his presentation at the roundtable. However, Fisher's [written remarks](#) indicate that he disagrees somewhat with Bates' proposals. Focusing primarily on the military dimension of Bates' recommendations, Fisher advises against cutting Taiwan's ground forces in half. Noting that PLA air and missile forces are reaching a point where they can overwhelm Taiwan's air and naval forces during a conflict, Fisher argues that strong ROC ground forces continue to serve as an effective deterrent in that they make a PLA invasion of Taiwan more risky and complicated.

In addition to calling for sustained, large ROC ground forces, Fisher also advocates for robust development of Taiwan's indigenous surface-to-surface missile program. He notes that Taiwan's surface-to-surface missiles can be armed with sensors to create Sensor Fused Munitions (SFMs), a type of weapon that has the potential to destroy as many as thirty tanks or thirty invasion ships through the shooting of explosive metal disks. Fisher argues Taiwan's possession of SFMs would allow it to confront most PLA invasion forces in a cost-effective manner: for the cost of 15 new F-16 C/D fighter jets, Taiwan can pay for up to 1,000 SFMs.

Overall, the roundtable was useful in reflecting the ongoing differences in opinion among various experts who are actively thinking about Taiwan's security, particularly in the context of an increasingly powerful China.

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