

How to adapt to changing realities

View from Taiwan: the future of the geo-economic order in Asia

by Ambassador Zhang Ming-Zhong, Representative of Taiwan in France, Paris

With the world's economic center of gravity shifting to Asia, the region's geo-economic landscape, as well as the ensuing political and security order, will steadily have a greater impact on the world. The three areas of France's core interests – security, climate and economics – are deemed inflexible to French President Emmanuel Macron. Their success, however, depends largely on the outcome and circumstances in Asia. Having its prosperity intertwined with Asia, policy regarding this region deserves Europe's highest attention.

The rise of China

The rise of China is a central factor dictating the development of Asia's geo-economics. Its comprehensive surge of power has reshaped the political, economic and security landscape in Asia, as well as the world. Devoting its full strength to implementing the ambitious One-Belt-One Road initiative, China aims to transform its economic weight into bigger political influence. It wants to do this by connecting countries in Asia and Europe and bridging the existing infrastructure gap via the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. After its first summit for the initiative, China has signed cooperation agreements with 80 countries and international organisations and has achieved more than 270 cooperation results. In the future, the initiative

will be further expanded to develop the existing mechanisms of cooperation with Africa and Latin America, so as to dominate and construct a new international order that meets its own national interests.

Xi Jinping's ambition

With the closure of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese President Xi Jinping has established his own “Xi Jinping thought” and sets out as the most powerful leader of China since Mao Zedong. He is expected to fast-track China's foreign policy, consolidating China's status as a grand power promoting world peace, globalisation and free trade. This will, in practice, be based on his personal political will. While pragmatically cooperating with China in international affairs, the US – China's main strategic competitor – mindfully seeks ways to counter the blow it received since China has also strategically increased its military presence.

China's increased military presence

We should not ignore China's military strategy and increased presence. For example, China's first aircraft carrier, “Liaoning”, an unfinished aircraft carrier purchased by a Hong Kong private company in 1998 to build a floating hotel and casino ended up being an aircraft carrier and has frequently passed through the

Taiwan Strait to enter the waters of South China Sea since 2012. Furthermore, China launched its second aircraft carrier in 2017 and prepares to build a third.

In July 2017, China established its first overseas permanent military base in Djibouti, strategically located at the junction of three continents, overlooking a passage of water used by 30% of the world's shipping trade. Though described as a “logistics support” instead of a “military” base, the Djibouti base would also undoubtedly cement China's military, economic and strategic influence in the region.

Regional tensions

As recently as 4 January 2018, China launched the northbound M503 flight route in the Taiwan Strait and the



G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China, 4.9.2016

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W121, W122 and W123 east-west extension routes without prior negotiation with Taiwan. This one-sided launch of controversial flight routes not only violates the agreement reached between the two sides in March 2015, but also endangers aviation safety and upsets the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. The unilateral activation of these four airways is a provocation impacting regional security. We call on all parties not to use these routes as serious safety concerns remain.

Since President Tsai Ing-Wen’s inauguration in 2016, China has unilaterally suspended cross-Strait communication mechanisms under the pretext of Taiwan’s lack of recognition of the 1992 Consensus, and forcefully imposed pressure on Taiwan’s diplomacy and international participation. Despite escalating pressure from China and the power struggles between big regional powers, the challenges can also be seen as vast opportunities.

Taiwan’s strategic position

Looking ahead, Taiwan will use its unique strategic position and continue its unwavering pursuit to participate in regional economic integration, avoid economic dependency on China via the New Southbound Policy, and strengthen industrial ties with other partners such as the US and Europe, so as to weather the ever-changing dynamics of Asia’s economic and political order. Taiwan will minimise the risks to national security while maximizing regional cooperation in the face of regional challenges and tension-raising developments.



Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China (on the right) with Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, at the G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China, 4.9.2016

Photo: © European Union

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has been the Representative of Taiwan in France since 2015. Born in 1960 in Taiwan, he studied at the Fu-Jen Catholic University, Université Catholique de l’Ouest in Angers and at Sciences-Po in Paris. Mr Zhang began his professional career as Secretary in the Taipei Representative Office in France in 1992, followed by several senior positions in embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2006 to 2007, he served as counsellor to the general secretary in the Office of the President, and a year later in the National Security Council. In 2009, Mr Zhang was appointed Ambassador to Burkina Faso, a position he held for three and half years. Prior to his current appointment, he was director general of European affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.