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CHINA-TAIWAN DIALOGUE COULD BEGIN AT THE APEC SUMMIT

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On October 18, all but one of the leaders of the Asia-Pacific region's top economies will meet in Shanghai, China, for the annual "CEO Summit" of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The missing chief executive at the Chinese-hosted event will be Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian. Given the importance of Taiwan to both the national security and economic interests of the United States, on July 24, Representative Gary Ackerman (D-NY) submitted House Resolution 194 "expressing the sense of Congress to encourage full participation" in the APEC forum by President Chen.

President Chen's absence from the summit will not be by choice. As early as May, in dialogue with several U.S. Members of Congress, he expressed his desire to attend the APEC leaders meeting and his hopes that it could be a vehicle to initiate talks with China. In fact, President Chen has made a year-long effort with repeated pleas to China to begin talks—without precondition—that "could discuss anything" including the "prospects for eventual unification." However, China has barred Chen's attendance at the summit. Hardliners in Beijing insist that Taiwan be brought under China's rule and that all talks be "conditioned" on Taiwan's acceptance that it is part of the People's Republic.

By denying Mr. Chen a chance to attend the APEC summit, China is missing an historic opportunity to begin substantive dialogue with its neighbor across the Taiwan Strait. The forum could begin a process of defusing a half-century of pent-up

tension in one of the world's most dangerous flash points. The Ackerman Resolution could provide a crucial push to break the stalemate between China and Taiwan, promoting "direct dialogue, without precondition, between leaders on both sides of the Taiwan Strait." The resolution, which will be voted on early this September, acknowledges that President Chen's attendance at the summit would be "a constructive step" and an ideal starting point for a peaceful dialogue between China and Taiwan—a key objective of America's China policy in the Administrations of both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

WHY THE U.S. SHOULD SUPPORT TAIWAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE APEC SUMMIT

Taiwan is a full member of APEC. Like China, Taiwan is a full member of APEC, an avowedly economic—not political—organization. Taiwan's leaders are entitled to be present at the summit. There is no regulation or memorandum barring Taiwan's democratically elected leader from attending. In fact, in 1991, APEC members committed themselves to "conduct-

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ing their activities and work programs on the basis of open dialogue with *equal* respect for the views of all participants.”

Taiwan is economically significant. As H Con. Res 194 recognizes, Taiwan possesses the seventh largest trading economy and ninth largest gross domestic product in the APEC consortium, contributing significantly to economic stability and commercial expansion throughout the region. The United States has correctly refrained from prodding Taiwan to negotiate with China, but it does have economic, moral, and legal interests in Taiwan that successive U.S. administrations have vowed to defend. Taiwan was America’s fifth largest export market in 2000, importing \$24 billion in American goods (half again as much as the US\$16 billion that China imported from the U.S. last year). Taiwan also is the United States’ single largest foreign source of computers and semiconductors.

Taiwan plays an important role in regional stability. Taiwan has become Asia’s most vibrant and dynamic democracy. Given that encouragement (indeed, pressure) from the United States played a role in this development, America’s leaders have a moral commitment to support Taiwan, as well as a statutory obligation to, as President Bush put it, “help Taiwan defend itself,” which the Taiwan Relations Act (22 USC 3301 and 3302) defines.

The United States’ long-standing policy to preserve Taiwan’s rights as a free agent in negotiating its relations with China was evidenced 20 years ago in President Ronald Reagan’s pledge that the United States “will not prejudice the free choice of, or put pressure on, the people of Taiwan” in resolving their differences with China. The policy was reiterated by President Clinton, who on February 24, 2000, in response to China’s threats of war, declared, “We’ll continue to reject the use of force as a means to resolve the Taiwan question,” and added that “We’ll also continue to make absolutely clear that the issues between Beijing and Taiwan must be resolved peacefully and with the assent of the people of Taiwan.” As recently as June 12, 2001, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly told a Senate hearing that “the first priority for the PRC and Taiwan ought to be the resumption of direct dialogue.”

ENCOURAGING AN EQUAL CHINA– TAIWAN DIALOGUE

Both Congress and the Administration should encourage the Chinese leadership to invite Taiwan to participate in the APEC summit as the full member that it is, recognizing its right to have its “Chief Executive Officer,” President Chen, represent it in Shanghai. H. Con. Res. 194 would signal that the American people and their representatives in Congress support a direct face-to-face dialogue without preconditions between Taipei and Beijing, and that such a dialogue is in accord with America’s foreign policy goals.

In September, a representative of President Bush will visit Beijing to review the agenda for a forthcoming visit by the President. With the weight of a congressional resolution behind him, that envoy could present an authoritative demarche urging China’s leadership to be open to the possibility of a direct dialogue—without precondition—with Taiwan’s leader about their points of disagreement and encourage China’s leaders to invite the democratically elected leader of the people of Taiwan to the Shanghai APEC summit.

CONCLUSION

China’s response to the United States’ recommendation that President Chen be invited as a full participant to the APEC summit will be an indication of whether China is truly interested in resolving its differences with Taiwan peacefully. Beijing’s continued insistence on barring President Chen’s attendance—despite his repeated requests for face-to-face talks—would be evidence that China may opt to use force to impose its will in the Taiwan Strait. This could be an early sign that the United States must prepare for a prolonged period of firmness with China if peace and stability in the Pacific are to be preserved.

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