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China and Taiwan Agree to Closer Economic Ties

Until now, merchants ships have been required to take expensive detours through third countries, and China-Taiwan flights have had to make interim stops in Hong Kong or Macau.

Under the agreement:

- Direct charter flights will increase from 36 to 108 per week, and can operate daily rather than four days out of seven;
- Routes will be shortened and private business jet flights will be allowed;
- Direct cargo shipments will be allowed tax-free between 11 seaports in Taiwan and 63 in China;
- Sixty direct cargo flights will be allowed per month;
- Direct postal links will be expanded to improve delivery time, currently up to 10 days; and
- Food safety alerts between the countries will be set up.



BBC News observed that "the agreements were reached on the second day of a five-day visit to Taiwan by Chen Yunlin, China's top official for handling relations with Taiwan." Chen's counterpart was Chiang Pin-kung, head of the Strait Exchange Foundation.

"I think history will remember that this event happened," Chen told a Taiwanese official after the signings. "Although there are a lot of difficulties for peaceful development between the two sides, we're making a lot of efforts."

"Chen's visit will have a positive impact on cross-strait ties as the two sides aim to promote economic and trade exchanges on an equal-footing," said Chang Ya-chung, a political science professor at National Taiwan University, according to AFP, the French Press Agency.

The agreements were made possible by Taiwan's softened stance toward the mainland following the election of President Ma Ying-jeou last May. However, President Ma's relaxed foreign policy with Beijing has resulted in serious protest from within Taiwan, with some parties charging Ma with "selling out" to the mainland. In response to Chen's visit, thousands of protestors gathered outside Taiwan's parliament wearing yellow ribbons printed with the slogan, "Taiwan is my country."

Reuters news service reported that the negotiators discussed holding their next round of talks, which will most likely be held on mainland China, early next year. Taiwan's negotiator predicted that among the topics discussed next time will be joint criminal law enforcement, legal protection for Taiwan investors in China, and more food-safety cooperation.



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The recent agreements depart from a long history of confrontation between the two governments. Their political separation originated when the communist rebel forces under Mao Zedong, which had been supplied by the Soviet Union with arms from a stash of Japanese weapons left in Manchuria after World War II, succeeded in wresting control of mainland China from the anti-Communist, pro-American Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-Shek. Chiang's forces, in contrast, had been denied weapons through an embargo declared by General George Marshall of the United States. Marshall boasted of having disarmed 39 of Chiang's divisions "with a stroke of his pen."

Finally in 1949, unable to continue the fight, and with China in economic collapse brought on by the communists' destruction of the nation's infrastructure, Chiang Kai-shek led his battered forces across the Formosa Strait to Taiwan and relocated the government of the Republic of China to the island.

In 1951, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) would say of George Marshall's role in abandoning mainland China to the communists: "If Marshall were merely stupid, the laws of probability would dictate that part of his decisions would serve this country's interest." McCarthy summarized the fall of China to the communists as follows:

When Marshall was sent to China with secret State Department orders, the Communists at that time were bottled up in two areas and were fighting a losing battle, but that because of those orders the situation was radically changed in favor of the Communists. Under those orders, as we know, Marshall embargoed all arms and ammunition to our allies in China. He forced the opening of the Nationalist-held Kalgan Mountain pass into Manchuria, to the end that the Chinese Communists gained access to the mountains of captured Japanese equipment. No need to tell the country about how Marshall tried to force Chiang Kai-shek to form a partnership government with the Communists.

The recent deals between Taiwan and mainland China may not be "a partnership government with the Communists," but at least some residents of Taiwan are wary of them nonetheless.

The government in Beijing still officially regards Taiwan as a "breakaway province" of China.



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