



## Mainland China and the ROC on Taiwan Hold Talks

Wang Yu-chi, the head of The Republic of China's (Taiwan's) Mainland Affairs Council, and Zhang Zhijun, head of mainland communist China's Taiwan Affairs Office, met on February 11 in the mainland city of Nanjing (formerly spelled Nanking).

It was the first official contact between the two governments since the takeover of the mainland by communist forces in 1949 forced Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists to flee across the Formosa Strait to Taiwan.



Nanjing was the capital of the Republic of China (ROC) under General Chiang Kai-shek from 1927 until the Chinese Communists captured the city in 1949. It was also the site of the brutal Nanking Massacre by Japanese troops, who occupied the city from 1937-1946, during which time the ROC relocated its capital to Chungking.

Wang afterwards said the meeting was the start of a "new chapter" in relations between two rival governments and that both sides met with equal standing and showed mutual respect.

*Bloomberg News* quoted a statement from Zhang: "We absolutely can't let the relations between the two sides be turbulent again, and even more, we can't backtrack."

China's official Xinhua News Agency cited Zhang's opening speech at the meeting, in which he said that the two sides have a goal to open a regular communication channel between their cross-Strait affairs departments. The communication channel is a result of deepening mutual political trust on the basis of adhering to the "1992 consensus," he said.

"I believe, with this arrangement, the two sides will improve exchanges, understanding and mutual trust, and better handle outstanding problems in cross-Strait exchanges," said Zhang.

The [1992 Consensus](#) refers to the outcome of a meeting in that year between the mainland China-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and the Taiwan-based Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), both semi-official representatives of their respective nations.

The official historic position of each country is that it, alone, is the legitimate government of both the mainland and Taiwan. The *Taipei Times* reported on October 8, 2008 that ROC President Ma Ying-jeou said in an interview with a Japanese magazine that under the ROC constitution, the ROC "definitely is an independent sovereign state, and mainland China is also part of the territory of the ROC."

The PRC's position is just the opposite: that there is one, undivided China of which Taiwan is a part, and that the PRC government is the sole legitimate representative of that nation. The PRC has stated that any group in Taiwan with which it has formal talks must support the 1992 Consensus.

The ROC government led by the Kuomintang (KMT) party defined the 1992 meeting's outcome as "one China with different interpretations"—both sides agreed that there was one China, but acknowledged that both sides had different interpretations of what that meant. By contrast, the Communist Party of China (CPC)-led government of the mainland maintains that the 1992 meeting reached an



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understanding that there is “one China.”

But ROC’s main opposition party on Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), did not regard the 1992 meeting as reaching any consensus on there being only “one China.” Rather, the DPP interpreted the outcome of the meeting as establishing that the two rival states had different interpretations of what “one China” meant.

When the United States established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979, it acknowledged the PRC as the government of all of China and terminated diplomatic relations with the ROC. To maintain semi-official ties with the ROC and protect U.S. interests in Taiwan, the U.S. government established a non-profit, public corporation called the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT).

An article in the *Taiwan Times* for February 8, 2006 said:

New American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt might be the only US political figure who has ever expressed his opinion in public about the question of whether the two sides of the Taiwan Strait struck a consensus during their talks in Hong Kong in 1992, usually dubbed the “1992 consensus.”

Burghardt, who headed the Taipei office of the AIT, the quasi-official organization that handles Taiwan-US affairs in the absence of diplomatic ties, from 1999 through 2001, once said in a speech delivered at a farewell party hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei (AmCham) that he personally doesn’t believe in the so-called “1992 consensus.”

Burghardt, noted the *Times*, said in the 2001 speech that after their 1992 Hong Kong talks, Taiwan and China exchanged faxes detailing their respective stances and agreed to conduct dialogue based on their statements written in those faxes.

“That’s what happened. Nothing more or nothing less,” Burghardt said, adding that the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) called this the “1992 consensus,” which was to some extent “confusing and misleading.”

“To me, I’m not sure why you could call that a consensus,” Burghardt said.

From Zhang’s statement, the PRC apparently believes that a consensus, or something approaching a consensus, was reached in 1992. And Xinhua reported the official PRC belief that the meeting between Zhang and Wang “is considered an important breakthrough in promoting cross-Strait relations and may lead to regular exchanges of visits in the future.”

“Today’s cross-Strait situation has been hard-earned through efforts of generations. We should cherish it and work together to maintain this favorable momentum,” Zhang said, as quoted by Xinhua.

Zhang and the communists who rule mainland China have taken a much more conciliatory stance toward Taiwan in recent years, perhaps because they view the island nation — which has prospered under a free government — as a lucrative trading partner. But that does not mean the PRC has changed its position on Taiwan. The ruling Chinese Communist Party considers Taiwan a renegade province and has never ruled out the use of force to bring the island back under its control. The anti-secession law passed in the PRC in 2005 formalized the long-standing policy of the People’s Republic of China to use “non-peaceful means” against the “Taiwan independence movement” in the event of a declaration of Taiwan independence.

According to a new U.S. Defense Department Intelligence Agency report, mainland China currently has 1,200 conventional missiles aimed at Taiwan.



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Considering the highly unlikely chance that Taiwan, with a population of 23 million, could mount a successful invasion of the mainland — which has a population of 1.3 billion and is armed with nuclear weapons and short-, medium-, and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles, most of which are capable of striking Taiwan with nuclear warheads — one must ask why the PRC needs such a large arsenal threatening Taiwan.

While diplomacy is almost always beneficial, the ROC must exercise caution when negotiating with the government that is directly descended from that established by mass murderer Mao Tse-tung, lest it negotiate itself into a position of irreversible weakness.

Photo of New Taipei

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