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淡江大學國際研究學院

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Perspectives of the Taiwan Relations with Latin America in 2008

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Introduction

Taiwan has used its stable democratic and economic successes as basis upon which to build international support. In addition, Taipei has also transformed its economic power into diplomatic tools, such as foreign aid and investment policies, in an attempt to consolidate its relations with allies and friends. The growing importance of realpolitik and the demise of ideology, democracy and human rights in Foreign Policy are not good news for Taiwan. The economic and political emergence of China makes anytime more difficult the game of keeping meaningful ties with foreign countries, and a handful of diplomatic allies, in competition with China. But there are many thing, Taipei can do to improve its international standing, and to keep

its diplomatic friends, both in a future scenario of zero-sum with China or in a scenario of diplomatic truce.

In strong competition with China, Taiwan maintains full diplomatic relations with 24 countries, and 92 representative and branch offices that perform the functions of embassies in the capitals and major cities of 59 countries. Forty-eight countries that do not have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan have established 58 representative or visa-issuing offices in Taiwan.

Latin America in the Foreign Relations of Taiwan

Latin America has emerged as a crucial battleground where a dozen struggling nations, mainly in Central America and the Caribbean, have become entangled in the cross-strait diplomatic dispute. Meanwhile, Washington is considering the possible implications for U.S. policy of this intensifying competition in their own backyard. Many voices in Taiwan call for giving less importance to diplomatic efforts in view of the growing power of China, and the possibility of a diplomatic truce between Taipei and Beijing, but in reality Taiwan needs to preserve its own

cards vis a vis China, and diplomatic allies and international friends are useful for the country and for the welfare of its citizens. Taiwan should not abandon its diplomatic work, but it should transform it, and coordinate it with a broader blueprint of a pragmatic Foreign Policy, that gives priority to serve the needs of Taiwanese citizens and business.

The diplomatic allies of Taiwan in Latin America are Belize, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Taiwan diplomacy has been trying to attract Suriname, and is quite concerned about the future of the relations with Nicaragua, after the election of the Sandinist Daniel Ortega as president in 2006, and with Paraguay, after the election of the ex bishop Fernando Lugo as president, in April, 2008. But other countries are also in danger of turning to the Chinese side.

Many people expected that the arrival to power of the longtime Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega triumphed in Nicaragua's presidential election in November 2006, would mean the end of the formal relations between Taipei and Managua. Ortega had said during his

presidential campaign that he favored an alliance with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Though Nicaragua's formal diplomatic ties to China ended abruptly when Ortega was voted out of office in 1990, his return to power represented an opportunity for Beijing to usurp one of Taiwan's precious remaining allies, but Beijing's hopes did not materialize. Something similar might have happened with Fernando Lugo, the next president of Paraguay. Two days after his electoral victory, Lugo told the international press that he intended to establish diplomatic links with China, but a month later the vice-president elect, Federico Franco, said that Taiwan would donate US\$71 million for programs to help Paraguayan farmers¹.

Taiwan's alliances in the Caribbean have been reduced to just four countries—the Dominican Republic, Haiti, St. Kitts & Nevis, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines—plus St. Lucia which switched back to

¹ “El gobierno de Taiwán ofreció al Paraguay una donación de 71 millones de dólares, el cual podría ser utilizada íntegramente para la problemática campesina, según manifestó el vicepresidente electo Federico Franco, durante una conversación con radio Cardinal” (Ultima Hora, Asunción. May 23, 2008. En <http://www.ultimahora.com/notas/119057-Franco:-Donaci%C3%B3n-de-Taiw%C3%A1n-ir%C3%A1-al-problema-campesino->)

Taiwan, in May 2007, after a decade-long hiatus. St. Lucia and the Bahamas had both gone to China in 1997, and Dominica severed ties with Taipei in 2004. Not long after that, Grenada—which suffered an U.S. military intervention in 1983—abandoned Taipei to establish formal links with the Communist China in 2005. And history shows us that, beginning when Chile's socialist president Salvador Allende formally recognized the PRC in 1970, the other South American powers switched over one by one throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Today Paraguay is the only diplomatic ally of Taiwan in South America.

In the formal side, the links with Taiwan allies in 2007 have been stable, with the exception of Costa Rica. Many senior officials from Central and South America and the Caribbean visited Taiwan in 2007. These included President Oscar Berger Perdomo of Guatemala, Prime Minister Said Wilbert Musa of Belize, and former President Francisco Guillermo Flores of El Salvador.

High-ranking officials from Taipei reciprocated these visits. In 2007, President Chen made a state visit to attend the inauguration of President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and Judicial Yuan President Weng Yueh-

Sheng went to Panama to sign a bilateral cooperation agreement in January. Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Chih-fang visited the Caribbean country of Saint Lucia to sign a joint communiqué on the restoration of diplomatic relations. He also visited Belize, where he signed a joint communiqué.

In restoring diplomatic relations with Taiwan on April 30, 2007 after a ten-year hiatus, Saint Lucia became Taiwan's ally, but five weeks later, on June 7, Costa Rica severed ties with Taiwan.

The defection of Costa Rica is the consequence of the election of Oscar Arias as president of that Central American country. Arias wants to give his country a more important place in the international arena, and in that respect Taiwan cannot compete with China. And trade figures provided Arias with the needed excuse to choose China over Taiwan, and put an end to 60 years of political alliance. Costa Rica exports to China millions of dollars in Intel's products from its factory in the Central American country. In reality, these exports would not be affected by politics, but are a perfect excuse before Costa Rican public opinion, and it helps to fuel the hope that China can absorb more Costa Rican exports in other areas.

Arias got also promises of money from China, to offset the loss of Taiwanese funding. Arias, during his first visit to China, in October 2007, said he wanted to establish diplomatic ties during his first period as president from 1986 to 1990, but it was too difficult during the Cold War². Thus even though Costa Rica's turnaround was largely an economic calculus, it was also a political strategy. One sphere of influence for China is the United Nations Security Council, where Costa Rica was seeking a seat for the third time. Although all states in the U.N. General Assembly vote for non-permanent members of the Security Council, China has particular influence given its active diplomacy and permanent seat on the Council. Chinese Ambassador Wang told the daily La Nación in a July interview that China would support Costa Rica's bid. China and Costa Rica engaged also in cooperation in the field of immigration. The Chinese government bought \$4,000 airline tickets for 72 illegal Chinese immigrants with links to the Chinese mafia to return home from Costa Rica. Approximately 30,000 legal Chinese immigrants live in Costa Rica, along with about 10,000

² See

http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2007/10/24/costa_ri_ca_president_meets_chinas_hu/

illegal immigrants. That makes Chinese citizens the third largest group of immigrants in Costa Rica, after Nicaraguan and North American immigrants. China is Costa Rica's second-biggest trading partner, behind the U.S., with \$1 billion in sales to the Asian powerhouse and \$618 million in imports last year.

In the more than a year of diplomatic relations between San Jose and Beijing, China has already donated US\$20 million to the country's emergency fund³ and promised to build a US\$70 million stadium in Costa Rica's capital. The National Bank of Costa Rica and China Development Bank signed finance agreements, which according to reports, have absorbed the whole of Costa Rica's debt. Chinese diplomats and officials are flying across the Pacific ocean on a weekly basis and

³ "President Oscar Arias returned from his diplomatic trip to mainland China with his shopping bags bulging with cash for his country. Besides talking his hosts out of \$20 million in immediate aid for victims of the disastrous September flooding, he received \$27 million in longer-term projects. But the list of goodies did not end there. Besides laying the groundwork for possible trade pacts, Arias and his host, strongman Hu Jintao also inked a contract with the Chinese Petroleum Corp. to refurbish and expand this country's Recope Refinery at Limon. The refinery is getting long in the tooth, having been bought from Allied Chemical by president Jose "Don Pepe" Figueres decades ago in a flurry of nationalizations" (Rod Hughes. . Arias China Visit Proves Lucrative. At <http://www.american-european.net/blogs/costa-rica-news/2007/10/26/arias-china-visit-proves-lucrative>).

meeting with Costa Rican officials and Government members. In a recent visit by Vice Premier Hui Liangyu⁴, he promised Costa Rica a US\$10m check, 200 police cars and 40 scholarships and a credit line for Costa Rican small businesses⁵. China has also floated the idea of building a Technology Park and an Oil Refinery in Costa Rica. A more criticized plan involves China offering to help Costa Rica in the exploration for oil and natural gas. Costa Rica's Environmental Minister stated that the country hopes to guarantee access to energy, but noted that some environmental dangers do exist..

⁴ "Costa Rica and China inked deals worth 50 million dollars Tuesday during a three-day visit here by Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu aimed at broadening relations with San Jose. Hui is the highest-level Chinese official ever to visit the Latin American country and was due to meet with President Oscar Arias as well as Vice President Laura Chinchilla and other top leaders. The accords include a 40-million-dollar line of credit by China for small and medium size projects in Costa Rica, following an agreement between the National Bank of Costa Rica and the China Development Bank, as well as Beijing's donation of 10 million dollars and 200 vehicles for Costa Rican civil security." (AFP. Chinese vice premier in Costa Rica to boost ties. San José. May 7, 2008).

⁵ See

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/asiapacific/news/article_1403812.php/Costa_Rica_China_evaluate_first_year_of_diplomatic_ties

Embassies and Missions in Latin America

Embassies 12

Belize	Paraguay
Dominican Republic	Saint Kitts and Nevis
El Salvador	Saint Lucia
Guatemala	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Haiti	
Honduras	
Nicaragua	
Panama	

Overseas Missions 9

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazi
Chile
Colombia
Ecuador
Mexico
Peru
Venezuela

Note: Taiwan has representative offices in 59 countries. The list of 62 overseas missions includes those for Hong Kong, Macau, and the World Trade Organization.
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 2007

Related Websites

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <http://www.mofa.gov.tw>
- Council for Cultural Affairs: <http://www.cca.gov.tw>
- International Cooperation and Development Fund:
<http://www.icdf.org.tw>
- Taiwan Scholarship Program:
<http://www.studyintaiwan.org>

Latin America is definitely a stronghold for the diplomatic relations of Taiwan, but diplomatic ties should not exhaust the interest of Taiwan for Latin America in the realm of Foreign Relation with the area. Taiwanese allies in Latin America are not the main players of the region in economics, trade, technology, industry, markets, natural resources, education, cultural goods, etc. Countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela are prospective markets for Taiwanese products, and after the economic slowdown in US, they are important targets for the diversification of Taiwanese exports. And countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Argentina are important sources of energy and raw materials, with an ever-growing importance in this World of scarcity of oil,

minerals, and food. Therefore, Taiwan should adopt a diversified approach to its relations with Latin America, so as to maximize the attainment of benefits. On the one hand, Latin America can satisfy the need of diplomatic acknowledgment through the diplomatic ties with allied countries. On the other hand, Taiwan should adopt a more aggressive Merchant State Foreign Policy to maximize its economic interest in the relation with Latin America.

Characteristics of Latin America from the point of view of Taiwan's Foreign Policy

In the diplomatic front, we should take into account the following points:

1. The changes in Taiwan's relations with China will have a great impact in the diplomatic ties to Latin America. A diplomatic truce between Beijing and Taipei will consolidate the existing ties, perhaps with the exception of Paraguay. The persistence of the present situation of strong competition will bring about a growing pressure on Taiwan, and the danger of losing from one to six allies in the region.

2. Latin American allies—perhaps with the exception of Belize and the Caribbean States of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines—are more stable in terms of diplomatic ties than the rest of Taiwanese allies in Africa, and the South Pacific. Latin American allies are relatively consolidated democracies, very much related to US and Europe, without internal wars or authoritarian leaders. This makes Latin American allies an asset in giving prestige to Taiwan, while the links with other allies are not such an international honor.
3. The year 2004 will be remembered as one in which an increasingly confident China jumped into Latin America, a geopolitical and geoeconomic space always considered by the United States as its “backyard.” In 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 that policy continued and was sustained. . The Chinese need of raw materials, food, and energy not only is likely to remain at current levels; if its economy keeps growing at high rates (something probable but not certain), it will need such resources. The high complementarity between many Latin American economies and China also helps to find a simple and