

## **Summary of Ron MacIntosh's Presentation "Canada-Taiwan Relations: Challenges of Pushing Canada's Agenda" on Wednesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017 by Yany Siek**

As the Canadian government continues to pursue closer ties with the People's Republic of China, a deeper consideration of Canada's relationship with Taiwan is well-timed and warranted. Presently, the trajectory of cross-strait relations presents some challenges for global governance, regional and global prosperity, and security. China's growing importance for Canada creates numerous opportunities - and a few risks related to how well relations with Taiwan are managed.

Against the backdrop of an apparent impasse in cross-strait and international processes, Ron MacIntosh's presentation provided unique insight into the history of Canada-China-Taiwan relations, current challenges, and areas that policymakers could prioritize. Historically, China-Taiwan relations have been the source of most complications, as it is beyond Canada's control but nonetheless affects its ability to develop both relationships. Mr. MacIntosh described Canada's approach as *creatively ambiguous* and based on a One China policy framework that has generally worked well since 1970 despite the sensitivities, complexities and inevitable stresses. Presently, the government's agenda prioritizes expanding ties with China with less focus on Taiwan. However, Canada has made considerable progress in building economic and people-to-people ties with the latter and a unique opportunity exists to build on past accomplishments. To do so, Canadian leaders must confront contemporary developments that include the 2016 election of Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen, the uncertainty of the so-called 1992 consensus on the status of Taiwan in relation to China, and the subsequent deterioration of cross-strait relations in light of the Tsai administration's reluctance to embrace the consensus.

Despite the dominance of zero-sum thinking and heightened concern regarding the downturn in Sino-Taiwan relations, Mr. MacIntosh highlighted five areas that Canada could focus on. Firstly, although China has become more hard-line on Taiwan, Canada should promote accommodation and urge civility between both parties. This will require not only a more robust Canadian effort, but working with like-minded allies such as Australia to pursue this objective as well. Secondly, Canada should continue to support Taiwan's "International Space" by proactively facilitating its participation in regional and multilateral bodies that do not require statehood; Canada can be simultaneously principled and pragmatic. Thirdly, Canadian policymakers should recognize that although bilateral relations with Taiwan and China are promising, success will require focus, effort and investment. Fourthly, despite the One China Policy, engagement with Taiwan is viable. Canada's Taiwan agenda should be built on productive agreements, regular visits by senior officials to promote important agendas, expanded economic and cooperative exchanges, and consultative instrumentation. Finally, public support for Canadian objectives in China must be sustainable. Undoubtedly, this support will be influenced by how key issues such as the South China Sea are handled as well as those of Canadian values surrounding human rights and democratic governance noting the progress made in this field by Taiwan.

As the Canadian government's public consultations on a potential free trade agreement with China comes to a close on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, Canadians continue to grapple with the implications of deeper engagement. Ron MacIntosh's insights contributes to answering the question, "Can Canada expand relations with China, while engaging Taiwan?" For many, the answer is no.

However, as Mr. MacIntosh explained, strong relations with Taiwan and Mainland China may not be mutually exclusive. Yes, management of these relationships will be difficult and the choices less than ideal. However, with shrewd judgement and sound diplomacy, Canada may successfully pursue stronger relationships with China and Taiwan at the same time.