



Taiwan's Strong COVID-19 Response: Remarks by Foreign Minister Joseph Wu

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- Patrick Cronin, *Senior Fellow and Asia-Pacific Security Chair, Hudson Institute*
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John Walters:

Hello. I'm John Walters. It is my pleasure to welcome our viewing audience to Hudson Institute's continuing analysis of the Coronavirus epidemic. Today our focus is on Taiwan's success in protecting its citizens against Covid-19. Taiwan's elected leaders understood the danger of the virus quickly. On December 31st of last year, the ministry of health and welfare began to inform the populace daily about the disease. The measures the government took make Taiwan a leader in the global fight against the Covid pandemic. It learned from the hard lessons of the 2003 SARS epidemic.

At the end of March, Taiwan, out of a population of nearly 24 million had approximately 300 cases of the virus and five fatalities. Taiwan's preparedness allowed it to donate 10 million masks to countries that had been hardest hit by the virus, including 2 million to the United States. Hudson's panel will look at Taiwan's example today, but first it is my honor to introduce Dr. Joseph Wu, who has served as Taiwan's foreign minister for two years now. Prior to becoming foreign minister, Dr. Wu served as secretary general to Taiwan's president and of Taiwan's national security council. Dr. Wu has also served as minister of the mainland affairs council and as Taiwan's representative to the United States. Dr. Joseph Wu is an old and valued friend of Hudson Institute and we are honored to have him with us today.

Foreign Minister Joseph Wu:

Good afternoon everybody. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the Hudson Institute for holding this timely event and for inviting me to share what Taiwan is doing against this global pandemic. Here in Taiwan and around the world, people are closely tracking the spread of Coronavirus. We know how serious it is, its rate of infection and the unfortunate number of deaths. Near half off the world is in lockdown. Billions are discouraged from leaving their homes. Taiwan is fortunate so far thanks to an early and active campaign to diagnose, track, isolate and mitigate cases. The impact to our daily lives has been minor. Although we are currently experiencing an increase in cases the vast majority have been from overseas arrivals and these cases have been quickly identified and placed under treatment. Despite these successes, the situation could have been very different. We know we are vulnerable, our geographical proximity to China, a large number of Taiwanese living and working in China including thousands in Wuhan, hundreds of weekly flights, 3 million visitors from China annually and the lack of access to the World Health Organization.

But we have also learned a hard lesson from SARS in 2003 that we should rely on ourselves as the WHO might not help Taiwan at all. We know this is a recipe for a potential catastrophe and we don't have the luxury to wait and see. So when our health officials saw some reports of SARS-like transmittable disease in Wuhan they began their serious investigation and the preparation for the possible emergency. Along the way of dealing with the coming pandemic, several major steps we took seem to be effective and I would like to share with you here.

First, quick response. We took action faster than our neighbors in the region and the rest of the world. On December 31st the same day we reached out to the WHO about this mysterious SARS-like atypical pneumonia in Wuhan we started screening passengers on board of all flights coming from Wuhan prior to the first case arriving in Taiwan. We quickly activated a task force led by our CDC officials to monitor the situation closely, including sending two experts to Wuhan to conduct onsite investigation. Since our experts failed to obtain credible response from the

Chinese officials in Wuhan we thought something went wrong there and we needed to arm ourselves for the war against an invisible enemy. Second, early deployment. When the first case of the Coronavirus did arrive on January 21st we set up the central epidemic command center, CECC fully authorized by the government to do what is necessary. We enacted border control procedures to stop flights from certain areas or countries from coming in. We screened body temperature of all inbound passengers and outbound passengers at a later stage so that we don't export our cases. We implemented a tracking and monitoring program. First of all, travelers from Wuhan then for the rest of China and now for all inbound passengers.

We set up quarantine procedures, locations, and digital fans. We also mobilized a number of taxis for the sole purpose of transporting passengers from the airports to their quarantine locations. We also planned for the production and ration for critical materials that will surely become a global problem. The government also quickly drew up a legal framework to deal with the coming crisis, especially dealing with the possible economic impact. All these were done before things turn bad on us. Third, transparency. After its set up the CCC began its daily press conference, sometimes more than once a day to brief the public the real situation in the country and around the world. The confirmed cases found, their origin, context, traces, and so forth. The CECC has also been educating the public how to protect themselves. The press rounds were also used to combat disinformation generated mostly by the Chinese.

In addition, the government also acquired airtime for public messages within a short period of time. The CECC has firmly established its authority and it's gained the trust of the public. In some occasions, large public gatherings were forced to cancel, not by the government order, but by the pressure. All of the well-informed citizens. If anyone asks me about the difference between the Taiwan model and a Chinese communist model in fighting against Covid-19 I will say the most important factor is transparency and honesty. We in Taiwan cannot afford to conceal or to lie, but the Chinese communists are institutionally incapable of telling the truth. Forth, export ban, ration and rapid increase of production on critical supplies. When the government noticed a wave of procurement by the Chinese on critical medical supplies, not only in Taiwan but also in other countries, we quickly issued an export ban.

At the same time, we also began a massive increase in the production of surgical masks as well as sanitizing alcohol. In addition, we started a ration on face masks, putting it at a very affordable price under \$0.17 per piece with virtually every citizen being able to buy with their national health insurance card and for the resident foreigners in Taiwan, they can use their residence card to buy the same price for the resident diplomats and their dependents. Our ministry is responsible for distributing them free with the same amount as a ration for our own citizens. Fifth, a whole of government approach. We knew very well that outbreaks would have economic, international and other impacts as we learned from SARS in 2003. The CECC has taken in many ministries to make joint decisions including border control, putting certain countries on higher alert, monitoring, international situation, engaging in international cooperation, repatriation of citizens from China or elsewhere, military personnel involving in initial production of critical materials as well as disinfection of public areas.

Rapid increase of critical material supplies, coming up with financial packages to support the businesses that are impacted, combating disinformation, monitoring the mass transportation in stations, catching those who violated the quarantine orders and et cetera. The arrangement brought the whole government together under the CECC command, which has the full backing of the president and the premier. I think I'm rather senior among my peers in the cabinet, but

when the commander speaks, I can only say, "Yes, sir." Six, rearrangement of the medical institutions to meet the emergency requirements. We've designed a system to quickly streamline testing, diagnose, and treatment. We have designated over 160 testing facilities around the country and these rapidly increase our capacity to do the testing. From these facilities confirmed cases would either be sent to one of 134 medical facilities for milder cases or 50 large regional centers for more severe cases. This system allowed us to quickly isolate patients based on their severity as well as prioritize medical personnel and equipment.

Seventh, preventive measures of in-hospital outbreaks. Again, this is a hard lesson we learned in 2003 when we saw hospital lockdown was a traumatic image. We quickly re-activated the emergency procedures for patients entering hospitals. Patients with fever would have a separate room to be screened first and possibly test it. More importantly, hospitals were clearly demarcated internally so that medical personnel and staff in different wards and floors do not interact. So if there's an outbreak it'll be limited to a ward or floor at most and the rest of the hospital will remain operational. We also fully understand that medical personnel are absolute critical in this fight but at the same time they are also vulnerable by standing on the front line we want to make certain their personal protection gears are stocked to sufficiency for a possible outbreak ie. they can remain operational under extreme conditions of hospital lockdown.

We won't let them go to war without giving them what they need to protect themselves. Eighth, contact tracing. Among all the measures we took I would like to point out the contact tracing through the use of technology is quite effective. We are able to identify potential cases by tracing past context, sometimes numbered at hundreds of the cases that were tested positive by cross referencing health records and personal travel histories the government has been able to quickly identify, put under quarantine and test people that had been in contact with confirmed case. Without the use of tracing technology the workload of our CECC team would have been insurmountable. At this point, I will also like to point out that national health insurance which has more than 99% of coverage is the key to the success of ration of critical material and tracing of context.

Ladies and gentlemen, Taiwan is a democracy. We recognize that while the above actions may be effective, they must also be undertaken carefully and in proportion to the threat that we face. I would like to emphasize there must be accountability and full public support for these actions. That is the reason for that daily debriefing to disclose information about the actions we have taken and these has been well received by the public. It is important to note that we continue to face information warfare waged by the other side of the Taiwan Strait. Over the past few months, we have seen Beijing engaged in large scale coordinated campaign to mislead our public on the disease and to undermine their trust in the government from conspiracy theories about the origins of the Coronavirus to fabricated government proclamations. China has clearly shown that they do not want this crisis to go to waste. I think the United States these days is also having a small dose or what we have been encountered in Taiwan for some time.

Whatever China has tried to do, Taiwan's experience shows that for free and open democracies there is a better path forward in dealing with the outbreak. As foreign minister, one of my priorities is to share the Taiwan model with the international community and with this as a basis strengthening existing partnership with the like-minded countries. Last month I was pleased to have issued a joint statement between Taiwan and the United States to establish a new partnership to fight together against Covid-19. As part of this partnership, we are committed to the exchange of critical medical supplies and on the development and production of vaccines,

medicines, and testing kits. We also seek to replicate this partnership with other like-minded countries. We are now engaging in technical consultations with partners in Europe. In addition, we are also working to make available key medical supplies, especially to the medical personnel on the front line in the hardest hit countries. The medical masks are arriving in Europe and the US shortly. We will continue to seek participation in the who we believe that having undertaken successful actions to mitigate the Coronavirus we have a lot to share with the international community.

Given that pandemics recognize no borders and make no distinctions between nationalities, we think it is irresponsible for the WHO to continue to limit Taiwan's participation. We have noted that while we have made some progress, significant hurdles remain. One area that is very important for us is information exchange. Without timely access to critical information about the coronavirus, Taiwan risks becoming a gap in the global health system, undermining the very purpose of the WHO existence and these also puts at risk everything we have worked so hard to accomplish both in Taiwan and together with other like-minded countries. Despite our difficulties with the WHO we are moving ahead with experience sharing at a regional level.

Over the past five years, the Taiwan-US global cooperation and training framework or GCTF has become a successful platform to conduct discussions and exchanges with countries in the Indo-Pacific. We are working to hold a workshop on the Coronavirus to exchange experiences and the best practices. I believe this event will be well attended. Over the past few years we have kept our messaging on Taiwan's international participation simple. Taiwan can help. Our robust response to the coronavirus outbreak, the actions we have taken and the model we are committed to sharing all of this shows that Taiwan can help and we are willing to do so.

The most dangerous narrative to arise out of this global pandemic seems to me are the talking points China is pushing around the world, that only authoritarian regimes have the resources and capabilities to deal with the problem. And while the outbreak will subside eventually, my concern is that this narrative may persist. This narrative only serves one purpose, to further undermine free and open societies from around the world. Taiwan is a counterweight to this narrative. We proved that there's a better way forward. The more we can amplify Taiwan's story, our experiences in so far successfully managing the crisis, the more difficult it is for the authoritarian regimes to promote their alternative vision. For that, I'm grateful for the Hudson Institute for giving me this opportunity. Thank you.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you Minister Wu. Your remarks were excellent. Taiwan's response to the virus is an example that the whole world is now acknowledging and especially Americans who, thanks to your remarks and other attempts by the government to make it clear what's happening, are grateful for Taiwan's efforts, not only to help the world, but the 2 million masks that you mentioned that were coming to the United States. Our panel will continue the discussion today. I'd like to briefly introduce them and then we'll get to some questions. And also note that if viewers have questions and we have time, which I hope, they should email them to events@hudson.org or on Twitter [@HudsonInstitute](https://twitter.com/HudsonInstitute). And again, if we have time, which I hope we do, we'll be happy to put your questions to the ones that you addressed the questions to. Please make that clear in your questions.

Patrick Cronin is the Asia-Pacific security chair at Hudson Institute. Dr Cronin's research program analyzes the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, including China's total competition campaign, the future of the Korean peninsula and strengthening US alliances and partnerships. The next speaker will be Robert Spalding, who's a senior fellow also at Hudson Institute. His work focuses on US/China relations, economic and national security and the Asian-Pacific military balance. General Spalding has served in senior positions and strategy in diplomacy within the defense and state departments for more than 26 years and is an accomplished innovator in government and a national security policy strategist.

Vincent Chao is the director of the political division at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative office in the United States, that's Taiwan's diplomatic mission in Washington. Before this he was chief of staff to Taiwan's foreign minister and also served in senior level positions in the office of the president and national security council.

I'd like to get to our questions now. As our colleague Michael Mazza at the American Enterprise Institute has noted, Taiwan's early identification of the viruses spread and the measures it has taken since the end of 2019 have succeeded in battling the virus. That's foreign minister noted and they may provide a chance for Taiwan to explore new avenues of cooperation with the world community. We've just heard from Foreign Minister Wu the specific actions that Taiwan has taken. I'd like to ask Patrick Cronin first to discuss the prospects for wider international recognition of Taiwan based on current events, whether this is possible and what form it might take. As a close follower of China's military forces, it will also be good to hear Patrick Cronin's thoughts on how the virus has affected Chinese military dispositions, if we know anything about this. Is the PLAN persisting in its deployments around Taiwan sea and airspace? Does it show any signs of being affected by the virus? Patrick?

Patrick Cronin:

Well Seth, thank you. I think Minister Wu's comments remind us that a crisis forces us, or should force us all to think because excluding an advanced democracy like Taiwan from readiness in fighting a pandemic doesn't make any sense at all. Beijing should not be allowed to politicize global public health. Yet that's what's happened by ensuring Taiwan's non-participation in the World Health Assembly, the decision making body of the World Health Organization. And so when you consider that both SARS and COVID-19 originated in China, Taiwan has to take part in the international early warning and response system. We need Taiwan's analysis, ideas, expertise to be part of preventing senseless death.

If you put the question of Taiwan's role in the WHO to a vote among the 37 million people living across Taiwan in Fujian province, I bet it would pass quickly. The more you think about Taiwan's outstanding model of pandemic response that Minister Wu described, the more you can see why Taiwan's international roles should transcend the WHO. Contagion spread by air travel, which is why Taiwan was alert to the need to close down flights from coronavirus hotspots and that's why Taiwan needs to play a significant role in the international civil aviation organization.

And it doesn't stop there. As you know Seth, this is an economic crisis now as well. When we think about supply chain stability, when we think about maritime safety and security, Taiwan should have a pivotal role to play in all of these. On the intellectual property, when you think about, again, economic stability and security, it was a great thing that the United States last

month led the campaign to block Beijing from commandeering leadership of the World Intellectual Property Organization. This was the biggest thief about to run the WIPO, which didn't make any sense at all. We need democracies that are oriented toward free markets, helping to protect intellectual property as well as to thinking about the security of our information-based systems and about the recovery of the economic economy around the world.

And I could go on about maritime security because it seems to me that waiting more decades for a code of conduct to be negotiated between China and the 10 ASEAN countries doesn't make as much sense as democracies and like-minded maritime countries. Putting down what the binding rules ought to be. No ramming, no lasering, no swarming, obvious common sense rules and then putting that in China's lap and say, look, you ought to sign up to this as well. Now you asked about the PLA and how they're being affected. If you're to believe the PLA officials, apparently China, it's PLA, the military and North Korea are the only two actors in the world who seem unaffected by the coronavirus, that's not credible. The PLA was thrown into the front lines of the epicenter in Wuhan. Their medics were offered life insurance, presumably because they were in great danger.

So surely they have suffered some readiness problems but we don't know this from the PLA. They're covering this up both because they want not to undermine deterrence, that makes sense even though nobody's threatening China. But more likely I think the Chinese are covering up the damage to PLA readiness because of reputation. They don't want this to upset the CCP narrative that the PLA is pivotal to this great rejuvenation of China. And they did the same thing during the SARS epidemic back in 2003. It wasn't until a whistle blower talked about the infection of the soldiers that this came to light. I think the exercises though and the harassment, the political warfare and information warfare and coercion against Taiwan in the neighborhood has been unstinting. That's what surprising really. In the middle of this global pandemic, it's life and death, and the Chinese are unstinting in high-profile exercises in harassment.

Remember the Shandong aircraft carrier sailed through the Taiwan Strait escorted by Chinese frigates just before the election and then just after the election they had bombers and fighters crossing the midline of the Taiwan Strait to try to intimidate Taiwan as their vice president went off to the United States, newly elected. I think that really galled Xi Jinping to see the reelection of President Tsai, because Beijing had been so opposed to this.

They're not stopping with their intimidation though, they're intimidating Australians with lasering helicopter pilots, American pilots, ramming Japanese destroyers, ramming Taiwan coast guard cutters by fishing boats and by maritime militia boats. So this is possibly out of weakness though, Seth. The Chinese are probably trying to cloak the fact that internally they're very worried, they're vulnerable. At the same time they're looking for an opportunity because everybody's diverted with the stay at home order. So that's my quick assessment of what the PLA and Chinese are up to around Taiwan.

Seth Cropsey:

Patrick, thank you very much. It's interesting, as the foreign minister pointed out, the Chinese are constitutionally incapable of telling the truth. So your remarks about what we know from their public pronouncements are certainly backed up by an expert in the person of Foreign Minister Wu. I'd like to move along here and ask Rob Spalding a question and then Vincent Chao. But Rob, the US military has experienced serious consequences as a result of the virus, most vividly

demonstrated by the confinement of its two aircraft carriers in the Pacific, Ronald Reagan in Japan and Roosevelt in Guam. Sailors from both these ships and from the carrier Vinson and USS Nimitz have tested positive for the virus.

I'd like to ask General Spalding to comment on the security implications for the US and its allies. Those make a difference to Taiwan. Does our vulnerability offer adversaries an opportunity? What should we be doing now to convince potential adversaries that this would be the wrong time to test US resolve? What are the implications for readiness over the next six to 12 months? Are there lessons for the US military, and for other democratic militaries, in addressing possible future pandemics that are already clear now, Rob?

Robert Spalding:

Thank you Patrick and thank you Minister Wu for those great comments. I agree, Taiwan has done a fantastic job dealing with the coronavirus and should be emulated. In terms of military readiness, I think a lot of people are focused on what happened with the aircraft carrier in Guam but what I can tell you is many of the units that need to be ready for deterring any activity by China are essentially doing just that. So they have prepared their people. The Department of Defense has mandated the use of masks, particularly if you're on duty for a mission or a potential mission that would be required in the theater, then those people are sequestered and they're made sure that they're kept safe from the coronavirus.

So while it may appear that the entire world is struck by this and we're seeing implications throughout, the Department of Defense has taken measures to make sure that the forces will be ready if required. And I think it's important to note that the United States stands ready to defend its allies in the region and I think the Department of Defense is prepared and ready to do that, and it's forces are ready.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you, Rob. What about the Indo-Pacific right now? Can I ask you to comment on that? That's the particular focus of our panel today and China's response is unknown. Their words are difficult to believe. We have a problem, a Naval problem in the Indo-Pacific, in East Asia, in the West Pacific. Do you have any thoughts and observations on this? Should we be reassured or is this a period of vulnerability? Is this something that we need to take further measures to address? Well I'd like you to give our viewing audience a sense of how you see things region wise.

Robert Spalding:

I definitely think that it's something that we need to pay attention to. Anytime that you have something that's so globally impactful then it could present an opportunity for China to make gains in the region. The fact of the matter is though they have been making gains in the region without coronavirus. They have been pressuring in the South China Sea. They've been pressuring in the East China Sea. They've been pressuring Taiwan. They have flown as late as March exercises that mimic an invasion or some kind of activity or military crisis with Taiwan. And so it is something that we're already prepared for and looking after.

In the United States, the United States military is clearly focused on the Indo-Pacific theater. It's a key area in the national defense strategy. Certainly it's called out in the national security

strategy and I think we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that even before coronavirus the United States was watching what the Chinese were doing in all of these areas. So yes, it's a key area of concern, but at the same time, it's been a key area of concern because of China's aggressive activity to date.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you, Rob. There will be some questions here, we've already received one. But first I'd like to turn to Vincent Chao, Taiwan's representative on this panel. I'd like to ask Vincent about the Taiwanese people's response to the crisis. It's clear that much of Taiwan's success is due to individuals. Individuals who self-quarantined, took measures in their own businesses to check customers for fever and other actions consistent with the government's efforts to prevent the spread of infection.

Could you tell our audience more about this? We'd also like to hear more about the role of the Taiwan's National Health Insurance is taking during this crisis. We'd also like to hear your thoughts about the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enforcement Initiative Act that Congress passed and President Trump signed late last month. Can it achieve its aim of assisting Taiwan in strengthening its relations around the world despite the PRC's relentless pressure? Could this help in gaining Taiwan's entry to the World Health Organization and other international bodies as Patrick mentioned? Vincent?

Vincent Chao:

Thanks for your question, Seth. And I think I'll start with your first question, which is really centering on a whole society response. So, I think it's worth restating. One part of the Foreign Ministers remarks, which is that this isn't Taiwan's first rodeo. Now, we've had the SARS experience in the past. We've had experiences dealing with a number of infectious diseases that frankly have had similar origins, so the people of Taiwan understand that at a time like this, precautions must be taken. And that overreaction is much, much better than an under reaction. And that in a lot of aspects it must be a society-wide effort inclusive of government businesses and private citizens. So, I think this is why even right now, Seth, when you go into a restaurant in Taipei, I mean these restaurants are still open, but you'll have your temperature taken before you get a table.

And the public has been very good about wearing face masks out in public, on public transportation, they've been good at practicing social distancing and avoiding larger groups, even for religious events. And local governments have also been pretty rigorous about disinfecting public spaces. So to be clear, I mean all of this has to deal with really public awareness, which is why transparency is so important in a situation like this. Because even before the first case was identified in Taiwan, we've held these public briefings, as the Foreign Minister mentioned. And so we've messaged early and aggressively on all issues concerning coronavirus, including even on a hoarding of essential goods. We've also ensured public buy-in for some of the more serious actions we've taken, such as mandatory home quarantines. And this has been really reflected, I think in opinion polls that we've taken that reflects sort of the level of confidence people have in government's response.

So while the government has taken this leading role, it is and still is a whole of society effort. And this model of transparency, public awareness, and public buy-in is quite different from the

authoritarian model that Beijing has been pushing for. In terms of the national health insurance. So it's important for everybody to be covered under some sort of health insurance in a crisis like this. And this is where I think our NHI plays an important role. We have a robust public single payer health insurance in Taiwan that is highly supported and widely acknowledged. And this has given us a lot more tools and options in dealing with this coronavirus. For example, we didn't have to immediately resolve the question of who's going to pay for testing and hospitalizations. We were able to quickly establish a formulaic process for intake of patients at medical centers and then division of labor, depending on their severity and so forth.

So broadly, the integration and digitalization medical records under this insurance system also gave our medical authorities a lot more insight and data about the situation. And this allowed us to identify high risk groups and aid in, for example, case identification. It allowed patients to be able to quickly provide these records to healthcare providers and doctors to access past histories of clinical symptoms and so forth. In terms of your last question on the Taipei Act. So we're very happy that this bill has been signed into law by President Trump. And the timing really is important because as Patrick pointed out just earlier, we are seeing signs that at a time when the world is focused on dealing with this pandemic, it appears Xi has been engaged in a pretty aggressive campaign in the South China Sea across the Taiwan Strait. And against some of our diplomatic allies.

So, obviously this Taipei Act is a strong signal by both the US Congress and administration that it takes issues of Taiwan's international space seriously. And so, it sends a pretty powerful message, I think, because the US is an important player in many of these regions that we are concerned about, and many of the regions that we have diplomatic allies in. And it helps counterbalance some of the pressure that the PRC is now exerting around the world.

On the WHO, we're grateful for the comments that Secretary Pompeo just made yesterday. And some of the comments that other senior officials have made on this issue. We have held a lot of discussion about announcement. We held a virtual forum on Taiwan's global participation on March 31st. So there is a strong momentum behind this push for Taiwan to be included as an observer in the WHO and to be able to fully, underscore, fully participate in technical meetings, which the Taipei Act will add to.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you, Vincent. We've got some questions here from the audience and I'd like to ask the question and any of our panelists, I encourage all of our panelists, any who are interested, to answer the question, to speak up and we'll go from one question to the next. The first one is, why does China continue its military exercises around Taiwan amid the coronavirus pandemic? We've also seen the US military ramped up activities around Taiwan, including by sending ships to transit through the Strait, the Taiwan Strait. Are these related to Chinese actions? So, let's go with that one. Why don't we direct that first to Rob, and after that, Patrick, if you'd like to say something. And of course, Vincent as well. So, gentlemen?

Robert Spalding:

Yes. The United States is present in the region and it's there to deter Chinese coercion both in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. And it's going to continue to be there. In terms of have we had any specific activity in the Taiwan Strait recently?

I don't have the answer to that, but we have in the past moved ships through the Taiwan Strait and they're clearly designed to show our presence, show that we remain committed via the Taiwan Relations Act, at providing for the defense of Taiwan. And I think that will continue. Why the Chinese continue to coerce, this is just what they do. They haven't given up their desire to see Taiwan be reunited with the mainland and under their totalitarian system. And they're going to continue to pressure Taiwan to that end. They also haven't given up the use of armed force. So we are aware of that and we continue to be prepared and work with Taiwan for its defense.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you, Rob. Patrick.

Patrick Cronin:

Yeah. Just agree very much with what Rob had to say. And say that there is a dynamic going on between US military actions and Chinese actions, but China's driven by a comprehensive policy to intimidate its neighbors so that it can rewrite the rules. It wants to essentially make sure that any economic and military activity that happens on its periphery as it would consider it, but that includes the international space in the East and South China Seas and beyond, is something that has to go through Beijing. And that is being done by Beijing's total competition policy of everything, short of war. But not short of the use of ramming. When you think about those 10 speed boats that were repeatedly ramming the two Taiwan Coast Guard patrol cutters, probably for the maritime militia, that's essentially a government sponsored activity. Same thing with maybe a fishing boat ramming a Japanese destroyer, Maritime Self Defense Force, that came close to the coast, but legally, being damaged or by the Chinese fishing vessel.

So there's no doubt that the Chinese want to intimidate and coerce so that they can write the rules that agree with what China wants, which is control over these areas. And as Rob says, yeah, unification with Taiwan, ultimately that's part of the China dream. That's part of Xi's narrative, and he right now is potentially vulnerable because he's been a man who's garnered every title and could be reaffirmed and given a third term as Secretary of the Communist party in 2023, but it's very likely that he's under immense pressure now that the economy is slowing down and the coronavirus has put China off course.

Vincent Chao:

Well, if I could just add on to that, I think what Beijing is thinking right now is you never let a good crisis go to waste, right? So I think Beijing is conscious that there is stronger and growing support for Taiwan within a like-minded countries, and there is more push back within China's actions in the region in general. But, I think at the same time Beijing is also conscious that these same countries that are pushing back against their actions are now preoccupied with the coronavirus. Even going to the degree of having some sort of impact on military readiness, as the Teddy Roosevelt shows. So it's really a golden opportunity for China, if you are the PRC to do what Rob says, which is to do what they always do, which is to achieve their goals through intimidation and coercion.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you. Look, we have a series of questions that are interestingly related. I'll lead off with the first and you'll see as they follow. The audience question is, how realistic is it that Taiwan will become a US backed observer to the World Health Assembly this year? I'd like to ask all of our panelists, each of them, any of them to jump in and then we'll go from one to the next. How realistic is it that the China will actually become a member of the WHO this year?

Robert Spalding:

Yeah, I think it's highly unlikely, Seth, that that is a case. It's clear that the WHO is highly influenced by the Chinese Communist Party, if not completely co-opted. I think it's clear that the United States needs to re-look its funding of WHO until it gets its act cleaned up. I mean, clearly if it had responded like the Taiwan government did to the coronavirus, we would all be better off, because it would have much earlier declared a worldwide pandemic. As it is, I don't have any hope that Taiwan will be welcomed into the WHO any time soon. But more importantly, we really need to think about reforming the WHO as it currently stands.

Vincent Chao:

I think that, I mean I echo what Rob said, but I also think that there's a lot of institutional factors kind of underlying this cause, and those institutional factors really relate to their relationship with China. The influence that China has within their secretariat. We've seen examples of this throughout this pandemic, but really, we've seen that in the past because Taiwan has been invited as an observer between 2009 and 2016, there is some sort of flexibility that the secretary at that DG can exert in this case. This DG I think has made his position pretty clear and his Alliance is pretty clear in this sense. So, certainly it will be an uphill battle. But, I think that there is a growing international support particularly because of Taiwan's response in terms of observing in the WHA, so this is what we're going to continue to work towards. We're not saying that it's completely off the table at any point, but certainly there are a lot of institutional factors that we'll need to overcome them.

Patrick Cronin:

And Seth, I would simply add that the COVID-19 crisis is going to be enduring for months. Maybe, well into next year, if not beyond. And I think it's very important for us to think about the longterm imperative of reforming the WHO, but right now we have a crisis to respond to. So it's great to hear what Minister Wu talked about with the US in terms of a bilateral engagement and working with the Czechs and working with others so that Taiwan can be on the front lines helping to fight this crisis right now and not wait for the WHO to be reformed, which we know as Rob says, it badly needs.

Seth Cropsey:

Well, you will not be surprised to hear that this response has spawned other questions. Most interestingly, how can Taiwan and the US and its allies hold the World Health Organization to account for performing China's bidding? I mean, as you know, the Head of the WHO is selected by China, approved by China, selected by China. So, is there anything in the meantime besides

reforming it, where the United States and its allies, Taiwan, can expect some kind of accountability hold the WHO accountable? Anything we can do?

Vincent Chao:

If I could jump in first on that question. I think the main issue really is public awareness. And I think that's been that ... public awareness has been increasing over the past couple of years about just amount of influence and control that China's exerted over international organizations. I mean, it's not exactly a secret that they could control the leadership of four international organizations when no other country controls more than one. So there's obviously ... and I'm not saying, there's evidence, there's plenty of evidence out there, but there's obviously a very concerted effort to influence and to exert some level of control over international organizations from Beijing.

So I think the first step, the very first step is to make sure there's increasing public awareness of this. So in the past, I think folks in like-minded countries, officials have been pretty content to kind of just let things be. And that there hasn't really been concerted effort to call them out on it and to really fight back against it. So we're seeing the pushback now. I think starting from the election. Like Rob said, I expect we'll see more going down the road of like-minded countries really banding together to say, enough is enough. Just wait your turn like everybody else. Everybody else has one leadership position in international organizations, you have four. Maybe you should cut that down a bit.

So I think that once that becomes part of the public narrative, that's going to help Taiwan and other like-minded countries in its efforts to really call out the disparity I think in influence that these international organizations are under.

Robert Spalding:

Yeah. I just think that we ought to focus on, as Patrick said, focus on the coronavirus as it currently stands, but more importantly use it as a stepping stone for figuring out how we ensure that democracies are protected in much the same way that Taiwan was protected by having early awareness and taking early action against any potential future pandemic. So I think it's clearly been noted that China's involvement in the World Health Organization and on needing to get transparent information from China is very difficult to actually attain.

And so, but Taiwan seems to have found how to deal with that. And so maybe it ought to be that we use the current pandemic and the actions of bilateral and multilateral or actions that are currently taking place to use that as a stepping stone to a system that actually is working on the basis of transparency. And really it's about democracy. When you bring in these totalitarian regimes into international institutions, then they begin to break down. And so prior to reforming the WHO, which may seem like a long pole in the tent, we could use this current crisis as an opportunity to really put a warning system in place and cooperative measures.

Seth Cropsey:

An important point, especially because the Chinese are attempting to sell the narrative that they're authoritarian response, including, which cannot exclude their lack of transparency, should be a model somehow for the world in dealing with the epidemic in the future. Which, of course is nonsense.

Patrick Cronin:

Yeah. Seth, I agree with you. When you don't have transparency and you clearly cover up the facts, you lose trust very quickly. Now, when it comes to something like the WHO, you're dealing with an international bureaucracy, so we know how our national bureaucracies can be cumbersome. When you get into the international organization business, you know how bureaucratic things can really become.

We have to engage the WHO just as we engaged heavily, I think, in the leadership campaign for WIPO, for the intellectual property, and we'll eventually see more positive results, we'll get the kind of leadership that it deserves, we'll get Taiwan to participate much more actively so that it has the full real time exchange of information, and eventually we can reform these institutions. They're not to be cast aside just because they're not important on any given month. Right now, we know we need something like the WHO, but it's going to take us years to really reform it, so let's keep working on explaining that our democracies, as Rob was saying, being transparent, sharing information, and bringing the science to bear is the best longterm ways of preserving both freedom and Liberty and our public health and economy.

Seth Cropsey:

Other thoughts from panelists? Let me move on, because there are more questions. I'm going to try to put together several of the questions into one, because they resemble each other. The audience is grateful for Taiwan's contribution to face masks in the United States. I think this is a useful instrument here for making that even clearer and getting people to understand what Taiwan is doing. People are asking us here on, on Twitter and through emails ... Let me sum this up. Can we expect U.S. Taiwan relations to respond, to expand, and to develop based on this generosity? Does this lead somewhere?

Vincent Chao:

I'll take a stab at that. First ... Yeah, we were really happy to do the face masks to be honest, because if you look at Taiwan-U.S. relations over the past few decades, it really has been a give and take relationship. We've benefited a lot from this relationship, including on international space issues. Obviously, we want to support our friends in the United States as well. I think it was something that people in Taiwan were really happy that it took place. Whether this will lead to something, that's not really the focus right now. I think the focus is on making sure the face masks get to these frontline medical personnel and that people have the supplies they need.

Whether it leads to something, that is really not the driving force behind the donation. That's not what folks are thinking about in Taiwan right now. Obviously, we think and hope that this relationship will be further enhanced by donation. We have seen the signing of the MOU that Foreign Minister, Wu, talked about. We have seen increased cooperation between our health authorities. We've seen a lot of sharing of best practices, and all of that is leading somewhere. I think we have to look at this really holistically and that it's just one part of our multifaceted relationship that is continuing to improve and it is particularly improving because of this Coronavirus outbreak.

Patrick Cronin:

Seth, as I mentioned, the crisis makes you think. I think hearing about learning about Peter Tsai, a Taiwan born scientist who helped invent part of the end N95 mask, it's a great contribution. From a policy perspective, since we have normalized relations with the People's Republic of China, every single administration, democratic and republican, has had to try to balance and juggle our interests and our values in terms of our relationship with Taiwan. Now, it's very interesting that the new Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act, the TAIPEI Act so called, is a continuation of something every administration has tried to do, from Jimmy Carter when he sort of hastily ended the U.S. RRC Defense Treaty, it was offset by the fact that Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act ...

When Reagan sort of made the Third Communique with China, which talked about gradually reducing arm sales to China, it was done with the Six Assurances, which made sure that it was linked to China's peaceful behavior, meaning if China's going to threaten Taiwan, then the game's off. We're not going to reduce our arm sales while you're threatening Taiwan. There's a balance to be had here, but there's no doubt that the goodwill, the expertise, and the energy that Taiwan brings to fighting the pandemic right now, which is really a life and death issue, can open up space for Taiwan internationally in dealing with health, dealing with economic prosperity, maritime safety, and much more. I hope it will strengthen the U.S.-Taiwan relationship in a way that it has not been really for decades.

Robert Spalding:

Seth, I've been even before the coronavirus talking to Taiwan about working with the United States on reassuring critical manufacturing in microelectronics and in semiconductors, so not just masks and pharmaceuticals, but really a lot of the manufacturing that the United States military needs to provide security and supply chain. Taiwan can actually help with that, and I think we should deepen our cooperation as we go forward in those areas. Eventually, hopefully that would lead to a free trade agreement between the U.S. and Taiwan, which I think would be a positive for both sides.

I think the coronavirus really gives us an opportunity to recognize the challenges that the Chinese Communist Party has to our supply chain and use that as an opportunity to strengthen our economic and industrial ties with Taiwan. The way that Taiwan reacted to the coronavirus, in terms of industrial policy, is something that we need to really focus on and learn from. I think by working together with Taiwan, not only in how they've implemented industrial policy for Taiwan, but in helping some of their companies to help reassure manufacturing in the United States, I think our relationship could become even stronger.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you Rob. An audience question addressed specifically to Vincent. The questioner asks, "Can you provide more details about what exactly Taiwan told the World Health Organization on December 31st and what, if anything, was the WHO's response to that information?"

Vincent Chao:

I think that's a fair question. It's a matter of public record, so I think that if you look back at some of the remarks and statements that have been made since January, obviously the foreign

minister said he noticed a number of abnormal cases that were coming from Wuhan, China in December. Because of the SARS experience and because of everything we've experienced coming from China in the past, this immediately drew, I think, a lot more attention in Taiwan than elsewhere in the world. Because there was so much concern, I think, within our health authorities that this could be the start of something unexplained, on December 31st there was a query that was directed towards the WHO, which stated what we were seeing and what we were potentially concerned about.

As to the WHO's response, I'm not very certain how they responded. I don't have that sort of information, but I do know that we were treating this as a very serious matter all the way back in December, back when even in China this wasn't seen as a much more than a very localized cluster of infectious cases. At that time, because of these vulnerabilities that the Foreign Minister spoke about, we took things a lot more seriously. That was what prompted, I think, our initial conversation with the WHO on the matter.

Seth Cropsey:

Thank you, Vincent. Look, we've very quickly reached an hour here. Closing thoughts or remarks, gentlemen?

Robert Spalding:

Seth, thank you for hosting this conversation. It's been a great honor to participate and talk about all of the great things coming out of Taiwan. I think it just reminds us the power of democracies to be open and transparent and willing to work together for the common good. It's really what the International Order was meant to be after the end of World War II. For so long, we've worked together with democracies to preserve that, and essentially what we've seen is erosion of that as we brought the Chinese Communist Party into that order. It's a good opportunity for us to reflect on what we've built, what we've seen essentially be eroded, and what we need to do to go forward to ensure that liberty and prosperity is not just for the Americans. It's for everybody, and Taiwan more than any country, or area in Asia, is really the epitome of that. Thank you.

Patrick Cronin:

Seth, if I could add that my comments really would just end by thanking Minister Wu. Joseph Wu, we all know him well. He's such a steadfast friend of the United States, but when you think about the pressure that Taiwan has been under because of Beijing's information warfare campaign, conducting a successful democratic election, and then stepping up to the world and helping with the pandemic ... I mean, there's nothing really more to underscore exactly what democratic Taiwan has to offer to both the United States, to the region, and to the world. This is a great moment for Taiwan, and we salute them.

Vincent Chao:

I just want to conclude by thanking Hudson for having this excellent panel. Again, the narrative that the Chinese are pushing around the world is that they have this ideal way of dealing with the Coronavirus, which is you have to be authoritarian and you have to take these hardhat and draconian tactics. You have to do a lot of information control, and Taiwan has really become a

counter narrative to that, just as we've been the counter narrative that democracy doesn't function well in our part of the world. There's a lot of inherent danger in being the counternarrative to the narrative that the CCP is pushing. It's really important that we continue to tell the story here in DC and around the world, and I'm grateful for the Hudson Institute for organizing this.

Seth Cropsey:

I think that the contrast between Taiwan and the PRC could not possibly be more interesting. It's a contrast between democracy and tyranny. It's a contrast between transparency and opaqueness. Most of all, it's a contrast between effective response and an ineffective response, the details of which we may never know. I want to thank John Walters for his time this morning. Also, I cannot possibly end this without thanking my friend, Minister Joseph Wu, whose comments I much appreciate and I think we all appreciate. They are insightful and something that we'll return to in the future. Of course, last but not least, thank you to Vincent Chao, Rob Spalding, and Patrick Cronan for your insights, your excellent observations, and particulate ones. Also, finally to our audience who've asked good questions and participated in what I think is an excellent event. Thank you all very much and stay tuned, if not to this channel than to following ones, because you'll hear more from on this subject. Thank you.