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Washington-Taipei Relations at a Crossroads

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abandonment of Taiwan, the U.S. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to regulate semi-official ties between Washington and Taipei, while maintaining U.S. commitment to Taiwan's security in an ambiguous way, including arms sales.

In preparing the establishment of Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations, the two countries made their statements respectively. The U.S. side reiterated that peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue by Chinese themselves conformed to American interests, while the Chinese side pointed out that "the way of Taiwan's return to the motherland and accomplishment of national unification is entirely an internal affair of China."[14] After PRC National People's Congress Standing Committee Chairman Ye Jianying (叶剑英) made his "Nine-Point Proposal" to Taipei on China's peaceful unification on 30 September 1981, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig openly appreciated the proposal and even suggested Taipei respond to it positively. Later, the retiring Haig suggested President Reagan reach an agreement with Beijing that would allow continued U.S. arms sales to Taiwan but subject it in the future to the progress on China's peaceful course of unification.[15] Echoing Haig's proposal, the 1982 Sino-U.S. communiqué (the August 17 communiqué) reiterated that the United States "has no intention of infringing on Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity, or interfering in China's internal affairs, or pursuing a policy of 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan.' The United States Government understands and appreciates the Chinese policy of striving for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question as indicated in China's Message to Compatriots in Taiwan issued on 1 January 1979 and the Nine-Point Proposal put forward by China on 30 September 1981."[16]

Washington's acceptance of peaceful unification and "a high degree of autonomy" for Taiwan offered in Beijing's Nine-Point Proposal, along with the U.S.-PRC August 17 communiqué, had aroused a great concern on the island as well as in the United States, as indicated by Washington's earlier "Six Assurances" to Taipei, including not exerting pressure on Taiwan to enter into negotiations with the PRC. The orally delivered Six Assurances, along with three "non-papers" in President Reagan's name by James Lilley, then the head of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), underlined the United States' "only interest in this matter," that being, "any resolution of these issues be accomplished peacefully."[17] Having no dissent on peaceful unification per se and not considering peaceful separation as another option for peaceful solution, Washington then worried

that Taiwan would be forced to hold peace talks on uni cation with the mainland and that the PRC government might pursue uni cation by force. erefore, when Beijing requested that Washington force Taipei to negotiate with the mainland to resolve the Taiwan issue peacefully, President Reagan declined it during his visit to China in April 1984. Since Taiwan was unwilling to accept unification with the mainland, the peaceful settlement that the U.S. Taiwan policy then emphasized actually meant no supporting uni cation, suggesting that Taiwan abandonment was not on the policy agenda.

In the late 1980s, Sino-U.S. cooperation in dealing with the Soviet Union was gradually loosening its strategic foundation due to the détente of U.S.-Soviet relations and the normalization of Sino-Soviet ties. With dramatic changes within former Soviet Union and Eastern European