



WTH did Taiwan do to defeat the coronavirus? How a free Taiwan succeeded where Beijing failed

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Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, What the Hell Is Going On?

Danielle Pletka: Marc, what the hell is going on?

Marc Thiessen: Well, what the hell is going on is we're talking about the coronavirus. Surprise, surprise. But we're talking about the Taiwanese response, which has been an absolute model for how a democratic society can protect its people from a public health threat without imposing mass lockdowns and destroying its economy and all the things that we're happily doing here in America. Taiwan should have been Ground Zero for this pandemic. They're 80 miles off the coast of mainland China. In 2019, they had 2.71 million visitors from mainland China to Taiwan, so there's a lot of trade, a lot of exchange, a lot of population going back and forth.

Danielle Pletka: And just by the way, 2.71 million, that represents more than 10% of Taiwan's entire population.

Marc Thiessen: Exactly.

Danielle Pletka: So that's a pretty big group of visitors.

Marc Thiessen: That is. And yet they have 393 cases and only six deaths from this virus, and they have managed to do this without shutting down their economy, without all the population-based mitigation that we're experiencing right now. And so we thought we would get to the bottom of how they did it, how they succeeded, and what lessons there are here for the US.

Danielle Pletka: Taiwan, I think, has really been an exemplar. And just to remind people what Taiwan is, this is, as Marc said, this is an island off of the coast of mainland China. It is a country, and I feel totally comfortable calling it a country on its own, that is claimed by the People's Republic of China – that the United States government officially takes no position. Basically, we follow what's called the One-China policy, which means that we do not treat Taiwan as if it's independent. And China has systematically, over the last decades, tried to exclude Taiwan even from attending, let alone being a member of any organization, doesn't matter how small, and that includes the World

Health Organization. So what makes the stats that you just laid out more remarkable, Marc, is that Taiwan has done this without any international help.

Marc Thiessen:

Yep.

Danielle Pletka:

So they've gotten the virus from the world, but the world has done absolutely nothing to help Taiwan. And I would say worse yet, not only has the world done nothing to help Taiwan, but insofar as China has been able, they have stopped Taiwan from helping the world.

Marc Thiessen:

On December 31st, the Taiwanese government warned the World Health Organization that they were hearing about a new pneumonia, atypical pneumonia, in Wuhan and that people were being treated in isolation, which was a sign that there was human-to-human transmission. And this was at a time when Communist China was lying to the world. They knew because not a few-- 1,700 medical workers had gotten sick. So that is the absolute, rock-solid evidence they knew that there was human-to-human transmission, because if medical workers are getting sick they're not getting it from a bat at the market. And they continued to lie up until mid-January about this thing.

Marc Thiessen:

There's a number of things to unpack here. One is, how did Taiwan respond so well? Two, is it in our interest to see Taiwan so isolated from China? But third, this contrast between what we on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we talked about Communist China and Taiwan as Free China, you know, because you were describing the situation of Taiwan in the world, except for the fiction that it's a province of the Communist Party, we've seen this throughout history. There was East Germany and West Germany, Free Germany and Communist Germany, there was North Vietnam and South Vietnam, North Korea and South Korea.

Marc Thiessen:

But this is a contrast where you have two populations of Chinese people, though there are some people who are Taiwanese who don't consider themselves to be Chinese. But a Chinese territory that is a functioning democracy, that has responded to this perfectly, near perfectly, and a communist regime on the mainland that wants to take over the free China, that has literally infected millions of people in its own country and across the world through its lies and totalitarian mishandling of this virus.

Danielle Pletka:

Not just lies, but deliberate disinformation. And that is something that, again, is worthy of talking about. But I want to actually underscore this to everybody because we're obviously dealing with our own challenges, America is, we're a big country, and not everything that Taiwan has done is necessarily scalable. Americans may not want to be tracked on their phones, Americans may not want... so it's worthwhile-

Marc Thiessen:

As opposed to being locked in their homes?

Danielle Pletka:

Yeah.

Marc Thiessen:

I'd rather be tracked by my phone than locked in my home.

Danielle Pletka:

Right, but many people would rather neither, I think, is the problem. But I think there's a really worthwhile and important comparison to make here, which is the numbers that you just laid out from Taiwan, which are really, remarkably low, I mean we're talking about six deaths. Even if we're wrong by a scale of 100%, maybe 12

deaths. And I want folks to hear: Taiwan is a country of 24 million people. Australia is a country of about 24, 25 million people as well. Australia, by contrast, has more than 6,000 cases of coronavirus and has had 63 deaths by latest count. That is, again, a factor of 10 compared to Taiwan, and it just really underscores how remarkably well, particularly given their proximity to China, how remarkably well the Taiwanese have handled this.

Marc Thiessen: And what's remarkable, the stat that really jumped out at me, and we're going to ask our guest about it in a moment how they got there, is there have been 393 cases. 338 of those have been imported, so-called imported cases, meaning people coming into the country with the virus that they were able to stop and isolate and identify. And that means there's only 55 people who have gotten the virus, not died from the virus, not put in intensive care, but actually caught the virus in Taiwan in community-to-community transmission. So they have been able to, without population mitigation, without a lockdown, with all the damage to our economy, prevent community transmission of this disease.

Danielle Pletka: So before we get to our guest the one thing I want to raise, because it exploded into the news as if somehow this was yet another terrible thing that Donald Trump had done, was that he ceased all US funding, he suspended all US funding, for the World Health Organization. And I think a lot of people rightly have sort of either tried to distance themselves, God knows I can't read another coronavirus story, and they've tried to distance themselves from some of the politicking, but it really is important to understand just how crappy the World Health Organization has been here. They have done nothing but propagate Chinese lies. And everybody, please understand this: the United States pays in the same proportion to the World Health Organization that we do to the United Nations.

Marc Thiessen: 23% of the budget.

Danielle Pletka: That is that we pay more than any other country in the world, twice as much as the Communist Chinese pay into these organizations. The American taxpayer is basically paying up to a quarter, roughly, let's just say a little less, let's just say 20% of the salaries of every single person that works at the World Health Organization. And the World Health Organization has lied to the world repeatedly.

Marc Thiessen: We're literally funding Communist Chinese propaganda about the virus.

Danielle Pletka: Right. So the notion that we should suspend this and figure out what's going on is completely justified.

Marc Thiessen: You mean we should find out what the hell is going on?

Danielle Pletka: We should. Donald Trump needs to find out what the hell is going on. And the other thing I wanted to note for everybody, and sorry I'm blabbing way too much, but this is-

Marc Thiessen: Nothing new.

Danielle Pletka: Shut up! Anyway.

Danielle Pletka: The other thing is that at the end of last month, Congress passed the Taiwan Allies

International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act. Yeah, I know. Sorry, it's a really long name. One of the things this bill demanded was that the US government do more to advocate for Taiwan in international institutions. And so Mike Pompeo, our Secretary of State, has gone in and demanded that the World Health Organization reinstate Taiwan as an observer to the WHO. I'm betting that's not going to happen.

Marc Thiessen: I'm sure it won't. Well let's get to the bottom of what the hell is going on in Taiwan with the coronavirus.

Danielle Pletka: So, our guest today is Bi-khim Hsiao. For those of you who follow Taiwan, she's a very well-known figure. For those less so, Bi-khim is a former member of the Legislative Yuan from the DPP, the Democratic People's Party, which is the party of the incumbent president, Tsai Ing-wen. She is American-educated, she went to Oberlin and then to Columbia, speaks perfect English, and is really a terrific advocate and very familiar with the challenges that Taiwan faces in a very, very dangerous neighborhood.

Marc Thiessen: So Bi-khim, welcome to the podcast.

Bi-khim Hsiao: Thank you. Glad to have this opportunity.

Marc Thiessen: Well, thank you. Well, so Taiwan has been an absolute success story in handling this COVID crisis in a much better way than the United States or other countries around the world has. You just reported for the first time in over a month no new cases, and you've limited it to 393 total cases with only six deaths. How has Taiwan been so successful in dealing with this pandemic?

Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, yes, you're right. As of today we have less than 400 cases and I think the key has been early action and advance deployment. But Taiwan's circumstances are quite unique in a number of ways, that is, all this is taking place in a context of our traumatic experience of SARS in 2003 in which we lost dozens of lives, including a number of medical professionals. And so our society and government has been on high alert from the very beginning because of that experience.

Bi-khim Hsiao: I think that it's a different circumstance from where you are in the United States. And a second element of the context in terms of background has been our exclusion from the World Health Organization. Obviously that means that we have had to rely on ourselves for judgment and advice. So we tend to be extra cautious when things like this happen. And a third element in terms of context is that we're generally suspicious of Chinese government information. We've been trained to be suspicious in that way. And a fourth element is that, ironically, the Chinese government had banned tourism to Taiwan prior to our elections. They had tried to use that as economic leverage to pressure us into political submission. And the irony of that is it might have ended up playing a big part in saving us from the pandemic because of a reduced number of Chinese travelers to Taiwan around that time. So these are unique elements of the context under which Taiwan's response to the pandemic initiated.

Marc Thiessen: So Taiwan's gotten a lot of praise internationally for its action. The Journal of the Medical Association actually published a big article crediting Taiwan with taking 124 actions to identify and isolate the virus. Talk to us a little bit about some of the actions and the categories of your activity.

- Bi-khim Hsiao: The steps we have taken, there are so many steps that it's going to take forever, but I just want to briefly categorize three areas of measures that we have taken to respond to this challenge. The first general area has been in the medical and health professional area. That includes early quarantine measures, travel regulations and limitations, and also, very importantly, tracking and tracing each and every individual case, isolating and containing the spread at a very early stage.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: And the second general category is the industrial and private sector's support in all of this. Our government took over the production and distribution of masks very early on, that was in January, to prevent mass panic buying of critical medical supplies. And so we also coordinated with the machine, tool, and medical supply industries to increase production capacity. So in January we had about less than two million masks-per-day capacity and now we have 15 million.
- Marc Thiessen: Wow.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: So this was a very important element in assuring our public that masks and protection would be affordable and available to anyone in need.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: A third area of general support, I mean the general category of measures that have been taken has been a very proactive and public information management process. That includes daily regular press briefings, transparency, which is important for Taiwan, and also dealing with disinformation. You might be aware that a couple years ago we suffered tremendously during an election campaign when the Chinese weaponized information as an attempt to destabilize social and public confidence. And so we take disinformation very seriously, especially when it comes to mass public issues like pandemics and diseases.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: So all of these general categories of measures have really helped our country as a whole deal with this pandemic at an early stage. And so we are in a situation where we have relatively fewer cases than other countries, and each and every case is tightly managed.
- Danielle Pletka: Look, this is a testament to the Taiwanese government's management. It really is. And the irony here, of course, is you have basically the same population as Australia, obviously substantially more population density than Australia in terms of geography, and of course Australia has had many, many more cases. You've also integrated your immigration and your health service and your customs. We have this terrible left-arm, right-arm problem where one agency doesn't know what the other one's doing, and I still don't think there's any integration with our immigration services. Was that something that people resisted at home?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: I want to go back to this context because our government and society went through the panic over SARS in 2003, so I think our society at large understands that this is a very serious matter. They understood this even before the pandemic got around to other countries. And so our public is kind of willing to accept some degree of government intervention in tracking their whereabouts. So this tracking, which begins as soon as you enter the border, and it is closely tied to not only our national health insurance system, but our mobile phones, which are used to track the whereabouts of those who are required to be under mandatory quarantine or isolation utilizing mobile phones. And if you are a foreign visitor to Taiwan without a local phone, the government will lend you one for the purpose of tracing your whereabouts, if you are in the category of high-risk and require mandatory

quarantine.

- Bi-khim Hsiao: And so this is one way in which we have managed to isolate and contain the pandemic. And some people who have a concern about privacy when your whereabouts is being tracked, our society understands the severity of this situation and so they're generally willing to forsake the privacy of some to enable normal functioning of the rest of our society. And indeed, our schools and our businesses remain open. We try to function as normal as possible in our society. Our economy is functioning despite tremendous challenges from abroad.
- Marc Thiessen: That's music to our ears because my kids are all in school at home. We would love to have your situation. The statistic that really jumped out to me is that you have 393 total cases and of those, 338 are imported, meaning that people you caught coming into the country who you've been able to isolate. So that means you've had only 55 cases of community-to-community transmission. How have you been able to keep that number so low?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, the community transmission cases are low because we track and trace and isolate everyone at high-risk. And at a height of our quarantine and isolation we could have as many as 50 or 60,000 citizens and visitors under mandatory quarantine or home quarantine. And if you don't have a place where you can be isolated at home, then we have government-designated hotels that we have offered as an alternative. Of course, you have to pay. But we try to contain the pandemic by isolating everyone at high-risk. And so this is something that we had to do at an early stage. I know for many societies now, including where you are in the United States, you're talking about isolation for everyone. But we handled this in a very targeted way, that is, we isolated only those with a risk of exposure, those who have come into contact with patients or individual cases, those who have traveled from abroad, so the rest of our society is able to function normally.
- Danielle Pletka: I think that one of the most important things we heard when you laid out how Taiwan approached the coronavirus challenge is just your familiarity with how the Community Party in Beijing runs its government. Taiwan knows, because you are really sort of at the point of the Chinese gun every day, 24/7, that you can't trust what you're hearing out of Beijing from the beginning. I want to talk about disinformation afterwards because I think this is a growing and really important issue for the United States, but tell us a little bit more about your assessment of how China handled this and why Xi Jinping screwed this up so royally.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, as you know, Taiwan is under constant threat and pressure from the Chinese Communist government, and so we tend to be on high alert and our society at large is quite suspicious of Chinese government intentions. But specifically towards this pandemic and the initial phase of the virus, again, we went through SARS in 2003 and that was a horrible experience. And so our society in a sense is psychologically prepared for extreme measures to prevent this from expanding to that extent. And we also know that the institutional traditions of the Chinese Communist government do not encourage openness, transparency, and truthful reporting. I mean that's just a common understanding here and so we have to rely on ourselves. Because we weren't really getting information from them. And so we knew from experience that we weren't getting the whole story from China and that's why we took extra cautious steps at an early stage in preventing this pandemic from spreading in Taiwan.
- Marc Thiessen: One of the lessons that we've been talking about on this podcast is that the lesson of

this pandemic is that authoritarianism is a public health threat, that the Chinese Communist government and the Chinese Communist Party, they didn't just mishandle this; they proactively lied, they punished doctors who were trying to warn people, they ordered samples to be destroyed, they reported to the world that there was no human-to-human contact long after literally thousands of doctors and nurses and medical workers had become sick, whereas Taiwan, which is a thriving democracy, responded differently. Could you talk a little bit about how authoritarianism, this is a case study between Taiwan and China's response, of the difference between how a Chinese authoritarian government and a Chinese democracy handles a crisis like this.

Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, I think the keyword there would be transparency and accountability in government. When you're a democracy, you're accountable to the people. The people want to know what's happening. The people are smart. And I think so are the Chinese people as well, they want to know what's happening and they have their suspicions. And the more you try to cover things up, the greater suspicions will arise. And so I think that's the key difference in terms of our political systems.

Bi-khim Hsiao: The problem in China is, even until today, even though the Chinese government claims that the pandemic is under control, we occasionally hear that certain cities are being sealed off again and certain townships, they're concerned, and we're seeing in some provinces racial profiling even to some foreigners residing in China, all related to certain sparkles again, the resurfacing of this pandemic. And we take all of this very seriously even though it doesn't come in the form of organized information from the government.

Bi-khim Hsiao: And so in dealing with a government that is so opaque, I think it's very important that lines are open to the rest of society. But it's not easy for China, it's such a big country. Taiwan's survival, our democracy, our public support, and even public participation in this process was very important. When I outlined the categories of measures that we took, I talked about support from industry and private sector, and I also want to say that from an early stage our private franchises, they were taking body temperature measures at all the restaurants. Everybody has been involved in this effort because it has been an effort that requires a lot of dialogue and communication between government and the people, and that's why we have been so successful.

Danielle Pletka: So another factor that I think is absolutely fascinating is that the Chinese, of course, as you rightly say, the Chinese people, no matter where they are, are suspicious of what they hear from their government because they know that their government lies for political reasons. One of the more interesting things is how the Chinese government has lied to the world, as well, and there, we can really pick out the fact that the World Health Organization tweeted out at the beginning of this coronavirus-

Marc Thiessen: January 14th.

Danielle Pletka: Right. That there was no human-to-human transmission. In other words, the World Health Organization has been taking, without any skepticism, the information that it gets from Beijing and repeating it to the world. Now, Taiwan used to have observer status at the World Health Organization. Since the election of Tsai Ing-wen you've been pushed out. First of all, I think it's worthwhile for people to understand what your being blocked out of the World Health Organization means. Not just for you, but in terms of the expertise you're also able to share with the world through them.

- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, I want to make a clarification is that we had observer status not in the WHO, but in the World Health Assembly, which was an annual meeting of the World Health Organization. So it was not an involvement in regular, day-to-day information sharing, you know, expert discussions. And where Taiwan is involved, it's an on ad-hoc basis. We don't have the same access to information and meetings, even the very technical nonpolitical meetings that other experts from other countries have. And I think this is certainly problematic because disease, as we can see in this pandemic, there are no borders to epidemics and diseases, and you just can't exclude someone or a country or put borders around a pandemic in dealing with these humanitarian crises.
- Bi-khim Hsiao: And so Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Organization means excluding a number of very capable health professionals and public health experts from Taiwan and excluding us from the opportunity to contribute those expertise to the rest of the world. And I think it's unfortunate that Chinese influence in international organizations like the WHO, which makes these organizations reluctant to do anything that might hurt Chinese feelings or the government's feelings, this allows the Communist government's opacity to cloud more professional judgments of the public health community around the world. And that's really unfortunate.
- Marc Thiessen: Well it's not just that it's unfair to you that you've been excluded because you don't get the benefits of this, but also Taiwan tried to warn the world that there was human-to-human transmission in December. And they tried to warn the World Health Organization because while the Chinese government was saying there was no human-to-human transmission, as I understand it, Taiwanese doctors were talking to their mainland counterparts in Wuhan who were saying, "We have human-to-human transmission," and you tried to warn them. And I think Taiwan just released the email to the World Health Organization recently with that warning. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, we issued an email warning to the World Health Organization. The International Health Regulations is a platform of information sharing, more of an informal email platform, and this email alerted the WHO that there were a number of cases, not SARS, but a new epidemic and the patients were being treated in isolation. I think that is the key. We didn't say, "Well there are human-to-human transmissions," because we were also trying to find out more information. But I think the fact that we knew that cases were being treated in isolation was really our own alarm to prepare our hospitals and our medical community for the potential of this pandemic. But also it was a warning sign to the World Health Organization. Unfortunately, this email, we didn't really get any response to this email.
- Danielle Pletka: Right, because the World Health Organization has fashioned itself at this point as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Chinese government.
- Marc Thiessen: And the director was Beijing's candidate, so he's in the pocket of Beijing.
- Danielle Pletka: One of the things that I found interesting when you first talked about this, you said that the other thing you need to combat, in addition to just Chinese lack of transparency, is the disinformation campaign they're waging. I was talking yesterday to our mutual friend Dan Blumenthal who runs AEI's Asian Studies Program and Dan and a couple of our other scholars noted that the Chinese profile on disinformation has changed. They didn't used to spread the kind of lies that we're seeing in this coronavirus problem. In other words, they did not used to go around accusing the

United States of having cultivated the virus, which the Chinese Foreign Minister actually said. That was really a Soviet-style disinformation campaign. That really marks kind of a change in tactics and Dan suggested that he thought they wouldn't be going backwards, that this was in fact a new approach by China in the world that they were going to start aggressively propagating lies about the United States, about Taiwan, about others. Do you see that same sort of transition, or do you perceive it differently?

Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, I think they have certainly become much more bold in their disinformation campaign. What we experienced a few years ago, and it is certainly ongoing, is a disinformation embedded in our community. They're very skilled at infiltrating our society. And so disinformation in various chat groups and websites within Taiwan, especially during our election time, that was quite obvious and we did suffer from that. And that's why we've tried to build up a greater kind of public defense or immunity to disinformation to, for example, media literacy campaigns on a grassroots level and various fact-checking applications and so forth.

Bi-khim Hsiao: But I think what we're witnessing now is disinformation on a very bold and public level, which is a bit distinct from, you know, within Taiwan this kind of broad, pervasive infiltration of our society. Even in private chat groups you would see people pasting and forwarding various, what we call information fabricated in these content farms, it's like where they produce information. And that was a very serious challenge to our society and it's aimed at destabilizing and disorienting our society and harboring distrust over the government, all of that was taking place.

Bi-khim Hsiao: But what we're witnessing, and I agree, this kind of step forward in that they're doing this on a very public and bold level. You see the Foreign Ministry's spokespersons really out there confronting the mainstream global understanding of what is happening and spreading what is obviously disinformation. And the problem with lies is, sometimes a lie is given 10 times and people start believing that it's true. And so when people hear, over and over again some people are going to take on it, and so that's the danger of all of this.

Danielle Pletka: I have a quick follow-up on that which is just to ask, and then I have only one more question, Marc, but why do you think we're seeing that change coming out Beijing? Because Beijing's desire before was really just to make lots and lots of friends. It was a charm campaign, we saw this in Washington, we at AEI have seen the escalation of the Chinese charm campaign. But that seems like it's over. Why do you think that change was made?

Bi-khim Hsiao: Well, it requires certainly much more sophisticated analysis but I just want to offer one possible reason is that this pandemic, the scale of this and how it has affected the whole world, is a completely new phenomenon. Like every country in the world, the Chinese are also facing economic challenges and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party for the past two, three decades has rested on ongoing economic growth and bettering the economic social lives of a lot of Chinese people, bringing them out of poverty. And when suddenly you see an economic downturn, and this is happening even though it appears the Chinese are reopening their economy, but in an age when you're closely connected to the rest of the world the Chinese leadership is perhaps looking into ways to not only convince the rest of the world of their innocence in all of this, but also they're communicating with their own people and they want to galvanize a kind of nationalistic sentiment or unity in support for the government at this critical time.

- Marc Thiessen: So, as we wrap up I want to pivot back to sort of the lessons we can learn here in the US from Taiwan's experience in handling this. One of the things, we did an episode the other day about the testing fiasco here in the US where our bureaucracy slowed the process of developing a test for this virus by six weeks because they wouldn't allow private companies to get involved, academic labs, and all the rest of it. Were you able to get testing up and running faster, and how were you able to do it? Or were you just isolating at-risk people, or were you actually doing mass testing in a very quick way?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: In Taiwan we have not taken the approach of mass testing. Actually, we have conducted targeted testing in our controlled national laboratory, and the reason we do targeted testing is because we need to isolate and contain those under a high risk. So we have done tests, we try to make them as accurate as possible, but we target a select group of high-risk individuals. And we do multiple, it's not just one test, you know, we'll test someone today and we'll do another test to verify, to check the outcome of that test because we know no test is 100% accurate.
- Marc Thiessen: So you didn't, just to clarify, one, were you able to get testing up a lot faster than we were? And two, when you were deciding who to isolate, were you doing people who tested positive, or was it people who were at high risk of bringing the virus into the country?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well we did both. What I mean by targeted testing is of course we tested the patients, but we also tested people who came into close contact with the cases. And then we expanded our testing pool to those returning to Taiwan from high-risk countries, and now we are trying to test everyone who is coming into Taiwan from abroad.
- Danielle Pletka: Last question from us and that is, just coming back to the extraordinary moment that we find ourselves in, I was at the election and saw the rallies for both the DPP candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, who won reelection overwhelmingly in a landslide in January, and the KMT, the Kuomintang candidate who, I think as a surprise to a lot of people, at least on the mainland, lost the election. There seems to be a real change in the relationship that I think is being exacerbated by the coronavirus and by the fear that they feel in Beijing. We saw that the Chinese had an aircraft carrier go through Taiwanese territorial waters, and at the same time the United States' carriers that are normally in the Pacific are down for the count because of the coronavirus. How worried are you about the military, or the escalating military threat from Beijing?
- Bi-khim Hsiao: Well we are certainly witnessing some provocative steps by the Navy and the Air Force and those provocations have intensified recently. But I want to say that Taiwan, we're not unfamiliar with Chinese threats. They have threatened us in every election, in every presidential election that we have had since the first ever presidential election in 1996. At the time, they launched a missile test to threaten our public. And so over the years we also need to intensify our own defenses. And we wouldn't shy from these threats; we would be resilient. And certainly, at this time of a global crisis, there's a possibility that the Chinese government is trying to test our preparedness and our resilience, but I want to say that we are always prepared and we want to avoid miscalculations and unnecessary accidents. But defending Taiwan, for us, is a survival issue and so we have our defenses prepared.
- Marc Thiessen: Well I will tell you that listening to the details of Taiwan's response and the fact that this pandemic has spread all throughout the world and the United States because of

the lies of the Chinese Community Party, we need a free Taiwan more than ever. And so we're grateful to your country as an ally and we're grateful to you for joining us on the podcast. Thank you for being with us.

- Bi-khim Hsiao: Thank you. Well I also believe that a democratic and prosperous Taiwan is certainly in the interests of everyone in this region. Thank you.
- Marc Thiessen: Thank you.
- Marc Thiessen: So Taiwan's response has been incredible, I mean, they're getting praise from the international medical community. One thing that the Journal of the American Medical Association in its article praising Taiwan's response talked about how the Taiwan agencies merged patients' 14-day travel history with their public health insurance information combining data from health identification cards with immigration and they did it in a single day. I mean, this is the combination of freedom and Chinese-
- Danielle Pletka: And efficiency.
- Marc Thiessen: Efficiency is remarkable. It took us six weeks to decide to let private sector companies develop a test. There's something going on in Taiwan that I'd like to take a little bit of that magic and spread it through the US government.
- Danielle Pletka: No kidding. But it does tell you something, I mean, we've been talking about sort of "bad China" and "good China," it just tells you what the world is missing by having the Communist Party in charge of the People's Republic of China. Because imagine, if 24 million people can do what they've done in Taiwan, imagine what 1.4 billion people could unleash if they had a decent government, if they allowed people to work where they wanted, if they allowed businesses to open where they wanted, if they were honest about the healthcare threats that people face. It's sad, if you think about it, that 20% of the world is being stifled and we're not benefiting from their creativity.
- Marc Thiessen: Well, you know, the irony is that the government of Taiwan is actually the Republic of China on Taiwan. So the pretense of this whole situation is that there's one China and both of them claim to govern the entirety of China. So Taiwan has sort of walked away from this a little bit because they realize they're not going to take over the mainland the way Chiang Kai-shek dreamed that he would one day. But the reality is that this is arguably the Taiwanese government is the legitimate government of all of China. And what it has, imagine if, I agree with you, imagine if mainland China had the same kind of accountability, transparency, that-
- Danielle Pletka: Creativity, initiative.
- Marc Thiessen: Creativity, ingenuity, and also popular buy-in. One thing I thought she said that was fascinating was how the population went along with this and bought into it because they knew how bad it was during the SARS pandemic in 2003. In mainland China they literally, in Wuhan, were posting the secret police outside of houses and saying, "If you leave your house we'll break your legs." They haven't had to do that in Taiwan. The lesson I want to take from all of this when this whole thing is over, if we take one lesson away from this, and we're going to have a lot of lessons, unfortunately, is that totalitarianism is a public health threat not just to the people of

China, but to the world because those lies, that lack of transparency, that lack of accountability, that's why you're locked in your home right now as you listen to this. This is why you're not going into your office and working. That's why 17 million people are filing for unemployment. If mainland China was Taiwan, none of that would be happening here today.

Danielle Pletka: God. The statistics are depressing. But I think the other thing that we are all realizing suddenly is that the way that China has treated Taiwan over the years, they are now internationalizing.

Marc Thiessen: Oh, I think our understanding of China and our relationship with China will never be the same. They've done so much damage to themselves. And I think, one thing that Bi-khim said is it's not just that they're worried about the international perceptions of their country, they're worried about their own population's response.

Danielle Pletka: Well rightly so.

Marc Thiessen: Whether this was just a completely mismanaged natural outbreak or, I mean, I've been listening to... Josh Rogin and David Ignatius at the Post have both had articles recently talking about how this could very well have been a lab accident in Wuhan's branch of China's CDC where they were testing bat virus from a thousand miles away, and this was a bat virus that broke out. And this could have been a lab worker who got infected, it could have been... they had bad... there were state department cables that there was bad sanitation. If this actually came not out of a wet market but out of a Chinese government lab, what do you think the Chinese people would think of that? So I think they're terrified of their own people.

Danielle Pletka: So what I worry about is exactly what our scholars here at AEI have written about, which is Oriana Mastro, Dan Blumenthal, Zack Cooper, all of them have written about the fact that when China is under pressure they lash out. And I worry that with our aircraft carriers offline, with our military completely obsessed with talking about their feelings and not following chain of command, that we are going to see a China that is much, much more aggressive, that is more aggressive not only towards Taiwan, but towards all of its neighbors. What are we going to do? Are we prepared? Is Donald Trump prepared to do more on the global stage to fight China? I worry that when we get out of this we're all going to spend the entire time in "self-care." God, I hate that expression, "just looking after me," as opposed to worrying about what's going to happen in the rest of the world. Now is the time when we need to step up.

Marc Thiessen: Well, I would say to you that when it comes to China Donald Trump has stepped up. Donald Trump has taken a more aggressive stance on trade, on... you mentioned during the interview that China is making a bid to be in charge of the World Intellectual Property Organization, that's like putting an arsonist in charge of the fire brigade. I mean, they're the world's biggest thief of intellectual property. Trump has been calling them out on that, he's been punishing them with tariffs. We can argue whether or not that's a good strategy or not but he has been taking the hammer to China and squeezing them to deal with some of these things in a way that no previous administration, Republican or Democratic, has done.

Danielle Pletka: He's fine when it comes to the trade stuff and when it comes to the passive stuff. What I worry about is on the military side, that he is less and less... it is a combination of his commitment to step back from the world and the Democrats' desire to use the

Defense Department as a piggy bank to fund absolutely everything other than defense.

Marc Thiessen: Well, that's a topic for another entire podcast at some point.

Danielle Pletka: All right. Well that's the right note on which to end, then, because God knows you all have come to expect that we should disagree. Stay safe, everybody.

Marc Thiessen: See you soon.

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