

China and US cannot co-manage Taiwan

Written by Winston Dang 王

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Early 2007 found me in Washington attending meetings with US officials and I asked a question concerning a rumor doing the rounds at the time: Is the US preparing to co-manage Taiwan with China? I was assured that it was not. From the way last month's presidential election proceeded, and indeed from the result, it is quite evident that this is precisely what is happening, even if nobody actually cares to verbalize it. Clearly, the US and China have found themselves, in President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), a CEO to oversee the proceedings and they have already put their plan into action.

In the run-up to the elections, China was already openly and brazenly interfering in Taiwan's affairs through a raft of measures. The US government, too, engaged in some rather suspicious and irregular activities several months prior to the election, actions that were unsettling and unnerving.

I came across an example of this when in Washington in July last year. I caught wind of a suggestion that China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) Director Wang Yi (王毅) had asked the US to grant Taiwan visa waiver status before the election as a way to help Ma secure a second term in office.

However, in the middle of December, just three weeks prior to the elections, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) announced that Taiwan had been placed on the list of countries nominated for the US' visa waiver program.

In another example, in the middle of September last year, a senior White House official told the Financial Times that concerns had been raised over Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) willingness and ability to handle cross-strait relations, an opinion subsequently denied by the US Department of State. This kind of two-handed tactic, publicly embarrassing Taiwan's opposition presidential candidate, who was in Washington at the time, was tantamount to interfering in the presidential election.

Third, just before the elections, several visits to Taiwan were arranged for high-level US officials, something quite irregular and not really seen in the past 10 years. The visitors included US Agency for International Development Administrator Rajiv Shah and US Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman. During their stays they heaped praise on nuclear power in Taiwan, looking to all appearances to be endorsing Ma's nuclear energy policies.

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The US has always prioritized its own national interests in its foreign policy. However, interfering in the elections of other democratic countries is not only undemocratic, it also damages US interests. In the next four years, if the US really has designs on co-managing Taiwan with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the interests of “cross-strait peace,” it is gambling with the democratic values that Americans supposedly hold so dear. Not only that, but the stake in this gamble is Taiwan’s hard-won democracy and freedom. In future, it may not be a question of who is to be president, but more a question of who is to be the US-China CEO stationed in Taiwan.

I would ask the US government to use a little more wisdom and conviction in its dealings with Taiwan, given our good relationship in the past. Why enlist the CCP as partners in trying to beat us down? I would also ask those policymakers in the US behind these tactics to think long and hard about what they are doing here and to not forget that at least 40 percent of the electorate in Taiwan used their vote to protect democratic freedoms and reject the idea of compromise with malevolent powers.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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