

Restoring ties with the US is not so far-fetched

Written by Tzou Jiing-wen 蔡景文

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Will Taiwan and the US restore diplomatic ties? Such talk has been unthinkable during the 40 years since the two nations broke off relations in 1979.

It is perhaps not surprising that US Representative Dana Rohrabacher, a steadfast, hawkish pro-Taiwan and anti-China politician, proposed that diplomatic relations with Taiwan be resumed. This is not the first proposal of its kind, but given the situation, perhaps this kind of discussion is once again possible.

This time is different, because the US' view of China has changed drastically, as Li Ruogu (李若谷), former chairman of the Export-Import Bank of China, "discovered." He also said that US-China relations are unlikely to continue along the path of the past 40 years.

Hearing such an observation from someone in the Chinese elite is a sign of coming change: The most politically sensitive high-ranking figures in China have become aware that the existing structure of US-China ties is wavering.

Further affirming this fact, the US government and opposition agree that a tough stance toward China is necessary.

This explains the changing "status quo." From the US' perspective, China is changing the "status quo" familiar to the US.

China's ascendancy continues: In the past, it followed Deng Xiaoping's (邓小平) policy of "concealing its capabilities and biding its time"; nowadays, it views itself as a world power and needs policies to match that status. It abandoned Deng's approach long ago, which has rattled the US, helping Donald Trump become US president.

The earth-shattering changes rammed through by Trump have broken past taboos and opened up new possibilities. Economically, the US has launched a trade war against China; politically speaking, someone who can shake hands with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is probably

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capable of anything.

The strategic implications of changing US-China relations are so clear that even the Chinese cannot ignore them. It is as if Trump is deliberately shaking the Chinese apple tree to get as much of its fruit to fall to the ground as possible.

This is a very special situation, and it creates more room to breathe for Taiwan, as is abundantly clear from the slew of Taiwan policies that have been announced by the US administration and US Congress.

Under these circumstances, the main significance of talking about whether the US should establish formal ties with Taiwan, which is tantamount to abandoning its “one China” principle, is to warn Beijing that the chips are on the table. In other words, China cannot misjudge the situation, because the US could pull out all the stops.

At this moment, the most urgent task for Taiwan is to grasp this elusive opportunity, as it cannot control how long it will last. When all the apples have fallen to the ground, it must act quickly and collect as many as possible to increase its resilience and elevate its international status.

To accomplish this, Taiwan needs a comprehensive and sensitive approach to the US; this is one of the greatest responsibilities of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her administration, which has come to power in the nick of time.

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Translated by Chang Ho-ming

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