

Taiwan must act on US goodwill

Written by Parris Chang 000

Thursday, 30 August 2018 05:34

When she stopped over in Los Angeles on Aug. 13 on her way to Paraguay, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) paid a visit to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, where she made a public statement in which she quoted the former US president, saying: “Everything [is] negotiable except two things: our freedom and our future.”

Some observers have interpreted Tsai’s remark as an olive branch to Beijing.

Reagan is regarded as one of the few US political leaders to have been Taiwan-friendly. However, this was thrown in doubt in 1982, when Reagan put his secretary of state, Alexander Haig, a disciple of former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, in charge of negotiating with China on drawing up the Joint Communiqué on Arms Sales to Taiwan, also known as the Aug. 17 Communiqué, which became the third of the three US-China joint communiqués.

Under pressure from China, Haig agreed that the US would limit both the quality and quantity of its arms sales to Taiwan and gradually reduce them, “leading, over a period of time, to a final resolution.”

This promise was seen as a major concession to China and contradicted the unequivocal stipulation of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) that “the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.”

Consequently, Reagan dismissed Haig from office.

He also instructed then-American Institute in Taiwan director James Lilley to convey the so-called “six assurances” to then-president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國), pledging not to set a date for ending arms sales to Taiwan, not to consult with Beijing on such arms sales, not to act as a mediator between Taiwan and China, not to exert pressure on Taiwan to negotiate with China, not to amend the TRA and not to change the US’ position regarding sovereignty over Taiwan.

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This last item meant that the US would not recognize China's claim of sovereignty.

Haig is not the only US government official to have contravened the TRA. From the 1990s onward, the US government has harmed Taiwan's interests on numerous occasions by acting contrary to the TRA and the "six assurances."

In 1994, then-US president Bill Clinton's administration conducted the Taiwan Policy Review, and in 1998, Clinton announced that the US government would not support Taiwan's re-entry into the UN or its membership in any other organization for which statehood is a requirement.

Clinton's statement contravened Section 4(d) of the TRA, which states: "Nothing in this chapter may be construed as a basis for supporting the exclusion or expulsion of Taiwan from continued membership in any ... international organization."

To avoid upsetting Beijing, former US president Barack Obama's administration only supplied Taiwan with outdated weapons and allowed Beijing to decide the quantity and quality of those weapons.

In addition to not fully implementing the terms of the TRA, this policy conflicted with the "six assurances."

In 2016, the US Senate and House of Representatives responded by passing a concurrent resolution reaffirming the TRA and the "six assurances" as "cornerstones of US-Taiwan relations." While voicing strong support for Taiwan, the resolution also expressed Congress' strong disapproval of what the Obama administration had done.

Since US President Donald Trump took office, his national security team has made a clear distinction between friends and foes.

The US is launching an "Indo-Pacific strategy" that involves joining up with Japan, India,

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Australia and other democratic partner states to contain Chinese hegemony.

Washington has been keeping a close eye on China's efforts to restrict Taiwan's diplomatic space and on its military threats against Taiwan.

Consequently, in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2018, which Trump signed in December last year, and the NDAA for fiscal year 2019, which he signed on Aug. 13, Congress has included provisions on upgrading US-Taiwan military exchanges and helping Taiwan strengthen its self-defense capabilities.

The Taiwan Travel Act, which Trump signed into law in March, encourages mutual visits between senior Taiwanese and US officials.

Although the Congress has enacted numerous Taiwan-friendly laws, the nation's executive departments have so far not put them into practice.

Why is this? According to one US expert who has close connections in the Trump White House, Taiwan has so far been too reticent and polite to tell the US exactly what it wants or what role it is willing to play in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Could it be that some people are afraid of offending Beijing?

A free, democratic and safe Taiwan that is willing to play an active part in international affairs and initiatives is in line with the strategic interests of the US, Japan and other US allies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Taiwan should take advantage of these advantageous conditions by posing a number of requests and demands to the US.

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First, Washington should conduct another policy review that would involve evaluating US-Taiwan relations over the past four decades and reformulating the US' policies regarding Taiwan.

Second, Taiwan should advise the US Congress to pass a new resolution that authorizes the US president to use military force to help Taiwan defend itself, following the example of the 1955 Formosa Resolution, which was repealed in 1974, and based on the provisions of the TRA.

Third, given that the US does not recognize the Chinese regime's claim of sovereignty over Taiwan, and that Taiwan is a reliable ally, why can the US not establish normal relations with it?

Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties should call for Taiwan and the US to establish normal diplomatic relations as soon as possible.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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