

A post-war view of Taiwan-US ties

Written by HoonTing 洪廷

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Who said it only happened last month? As early as June, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) entered a US federal facility — the American Institute in Taiwan's new compound in Taipei's Neihu District — as is evidenced both by the official seal of the US Department of State hanging on its facade and the fact that Tsai was received by federal officials. Once the new compound starts operations this month, a new page will turn in Taiwan-US relations.

To understand the significance of this change, it must be viewed against the backdrop of the reconstruction of relations that has taken place in the 70 years since the Pacific War.

According to international law, after a war has ended, the victor will enter the defeated party's territory and set up occupation authorities charged with maintaining order and the livelihood of the people, while planning reparations as political decisions are made to determine a peace treaty.

The main task of the occupation authorities is to facilitate economic recovery and political reconstruction.

On a global scale, economic recovery is achieved through relief and assistance programs, while political reconstruction refers to the establishment of a friendly and legitimate government.

On Jan. 29, 1946, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers issued Directive No. 677, which directed "the Japanese Government to cease exercising governmental or administrative authority over any area outside of Japan. Japan was defined — the four major Japanese islands and islands in their immediate vicinity — and excluded areas were indicated — Okinawa, Taiwan, what was then Korea and other UN trust territories.

Their fates have diverged over the past 70 years. Japan enacted a new constitution and was transformed into a democracy in 1947, while Korea was divided into north and south, both of which in 1948 established their own governments before joining the UN on the same day, Sept. 17, 1991. Okinawa was restored to Japan in 1972 after being subject to US military occupation and then US civil administration.

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The other trust territories were initially administered by the US, which from the 1980s onward allowed Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau to become independent nations by signing the Compact of Free Association. The Northern Mariana Islands alone did not seek independence, remaining a self-governing commonwealth of the US.

Only the status of Taiwan remains ambiguous — a result of Chinese obstruction.

Taiwan has relied on US economic assistance, through the Sino-American Fund, the Council for US Aid — which later became the Executive Yuan's Council for Economic Planning and Development, but was dissolved in 2014 — the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction and the Economic Cooperation Administration, as well as J.G. White Engineering Corp, George Fry and Associates and other businesses, which facilitated Taiwan's outstanding economic recovery.

From a security perspective, Taiwan relied on the US Taiwan Defense Command and the US Military Assistance Advisory Group, as well as intelligence cooperation and uninterrupted sales of military arms.

However, rebuilding the nation's political system has been fraught with endless difficulties. When the US negotiated and established formal diplomatic ties with China in the 1970s, then-US national security adviser Henry Kissinger's plan was to solve the Taiwan issue while pulling China into the international order.

Unfortunately, China has become more uncontrollable as it disrupts the world order and it seems that there is no way to guide Beijing.

Not long ago, Kissinger in a roundabout way admitted that he had miscalculated the situation.

Over the years, the nation's name has changed from the Taiwan Provincial Governor's Office, to the Republic of China, to the Republic of China on Taiwan, to the Republic of China, Taiwan,

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and finally, to Taiwan.

In the context of post-war political reconstruction, this is no different from “the governing authorities on Taiwan” referred in the Taiwan Relations Act.

Will Taiwan and the US establish formal diplomatic ties modeled on the Compact of Free Association, or will the US support Taiwan’s enactment of a new basic law of governance in accordance with today’s circumstances?

If our perspective changes to one aiming for “political reconstruction” in the post-war era, both options are possible.

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Translated by Chang Ho-ming.

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