

Slow shift in Taiwan's favor

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 13 September 2018 00:20

China's expansionist policies since Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) came to power — which include the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) efforts to reformulate the world order in its own image, as well as its "united front" tactics targeting educational and political institutions, industry and cyberspace — are increasingly setting off alarm bells in governments around the world.

As other nations are waking up to the threat posed by the CCP's hegemonic intentions, Taiwan's experiences and positioning are seen in greater relief.

The nation's experience of China's bullying and suppression, its value as an Asian democracy, the strategic geopolitical importance of its location within the first island chain and the US' guarantees of protection are being given new importance.

In a news release on Monday last week introducing the bipartisan Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act, US Senator Bob Menendez was quoted as saying that China is continuing "its quest for dominance through predatory diplomatic and economic practices."

He also said that the bill would serve "as a recommitment by the United States Congress to a comprehensive, durable and mutually beneficial US-Taiwan relationship and partnership," as well as an "affirmation of Taiwan's place in the international community."

The bill, introduced by Menendez and fellow senators Cory Gardner, Marco Rubio and Ed Markey, is a response to the severing of diplomatic ties by the Gambia, El Salvador, Sao Tome and Principe, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso in favor of ties with Beijing since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) was elected in 2016 "due to Chinese pressure and bullying tactics," the news release said.

Rubio spoke of China's "insidious agenda to isolate Taiwan," which he said "cannot go unanswered."

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The opening lines of the bill say that the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) stipulates that it is US policy to maintain the ability to “resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”

This is undeniably what the CCP is doing, and has been doing for decades.

The bill also says that the CCP has intensified its efforts to pressure Taiwan since Tsai's election, and that Tsai believes the severance of ties is “part of a series of diplomatic and military acts of coercion.”

Whether the bill passes, its legislative intent — to strengthen Taiwan's standing in the world by having the US monitor the CCP's efforts to induce Taiwan's diplomatic allies to switch ties, and to use the US' diplomatic and foreign aid to prevent this from happening — signals a level of awareness and urgency in Washington that is welcome to Taiwan.

The bill's wording is also welcome. Reaffirming the US' responsibilities in the TRA, recognizing that the CCP's efforts at coercion are real and intensifying, reacknowledging the value of Taiwan's democratic and open society, and promising to improve Taiwan's international engagement are all important words from a crucial ally.

Despite Washington's adherence to its “one China” policy, the wheels of policymaking and the renewed wariness of the CCP's ambitions under the current US administration are slowly inching things in Taiwan's favor.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/09/13](#)