

What does 'status quo' stand for?

Written by Chen Lung-chu 陳龍駒
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Taiwan is a nation that places great importance on democracy, freedom, diversity, transparency and basic human rights. When it comes to the nation's future, people have different views due to their different political beliefs, but when it comes to the relationship with China, opinion polls — whether they are conducted by the government, media outlets or a polling company — frequently show that “maintaining the ‘status quo’” is the mainstream public opinion.

What is the “status quo” in the Taiwan Strait, who interprets it and how should it be understood? The different conclusions that can be drawn from these questions will not only affect present and future generations, they will also affect the strategic deployment in the Asia-Pacific region of two great powers — the US and China.

Based on the Taiwan Relations Act, the US basically supports maintaining Taiwan's security, economy, democracy, freedom, human rights and freedom from foreign threats, while stressing that Taiwan's future must be decided through peaceful and legal means.

When it comes to the understanding of maintaining the “status quo,” Washington opposes any unilateral change to the peaceful “status quo” as defined by the US.

Beijing is of another opinion: it insists on the “one China” principle — the idea that there is only “one China,” that Taiwan is part of it and that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is its only legal government — as well as stressing that the “status quo” refers to the peaceful development that has taken place in cross-strait relations since 2008 based on the so-called “1992 consensus.”

The administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) keeps repeating that Taiwan is maintaining the peaceful and prosperous “status quo” created by the cross-strait insistence against unification, independence or military action, which in turn is built on the foundation of the “1992 consensus” and “one China, different interpretations” framework.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) proposal to maintain the “status quo” emphasizes a setting that includes interaction between governments, and

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maintaining peace, dialogue and exchanges across the Taiwan Strait. It also stresses that cross-strait relations should not be seen as relations between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but that equal and friendly treatment should be maintained regardless of which party holds the presidency in Taiwan, so that the two sides can maintain the "status quo" of peaceful development, dialogue and exchanges.

Four different views emerge from an analysis of how Taiwan's, the US' and China's ruling and opposition camps promote the maintenance of the "status quo." Although they all differ in their definition of the "status quo" and how it should be maintained, they all converge on maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. This is the shared idea that joins the four parties.

What does "the peaceful 'status quo' in the Taiwan Strait" mean? It means that each side is a separate state and that neither side has jurisdiction over, represents or administers the other. Each side has its own national title, people, territory, government and international policy. Taiwan is one nation and China is another nation. They should promote equality and mutual benefits, respect each other, work together, exist and develop together in peace. This is a profound understanding of the "status quo," which Taiwanese agree upon.

Maintaining the "status quo" means maintaining Taiwan's status as a sovereign nation; a nation with a system and way of life that guarantees democracy, freedom and the protection of human rights, while placing sovereignty in the hands of the public; a nation that does not fall under the jurisdiction of China and that does not claim jurisdiction over China; and is not governed, administered or interfered by China. Taiwan is not a part of China, nor is it a Chinese province or "a domestic Chinese issue."

During the 66 years that have past since the establishment of the PRC on Oct. 1, 1949, that nation has not ruled Taiwan for a single day.

It is clear, then, that the "status quo" consists of the political reality that Taiwan and China are two separate nations, one on each side of the Taiwan Strait.

Since Ma took office in 2008, he has relied on deceit to cover up his strongly pro-China outlook and tried to force Taiwanese to accept the "1992 consensus;" the "one China, different interpretations" policy; the "diplomatic truce" with China; the "one country, two areas" formula;

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the “mutual non-recognition of sovereignty and mutual non-denial of authority to govern” concept; the definition of cross-strait relations as relations within a “one-China” framework; and the eventual goal of unification.

The policies are aimed at removing the nation’s sovereignty and statehood. Led by politicians with ulterior motives and pro-China businesspeople catering to both sides of the Taiwan Strait, Ma and his administration have failed to set up defenses and allowed Chinese forces to enter Taiwan at will, where they have co-opted local leaders and factions, seduced capitalists who are useful to China, gobbled up economic strength and manipulated media outlets in preparations to sacrifice Taiwan at the altar of “one China.”

The Ma administration’s policy to maintain the “status quo” focuses on the “no unification, no independence, no military conflict” formula, which ignores Beijing’s long-standing ambition to annex Taiwan. This is the source of the dissolution of the peaceful cross-strait “status quo.”

China’s increasing economic clout has brought with it the modernization of China’s national defense and increased the threat of military action against Taiwan. In 2005, Beijing passed an “Anti-Secession” Law aimed at preventing Taiwanese independence. Today China is increasing the pressure: The amended Chinese National Security Act emphasizes national sovereignty, unification and territorial integrity — which it lists as the shared duties of the “Taiwanese compatriots” — in an attempt to govern Taiwan from Beijing through domestic legislation to affirm the delusion that Taiwan is a part of China.

This is China’s version of a “legal battle”: A violation of international law that upsets the peaceful order based on the UN Charter and international law.

The “status quo” is not static. Taiwanese must not be obsessed with the superficial peace in the Taiwan Strait at the cost of ignoring attempts by the KMT and the CCP to soften Taiwan’s psychological and military defenses against Chinese invasion and annexation. Failure to realize this is tantamount to courting disaster that would change the “status quo,” which sees Taiwan as a free and independent nation that is not under the jurisdiction of China and does not claim jurisdiction over it.

Beijing is threatening to “shake the Earth and move mountains” in its attempts to change the

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fact that neither Taiwan nor China has jurisdiction over the other. To avoid this, Taiwanese must improve the nation's psychological and military defenses, break free from reliance on China and look to the mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution provided by the UN Charter and international law, as well as the universal values of democracy, freedom, human rights and peace, as they try to gain the support of democratic nations.

They must do this to guarantee and consolidate the "status quo," which sees Taiwan and China as two separate nations on each side of the Taiwan Strait and bring a just and fair peace to Asia, the world and all humanity.

Chen Lung-chu is chairman of the Taiwan New Century Foundation.

Translated by Perry Svensson

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