

## US needs to recalibrate its policies on Taiwan

Written by Gerrit van der Wees  
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On Feb. 11, the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific held a hearing on the future of US-Taiwan relations after the momentous Jan. 16 presidential and legislative elections, which saw Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) elected president and gave the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) a majority in the Legislative Yuan.

While both the administration of US President Barack Obama and members of US Congress lauded Taiwan's vibrant democracy and expressed support for enhancing relations with the democracy, there was still a lot of bureaucratic inertia, too much caution and a lack of real vision for future relations.

What is needed in Washington — and in European capitals — is a recalibration of existing policies regarding Taiwan, so it can focus on how to take advantage of this window of opportunity to bring relations to a new level.

A few key items: While Taiwan needs to continue to emphasize “peace and stability” across the Taiwan Strait, it needs to acknowledge that the artificial cross-strait calm of the past seven to eight years does not entail a stable “status quo.” That was premised on Taiwan drifting closer into China's orbit and on the underlying assumption that unification with China was the inevitable choice for Taiwan's future.

In the elections, the people of Taiwan decided that is not how they see their future. There is therefore a need for a new formula for sustainable, long-term peaceful coexistence between the two sides.

Tsai's incoming government has outlined some of the contours of such a formula. It is essential that the US and western Europe welcome and stimulate the development of such a new formula.

China needs to be much more aware of the basic fact that cross-strait relations entail taking into account Taiwan's democratic voice. Beijing cannot just meet with old Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) standard bearers and believe that this will bring Taiwan into their fold. Facing this reality will hopefully move Beijing toward being content with being peaceful sovereign

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neighbors.

Strengthening and normalizing bilateral relations: Current US policy toward Taiwan is based on the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, but much of its implementation is based on outdated guidelines drafted in 1979 and 1980, when the US shifted diplomatic recognition from Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) Republic of China to the People's Republic of China.

These self-imposed restrictions should be relegated to history, and the US and western Europe should gradually move toward normalization of relations with Taiwan. For instance, it is highly peculiar that the five top political leaders of a democratic nation — the president, vice president, prime minister, foreign minister and minister of national defense — cannot travel to Washington, London, Berlin or Paris, while it receives regular visits and interactions with repressive leaders who are not democratically elected.

Last, but not least: Membership in international organizations. To many of Taiwan's young generation, one of the most infuriating anomalies is Taiwan's exclusion from international organizations. They see their nation as a responsible and forward-looking member of the international community, and chafe at unfair restrictions imposed on them by other nations.

The international community thus needs to find new and more constructive ways of bringing Taiwan in from the cold. The US and Europe need to be much more proactive and imaginative in getting international organizations, such as the UN and the WHO, to accept Taiwan as a full and equal member.

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