

CCP's Tom Sawyer ploy nears end

Written by Wayne Pajunen
Wednesday, 20 July 2016 07:26

In his book *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, Michael Pillsbury writes: “We believed that American aid to a fragile China whose leaders thought like us would help China become a democratic and peaceful power without ambitions of regional or even global dominance.”

No longer.

“Looking back, it is painful that I was so gullible,” Pillsbury concludes.

This coming from a man who has had the ear of every US president since Ronald Reagan should be a clarion call to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that Taiwan-US-China relations are in flux and the paradigm that ruled over the Taiwan Strait is now evolving to accommodate a maturing democratic Taiwan.

The CCP often uses both intimidation, as in the South China Sea, or deception with the intent that the international community will do its bidding, as Pillsbury expounded in a recent Hudson Institute Webcast.

Currently a consultant to the US Department of Defense, Pillsbury equated Beijing's deceptive approach to Mark Twain's character Tom Sawyer and one of his “immortal tricks, which is very close to Chinese strategy,” where he fools his friends into completing his unpleasant task, having them paint a fence for him.

Pillsbury explains this, in impeccable Chinese, quoting the phrase *wuwei er zhi* (无为而治), which translates as: “No action and under control.”

With CCP threats of hostility toward Taiwan, the international community, against better judgement — like Tom Sawyer's friends — does Beijing's bidding and isolates a favored, peaceful and democratic nation.

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The West has seemingly been “duped” by China’s oft-proclaimed “peaceful rise,” as expansion of territory, real and attempted, from the South China Sea to Taiwan and the Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) demonstrate.

However, the West is awakening to Beijing’s sophistry.

Taiwanese have taken China’s paintbrush out of the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) hands and elected Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as president. Tsai won largely due to her pledge to “maintain the status quo” in relations with China. For Taipei and Washington, the “status quo” means “steady as she sails,” whereas in Beijing, it means “furthering the steady subversion of Taiwanese identity and economy, maintaining international isolation and persona non grata status at the UN,” as evidenced during the previous KMT administration’s eight years.

Taiwanese are united against the continuance of this approach and have overwhelmingly demonstrated so in municipal, legislative and presidential elections, where voters have handed Tsai’s DPP landslide victories.

While Taiwanese grudgingly accept the “status quo” pledge, to come in from the cold and receive their democratic right to self-determination and international recognition is their aspiration.

Leading up to Tsai’s inaugural address in May, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) warned of the “Earth moving and mountains shaking” should Taipei not accept his “one China” proclamation. This not-so-veiled threat was the CCP’s usual bluster to “encourage” Taiwan to accept Beijing’s “one China” policy and forgo its deserved path.

A day after Tsai’s inaugural address and her disregard for Xi’s terms and supposed consequences, China’s Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Ma Xiaoguang (马晓光) reversed Xi’s bluster and said: “Only by confirming the one China principle could cross-strait authorities continue regular communications.”

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The Earth did not move and mountains did not shake, and in the end, Beijing's response was only a cold shoulder, suspending communications with Taipei.

Countries must question their relationship with a government that does not share their values and admonishes interactions with a friendly and contributing member of the international community. Why should the West keep the door shut on Taiwanese, leaving them out in the cold? Why should we be painting the CCP's expanding fence?

Taiwan's newly elected president has taken the paintbrush from the KMT and put it in the bucket. Tsai has ignored Beijing's threats and neither abides by the "one China" edict nor accepts the fictitious "one China 1992 consensus."

American Institute in Taiwan Chairman Raymond Burghart recently followed Tsai's lead and downplayed the relevance of the so-called "1992 consensus" that was the contrived cornerstone of the previous administration's kowtowing relationship with China.

To Beijing's consternation, Taiwanese have voted to make their own, more independent way forward. China rarely changes course, so more browbeating of Taiwan and the international community is expected.

China's strategy in times like these is to deny the other party what it desires until Beijing gets its fence painted.

The international community is also catching on to China's posturing, yet the CCP persists with its threats.

As noted in The Economist: "China is a world leader in this specialized form of righteous indignation."

One-on-one, this method of intimidation or promise of some future benefit — economic or

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otherwise — is always advantageous to China over its smaller neighbors, like the bully in elementary school who towers over his classmates, making demands of them. The only way to counter the bully is to team up and call the teacher.

This is just what China's East and Southeast Asian neighbors are doing. They are forging closer ties among themselves, along with the US, to guard against Chinese hegemony contrapuntal to Beijing's tune of a "peaceful rise."

From Japan and India, to Vietnam and Australia, "all sorts of new security configurations have evolved," says Bonnie Glaser, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

The international community is pushing back against Beijing as it extends its sphere of influence into their backyards and welcoming the US Navy's Seventh Fleet — the "teacher" — to counter China.

Taiwan might not have been in a position for formal recognition by the international community in the past and it could have been argued that Taiwan was of mixed minds on its future path, but that is no longer the case.

Confirming the trend that began in the mid 1990s, a poll released on May 30 by Taiwan Indicators Survey Research showed 66.4 percent oppose unification with China. In a portent of Taiwan's future path, that included 81 percent of those in the 20-to-29 age group.

Conclusions by the pollster, as reported in the Taipei Times ("Majority reject unification: poll," May 31, page 1) summarized: "The poll found that responses across different political camps to the hypothetical scenario are broadly similar to the general trend, suggesting a nonpartisan consensus with regard to the issue."

Democracy and the Internet, which serendipitously also arrived in the 1990s, have emboldened Taiwanese to speak out with the strength of their values. They have rejected the closed, manipulative KMT and its values, which mirror its CCP brother, they reject the imported

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Republic of China Constitution and the vast majority have coalesced around a democratic, self-determined future.

Beijing's attempted duress of halting official communications with Taipei would have worked with Tom Sawyer's KMT friends, but nothing darkens the enlightened nation.

The KMT "Mainlanders," as they are called, would have gnawed their knuckles and jumped in response to Beijing's cold shoulder, for they aspire to be closer to their self-described "Yellow Emperor" heritage, as often characterized by both the KMT and CCP.

With the emergence of a Taiwanese identity, an evolved understanding of China and expanded US naval presence in the region, diplomatic recognition of Taiwan could be considered the next step for the international community.

It would not break Tsai's campaign pledge to maintain the "status quo" and would send the message to Beijing that "we are no longer painting your fence."

China's response to the few countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan would be to label them persona non grata, which is an unlikely option in this scenario. Pragmatic China would learn to live with friendly Taiwan and a new "status quo."

Where developments lead from here is likely new territory, but China is unlikely to veer from its rhetorical coercion script, while analysis from Western experts is coming to recognize that they have been "gullible."

With China's "Tom Sawyer effect" running out of paint, the West might consider getting on board with their democratic Taiwanese brethren, call the Chinese Communist Party's bluff and unilaterally bring Taiwan in from the cold of diplomatic isolation.

Wayne Pajunen is a political analyst and commentator.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2016/07/20](#)