

A different US approach to Taiwan

Written by James Wang 王健

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Taiwan is the world's 17th largest trading nation, with aviation routes that extend to all of the world's major cities. Still, Taiwan's participation in this year's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly was crudely vetoed by China.

Beijing appears unconcerned with those cross-border issues that are in the common interest of humanity: improving hygiene and safety, cracking down on criminals and global warming. Instead, China's leaders are preoccupied with suppressing Taiwan at every possible turn in an attempt to force it to accept Beijing's stance on sovereignty.

China's malevolent attitude is a direct challenge to the US' pledge to actively support Taiwan's participation in non-governmental international organizations.

The reaction and handling of the issue by US President Barack Obama's administration was disappointing. US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Daniel Russel issued a feeble statement that the US recognizes "the value of Taiwan's participation in the international community;" American Institute in Taiwan Chairman Raymond Burghardt could only find it in himself to call the rejection of Taiwan's invitation to the ICAO Assembly an "unfortunate outcome."

With Obama a lame-duck president at the tail end of his time in office, there is not much hope for a toughening of his administration's stance toward China. However, whichever of the two US presidential candidates — Hillary Rodham Clinton or Donald Trump — enters the White House next year will have to get to grips with the new global reality and rethink US policy toward Taiwan.

The new US president must acknowledge the result of the democratic process in Taiwan, acknowledge the reality that neither Taiwan nor China holds jurisdiction over the other and begin the normalization of its relationship with Taiwan.

If Clinton is elected as the next US president, her new administration's review of US-Taiwan policy will be of greater significance: It will be the first such review since her husband, former US president Bill Clinton, first conducted a review of the policy 23 years ago. Hillary Clinton has

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previously voiced her dissatisfaction with the review conducted by Winston Lord, who was assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs under Bill Clinton, because Lord insisted on adhering to former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger's pledge to Beijing and strictly limited Washington's relations with Taipei.

Today, 22 years later, the world has changed beyond recognition: The basic assumptions made in the review are now woefully out of date. At the time, Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe had just broken apart, while China had nearly undergone a revolution with the Tiananmen Square demonstrations — and their subsequent violent suppression. Beijing was still concealing its ambitious foreign policy designs and Washington still harbored hopes that Chinese reforms would result in a gradual move toward liberalization.

However, global events did not turn out as the US had predicted. Following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York, the US Army became bogged down in Afghanistan and Iraq, while China embraced state capitalism and used the fruits of its "peaceful rise" to rapidly expand its army and defy the US. In addition, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has fanned the flames of Chinese nationalism and adopted the stance of regional hegemon in the South and East China seas.

When former US president Richard Nixon ended his country's policy of isolating China, the justification put forward was that China would then abide by international rules. However, following its "peaceful rise," Beijing is champing at the bit to rewrite the rules of the game.

Japan's recent defense white paper criticizes China for seeking to use force to change the "status quo," while US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has said that he believes China is heading toward a period of self-isolation.

Taiwan's democratization is another significant change that has occurred since the Clinton administration's policy review, but it has yet to be regarded with the importance that it deserves in Washington.

Since Taiwan's presidents have been directly elected by its people, the Chinese Nationalist Party-led (KMT) pro-unification camp has incurred three major defeats at the ballot box. This year, the KMT even lost its 67-year-long hold of the Legislative Yuan. Taiwan is the model of a

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sound democracy, yet Beijing fails to understand the need to respect the free decision of the Taiwanese public. Instead, China has intensified its efforts to bring Taiwan under its control by excluding it from participating in international organizations.

In order to respond to the new world order, both Taiwan and the US need to adjust their outdated policies.

At this year's elections, Taiwanese voters clearly signaled their desire to persevere with the pursuit of a distinct Taiwanese identity and the formation of a traditional democratic alliance with the US. President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), granted a mandate by the public, has made it clear that Taiwan will no longer blindly rely on China for economic growth and has put into action a "New Southbound Policy," while also placing an emphasis on defense autonomy. These twin policies are intended to guarantee both economic and national security.

After the next US president is elected next month, on taking up office he or she must deal with the rapacious ambitions of both China and Russia. The US has lost its former advantage of being able to play China off against Russia and vice versa. It must therefore strengthen ties with regional democracies and avoid falling into a subservient relationship with either of these two countries.

In East Asia, aside from its allies Japan, South Korea and Australia, no country is more important an ally to the US than Taiwan; yet out of all the US' East Asian allies, Taiwan is treated with the most indifference by Washington. When Nixon started to normalize relations with China 45 years ago, he wanted to bring China into the international community. To achieve that, Nixon's administration broke off relations with Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), and, in doing so, left Taiwan out in the cold, under the threat of annexation by China.

Despite this setback, Taiwanese struggled against adversity and made great sacrifices to establish democracy. The public has chosen their government, and chosen the path of independence and autonomy to resist Chinese intimidation. The next choice facing Taiwan is that of the new US administration, which will assume office in January next year.

The Obama administration, cheated and humiliated by Xi, has already started to rebalance its Asia policy. Rather than continue to lend only passive support to Taiwan's participation in the

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international community, the new administration should move forward with the normalization of its relationship with Taiwan.

First, during the course of the normalization process, the US should acknowledge the reality that neither Taiwan nor China holds jurisdiction over the other, with full diplomatic recognition as the final goal.

The US should plan to gradually lift the restrictions on its relationship with Taiwan, which should include visits by and dialogue between senior leaders of the two countries, the sale of military hardware, and military cooperation and exchanges in addition to technology transfers between the Taiwanese and US defense industries.

Second, as both a democracy and an economic trading power, Taiwan possesses both rights and responsibilities and desires to become a full participant of the international community. Forty-five years ago, the international community made a mistake in its decision to exclude the Republic of China; its present exclusion of Taiwan is simply a repetition of the very same mistake.

The US must no longer allow China to manipulate international organizations into excluding Taiwan, or restrict the nature of the international bodies that Taiwan can join. The new US administration must coordinate with other Western nations and use their combined strength to promote Taiwan's participation as a member of international organizations — and under a name of its own choosing.

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