

## A new era in Taiwan-US relations

Written by Yu Jie 余杰

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Judging by the chorus of wails from domestic commentators following the election of Donald Trump as the next US president, people might think that Taiwan has once again been dumped by Washington.

Chinese-language newspapers China Times and United Daily News have been particularly vociferous in their calls for Taiwan to emulate the governments of the Philippines and Malaysia, who have cast aside their alliances with the US and jumped into bed with Beijing.

There is a difference though: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has no desire to annex Malaysia and the Philippines, while it does have designs on Taiwan, hoping to turn it into another Hong Kong.

The question is, will President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) administration follow the example of Zheng Keshuang (鄭經) — who in 1683 turned Taiwan over to the Qing Dynasty in return for a dukedom — and raise the white flag?

Trump's election as US president by no means portends the beginning of a worsening Taiwan-US relationship, but quite the reverse — the relationship will be elevated.

While in Washington, I attended a seminar on how to further human rights through the US' China policy. Attendees from the US Department of State included the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor; the director of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs; as well as many former assistant secretaries of state, ambassadors, representatives from Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organizations.

It was certainly the largest gathering for a high-level discussion of US policy toward China since the election.

Perhaps due to the imminent change of government, many of the high-ranking officials who

took to the stage acknowledged that the US' China policy during the administration of US President Barack Obama has "achieved nothing" and that the stagnating relationship will be changed by Trump's administration.

Despite having attended a large number of discussion forums organized by governments, think tanks and universities, this is the first time I have heard high-level government officials dispense with the usual diplomatic parlance and openly speak their minds.

Most of the attendees were of the opinion that although Trump has yet to explain his Asia-Pacific policy, his administration will bring about significant change and that this has raised expectations.

Despite Trump having no foreign-policy experience to his name, his instincts might be able to help him, just as many years ago, then-US president Ronald Reagan relied on his own instincts to determine what course of action he should take, with results that proved superior to the painstaking calculations of professional diplomats.

At the seminar, veteran security specialist Richard Fontaine spoke up for the US' Taiwan policy. Fontaine is president of the Washington-based Center for a New American Security think tank and has held positions within the US Department of State and Congress, in addition to serving as an adviser on foreign affairs to US Republican Senator John McCain and previously holding the position of adjunct professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

Fontaine, with a degree of introspection and righteous indignation, spoke of the US government having let down Taiwan.

Fontaine spoke of the US government's Taiwan policy changing according to the whim of Beijing: A situation which invites self-inflicted humiliation on the US.

According to Fontaine, Obama has treated the dictatorship with far too much deference.

Under Obama, China has received the sort of deferential treatment that Soviet Russia could only dream of. In contrast, Taiwan is one of the most successfully democratized nations in Asia and it has established a model for peaceful transition in the Chinese-speaking world.

Fontaine said that Washington should give Taiwan more approval, respect and praise for its achievements and it should shift its preferential treatment from China to Taiwan.

Many of the academics and diplomats who attended the seminar said they had been appointed foreign policy consultants by the Trump team and cited this as a reason to believe that Trump intends to break through former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger's doctrine, which has cast a shadow over the US' Asia-Pacific policy for about half a century.

It was Kissinger who initiated the policy of establishing diplomatic relations with the CCP and after leaving office he has continued to retain influence within the Department of State as an aging shaman.

Kissinger, who has never visited Taiwan, once confided in a friend that "I would need to first run it past officials in Beijing."

However, China's leaders have not afforded Kissinger the respect he deserves: He was the last foreign visitor to meet with former politburo member Bo Xilai (薄熙来) prior to Bo's fall from grace, which shows that leaders at the top of government in China had not revealed to Kissinger the information that Bo was about to be stripped of his power, and in doing so humiliated Kissinger.

Foreign-policy specialists at the seminar recommended that a Trump administration set into motion the formalization of diplomatic ties with Taiwan and treat the nation as it does Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, India, Singapore and other Asian nations, which have become part of the US' new security framework for the region.

They said Trump should scorn the inevitable protest by Beijing and upgrade the US' diplomatic

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relationship with Tsai and her Democratic Progressive Party administration.

Taiwan's political parties should take on board this information coming from Washington.

If there is a breakthrough in diplomatic relations with the US, Taiwan would finally be able to break free from its invisible status on the international stage.

*Yu Jie is an exiled Chinese dissident writer.*

Translated by Edward Jones

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