

Donald Trump sets a precedent

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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US president-elect Donald Trump's telephone conversation with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on Friday last week made the headlines at home and abroad, with some accusing Trump of committing a diplomatic faux pas that rattled China, while others commended his decision to take Tsai's call and described it as a significant landmark in Taiwan-US relations.

As political pundits and policymakers continue to debate whether it was a simple telephone call or a momentous mistake, while others try to decipher whether Trump's move hints at the direction of his future policy in the Asia-Pacific region, one thing at least is certain: Taiwan's diplomatic morale has been greatly boosted as a result of the historic call.

It was the first publicly reported instance of a Taiwanese president speaking with a US president or president-elect since official diplomatic ties between the two nations were severed in 1979.

Taiwan, aside from having to deal with its authoritarian neighbor across the Strait — which harbors a malicious political ambition to annex the nation, and is constantly seeking to downgrade Taiwan's sovereignty and marginalize its international space — also has to fight international injustice, because the majority of the international community does not have the guts to stand up to China's despotism.

As a result, despite Taiwan having long been a good global citizen dutifully fulfilling its role by contributing to the international community through humanitarian aid to disaster-prone areas and combating international crime, the international community — bowing to China's pressure — constantly shuts its door to Taiwan and refuses to treat the nation with due respect, while Taiwanese are subjected to unfair treatment at international events.

Trump taking the call from Tsai not only helps put Taiwan back on the world map, but it sends a stern message to those nations who chose to kowtow to China's bullying and let Beijing dictate what they can do when it comes to interacting with Taiwan.

Trump's 10-minute telephone conversation with Tsai is also clear evidence that a direct channel of communication has been opened between Taipei and Washington.

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Stephen Yates, deputy national security adviser to former US vice president Dick Cheney, and Christian Whiton, formerly a US Department of State senior adviser under former US president George W. Bush, said Trump taking Tsai's call was "adhering to what he made clear throughout the presidential campaign: That he will be open to talking to foreign leaders who want good relations with the United States."

Taiwan is a sovereign state with its own government, currency, military and territory, and it negotiates its own treaties and has a president directly elected by the people. In line with Yates' and Whiton's remarks, that Trump took the call from Tsai signifies his understanding of Tsai as Taiwan's head of a state and, by association, that Taiwan is a nation.

Equally significant was Trump playing a part in identifying the nation as Taiwan in his tweet following the call: "The President of Taiwan CALLED ME today to wish me congratulations on winning the Presidency. Thank you."

It is sad but true that Taiwan has for so long been victimized by China's bullying of the international community, seemingly having grown numb to such blatant unfair treatment.

The telephone call has highlighted how international injustice and unfair treatment for Taiwan are not unbreakable — Trump has done it.

We can only hope that more members of the international community follow suit, start recognizing Taiwan in its own right and stop letting China tell them what to do.

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