

President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) telephone call with then-US president-elect Donald Trump last month and his questioning of the "one China" policy have angered Beijing. Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi (王毅) mocked Tsai for playing a "petty trick," but the call was planned weeks in advance and assisted by Trump's Taiwan-friendly aides and advisers who see the nation as a natural ally of the US.

Understandably, Chinese officials are apprehensive that the Trump administration might eliminate one of the basic elements of normal Sino-US relations — US policy on "one China" — and challenge China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is to convene its 19th Congress toward the end of this year — Chinese President Xi Jinping's (習近平) first as party general secretary. In the run-up to the congress, Xi is preoccupied with internal power struggles and consolidation of his authority, and he needs predictability in the Sino-US relations and reassurance that there will be no surprises. Given Trump's remarks and the statements of his Cabinet members, Beijing is uncertain and worried about the direction of Trump's China policy.

Meanwhile, Chinese officials have blamed Taiwan for creating trouble, as their attitude toward Taiwan has been shifting toward a more hawkish direction inside the CCP. Tsai's refusal to accept Beijing's "one China" principle and what some party cadres see as the ongoing process of "de-Sinification," or emphasis on a distinct Taiwanese identity by Tsai's government, have raised concerns in Beijing that Taiwan is drifting out of its reach. Hence, Beijing is resorting to political warfare, economic coercion and threat of force to forestall Taiwan's pursuit of independence.

The measures the CCP has employed include a divide-and-conquer strategy. Xi's meeting with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairwoman in Beijing in November last year is a prominent example. The CCP seeks to co-opt KMT leaders, pro-China political groups and fifth columns in Taiwan to promote its agenda: to create chaos, undermine Tsai's government, oppose Taiwanese independence and facilitate Taiwan's unification.

To put pressure on Tsai, Beijing has frozen official communications and engagements with Taipei, delayed meetings mandated by previous agreements and barred Taiwan's ranking officials from attending meetings in China. To cripple Taiwan's economy, China has restricted

Chinese tourists to Taiwan, and suspended or reduced imports of Taiwan's agricultural and industrial commodities.

As part of Beijing's political and psychological warfare against Taiwan, it has used Western media outlets to spread Chinese propaganda and disinformation.

Reuters quoted a retired Chinese military officer as saying that Beijing does not need to fire any missiles to bring Taiwan to its knees, "we can just cut them [Taiwan] off economically, no more direct flights, no more trade, nothing. Taiwan would not last long."

The Chinese military has also stepped up intimidation by conducting air patrols near Taiwan's airspace. Earlier this month, a Chinese naval fleet headed by its sole aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, took part in drills around Taiwan.

China's saber rattling and threats of force are futile exercises; Beijing is well aware that the US is committed to Taiwan's security. The Taiwan Relations Act has put Beijing on notice that the US sees economic embargo, blockade or use of force to achieve unification as a matter of "grave concern" and declared an intention to "resist any resort of force" against people on Taiwan.

With the enactment of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, US-Taiwan military ties will be elevated and broadened. There would be senior military exchanges and enhanced military cooperation between the two nations. The Trump administration is solicitous of Taiwan's defense needs and will likely forge closer military cooperation, including sales of sophisticated arms, such as fifth-generation warplanes — F35B jets, with stealth capabilities and vertical take-off and landing systems.

It is reassuring that Trump's US secretary of state-designate Rex Tillerson has expressed his ardent commitment to support and implement the Taiwan Relations Act and the "six assurances." His harsh criticism of China's construction of artificial islands and the militarization of the South China Sea, as well as his veiled threat to block China's access to the islands with force, provides a stark contrast to former US president Barack Obama's administration's muted and weak response to China's audacious seizure of a US underwater drone in waters off the Philippines last month.

US-China row and Taiwan's choice

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This is a powerful indication that the US, under Trump, is firm, resolved and ready to meet the challenge of China's expansionism and hegemonic ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region.

On several occasions Tsai has assured US friends that Taiwan will be a dependable regional security partner. Undoubtedly, the US values Taiwan's strategic importance and welcomes Taiwan's vital role in safeguarding peace and security in the region. Many Americans have also urged the Tsai government to increase defense spending and invest in Taiwan's security and national defense. First thing should come first — Taiwan must choose and act on its top priority.

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