

Trump's risky Taiwan policy

Written by Joseph Bosco
Friday, 18 May 2018 07:19

J. Stapleton Roy, US ambassador to China from 1991 to 1995, has condemned the Taiwan Travel Act as provocative and criticized its supporters as “so-called friends of Taiwan.”

That label presumably applies to every member of the US Congress as well, since both the House of Representatives and Senate passed the act unanimously, and to US President Donald Trump, who signed it into law without reservations.

Roy objects to the act's call for “visits between officials from the United States and Taiwan at all levels.”

He says the law is inconsistent with the “one China” framework under which Washington recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole government of that part of the original Republic of China called “the Chinese mainland.”

When the administration of then-US president Jimmy Carter broke relations with the remaining Republic of China on Taiwan in 1979, Congress immediately passed the Taiwan Relations Act, mandating a healthy ongoing relationship between Taiwan and the US. Since then, successive US administrations have limited US-Taiwan contacts to lower-level officials.

However, circumstances have evolved significantly since then, and Roy provides the historical context when he describes the political situation on Taiwan after the change in diplomatic relations: “Taiwan's far-sighted president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) boldly began opening up cross-strait relations with mainland China, liberalizing Taiwan's political system and shifting political power to the people. Chiang's successors continued the process.”

Taiwanese struggled and sacrificed to achieve that political power and they have exercised it by affirming their commitment to a democratic system. That new reality clearly does not envision replacing the old yoke of dictatorship with an even more oppressive one imposed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Trump's risky Taiwan policy

Written by Joseph Bosco
Friday, 18 May 2018 07:19

Roy concedes that Beijing's mistreatment of Hong Kong under a "one country, two systems" formulation and its tightening control over the lives of Chinese citizens have "not increased its attractiveness to residents of Taiwan."

Indeed, he also acknowledges that "a growing majority of Taiwan residents favor independence over unification with China" and would choose "an open quest for independence" were it not for Beijing's threat to use military force in such a contingency.

However, Roy fails to mention that the PRC's official threat of force against Taiwan — the 2005 "Anti-Secession" Law — goes well beyond a declaration of independence by Taiwan. It also claims a right to attack Taiwan if it simply takes too long to accept "peaceful" unification.

Roy cites CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's (习近平) affirmation of Chinese designs on Taiwan. Yet, his historical analysis does not recognize that the PRC's ongoing threat of force undermines the very premise of Washington's diplomatic switch. The Taiwan Relations Act explicitly states that US policy is "to make clear that the United States decision to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC rests upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means."

Moreover, the other predicate of the initial US policy has also eroded. The Shanghai Communiqué stated that Washington "acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States government does not challenge that position."

If the statement ever reflected actual public opinion in the PRC and on Taiwan — rather than the view of all Chinese dictators — it certainly is not true today.

Roy concludes: "Putting the future at risk is not good policy."

However, that is exactly what US policymakers have done by not making clear to Beijing that the US will defend Taiwan's right to determine its own future. Now is the time.

Trump's risky Taiwan policy

Written by Joseph Bosco
Friday, 18 May 2018 07:19

Joseph Bosco served as China country director in the office of the US secretary of defense and taught a graduate seminar on US-China-Taiwan relations at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He is a fellow at the Institute for Taiwan-American Studies. This article originally appeared in ChinaFile on April 26.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/05/18](#)