

Taiwan could gain from ally's betrayal

Written by James Wang 王健

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Last month, Taiwan's decades-long diplomatic relationship with El Salvador came to an abrupt end. El Salvador understands the relationship between Taiwan's status, China and the Republic of China (ROC) better than most countries.

Diplomatic relations were first established between the ROC and El Salvador in 1933, but at that time, Taiwan was not part of the ROC. In 1949, the ROC "government" occupied Taiwan, but had lost all its Chinese territory after losing the Chinese Civil War.

At the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan in 1951, El Salvador's ambassador declared that his country accepted that Japan only relinquished its sovereignty over Taiwan and Penghu so that their sovereignty and political future could be wholly determined according to the principles of liberty and the free expression of its people.

The treaty has never been amended and is still a valid international agreement. Yet by establishing diplomatic relations with China and accepting Beijing's "one China" principle, El Salvador has not only brushed aside Taiwan's position as a democratic nation, it has also reneged on its promise and turned its back on democratic principles.

Taipei and Washington must issue the sternest possible response to El Salvador's pusillanimous betrayal.

On the surface, the government did issue a robust response by moving first to sever the diplomatic relationship and terminating all economic financial aid, but by emphasizing the 85-year-long diplomatic relationship between the two countries, the government simply exposed the fact that El Salvador broke off relations with the "ROC" rather than "Taiwan."

Taiwan must build relationships with the international community by either rectifying the nation's official name or clearly redefining the concept of the ROC.

Beijing's latest overbearing suppression of Taiwan has elicited a rare reflex response from

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Washington.

A US Department of State spokesman said that the US was “deeply disappointed” by El Salvador’s decision, while a statement released by White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders spoke of the US’ “grave concern” over China’s “destabilization of the cross-strait relationship” and its “political interference in the western hemisphere.”

The statement also said that the Salvadorean government’s decision would result in a re-evaluation of the US’ relationship with El Salvador.

China’s poaching of El Salvador fits its pattern of hegemonic behavior and expansionism, encapsulated in its long-standing hunger to annex Taiwan. However, this time Beijing has thoroughly irritated Washington and prompted the US to draw a new diplomatic red line.

From Washington’s perspective, China’s aggressive behavior in Asia is one thing — and it has begun to push back against it — but if Beijing seeks to encroach upon the US’ sphere of influence in the western hemisphere, it will sow the seeds of its own destruction.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has sought to make hay over the government’s latest diplomatic setback, yet the real setback from this incident is to the bogus legal mandate of the ROC and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s (习近平) regime.

Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative has been spurned by the US, while his country’s “peaceful rise” is being resisted both economically and militarily by the US.

Beijing’s purchase of El Salvador’s friendship could herald a turning point in Taiwan’s dealings with the outside world and the beginning of a genuine Taiwanese foreign diplomacy.

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