

US should reconsider the status of Taiwan

Written by James Wang

Sunday, 23 December 2018 06:28

Few would deny that former minister of foreign affairs Mark Chen (陳其南) is a member of the pro-Taiwanese independence old guard.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) would certainly agree that he is — which is why it has blacklisted him — as would independence advocates living in the US, the US government and the US Congress, which he addressed as a representative of World United Formosans for Independence.

THE ‘STATUS QUO’

It was for this reason that members of the new wave of independence advocates raised their eyebrows when Chen told US media that maintaining the cross-strait “status quo” is a way to protect the nation and that mentioning independence is a step too far.

The new wave of independence supporters believe that President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) policy of maintaining the cross-strait “status quo” was the reason for her drubbing in the recent local elections.

However, one Washington Post columnist visiting Taiwan said that everywhere he went, it seemed that everybody he met supported the “status quo,” just as Chen had.

NAMES ARE NOT ENOUGH

It goes without saying that it is entirely legitimate and reasonable to dispose of an imposed national title — if there were not a high price to pay for doing so.

However, it would be misguided to presume that simply changing the name of a country would gain that country official recognition.

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The reason that Taiwan's independent status has failed to secure its recognition as a country is purely political in nature: It has little to do with the name itself.

For 30 years, the US refused to recognize the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that had established itself in China, continuing to recognize instead the exiled government of the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, while not recognizing that the latter's territory extended to China.

The name of the country was not a factor in deciding whether to recognize the legitimacy of a government.

However, the continuation of the "status quo" could become an important consideration of whether or not to recognize a country.

When the US abandoned the ROC in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC, then-US president Jimmy Carter expected the KMT to surrender within three or four years — perhaps seven or eight years at the most. With that, the "Taiwan problem" would have been resolved.

Over the four decades that have passed since then, the exiled ROC government has been transformed into a representative, legitimate constitutional government and, over the past 20 years, calls for the US to recognize Taiwan's status have gradually become louder.

RECOGNITION

That Taiwan's status remains unrecognized is not the fault of Taiwan: It is because the US and the international community have capitulated to China.

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With the long-term maintenance of the “status quo,” coupled with China’s refusal to act in accordance with international norms and its hegemonic ambitions, the time is now ripe for the US to re-examine when would be the appropriate time to recognize Taiwan’s national status.

For 40 years now, the US has failed to officially recognize a political entity that legally belongs to no other country and which has consistently maintained an independent existence. That, my friends, is a step too far.

James Wang is a media commentator.

Translated by Paul Cooper

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/12/23](#)