

Significance of Tsai's US activities

Written by Michael Lin 林錫山
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During President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) tour of Taiwan's Caribbean diplomatic allies this month, she stopped over in the US, meeting with several US politicians as well as UN representatives. Tsai achieved a big diplomatic breakthrough, successfully persuading Washington to loosen the framework of the US' "one China" policy.

For more than three decades, successive US governments have agreed to respect the "one China" policy and its three main tenets: an acknowledgment that there is only "one China," the need for cross-strait dialogue and an agreement to reach a peaceful resolution.

The second of the Three Joint Communiques, which, when signed in 1979, formally established diplomatic relations between the US and China, stated that Washington "acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China."

The third communique, signed in 1982, stated that the US "reiterates that it has no intention of ... pursuing a policy of two Chinas or one China, one Taiwan." The result of the three communiques was to restrict Taiwan's diplomatic activities.

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the US and China, successive US governments have maintained close, unofficial ties with Taiwan in accordance with the terms of its Taiwan Relations Act.

The quasi-government-to-government relationship has maintained peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, while the US' mere "acknowledgment" of China's position in the three communiques fell short of "recognizing" that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The shades of gray created by the wording gave the US wiggle room to develop policies within the confines of the communiques and the act, and to defend Taiwan's *de facto* sovereignty and promote cross-strait dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disagreements.

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Washington was initially hopeful that by opening up to the world and becoming prosperous, China would eventually become a democracy. For this reason, the US pursued a “one China” Taiwan Strait strategy and a policy of engagement with Beijing. To have constructive relations with the PRC, the relationship between Taiwan, China and the US was weighted heavy toward China.

After US President Donald Trump took office, he looked at the aggressive military expansion under Chinese President Xi Jinping's (习近平) leadership, Beijing's flouting of international trade rules, its use of “sharp power” to infiltrate the globe with its ideology and its interference in the affairs of foreign governments. Trump decided to take on Beijing. His administration has enacted the Taiwan Travel Act and the National Defense Authorization Act in addition to other Taiwan-friendly measures.

The goal is twofold:

First, to remove the restrictive nature of the “one China” policy, which prevented Taiwanese presidents, premiers and high-level officials from visiting the US.

Second, to bring Taiwan into the fold of Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy family of democratic nations and use its democracy to shine a spotlight on China's autocratic regime.

Within the US-led strategic framework to fight China's autocracy with democracy, the US has used the Taiwan Travel Act to relax the “one China” policy and chart a path that will allow Taiwan reciprocal status with other sovereign nations and to harness its strategic ability to guide China toward democratization.

This has enabled Tsai to make a symbolic visit to Taiwan's liaison office in New York in addition to the diplomatic breakthrough of attending a dinner with the UN ambassadors from 17 friendly nations to enlist their support for Taiwan's readmission into the world body.

Add to this Tsai's speech at Columbia University in which she extolled the virtues of Taiwan's democratic values. These show that Taiwan is a sturdy buttress in the US' strategy of using

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democracy against autocracy.

This is the significance of Tsai's breakthrough and it serves as an important yardstick in Taiwan's journey toward democratic and diplomatic parity with other democratic nations.

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Translated by Edward Jones

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