



At no other time in the ancient story of international relations has Taiwan mattered as much as it does today and will in the next ten years.

It is exceedingly difficult to think about the future in the middle of a once-in-a-century public health catastrophe. Yet hidden deep inside the dark shadows of every great crisis is the chance to remake the world. What might that new world look like? Will it shine brighter than the old one we remember? Or will the waves of death and economic destruction now washing over the face of the earth recede at long last only to expose a gray, nightmarish landscape?

Rudyard Kipling famously observed, “Words, of course, are the most powerful drug used by mankind.” What words will future historians write when they record those events that are rushing toward us? Will they excite highs of ecstasy and triumph, or evoke crushing lows of regret?

Part of the answer will hinge on whether or not the United States and other like-minded countries stand together with Taiwan. More than ever before, it looks like they will.

Taiwan’s free, democratic, and transparent government has done a superb job fighting the pandemic. As a result, it has attracted an outpouring of admiration. Nations around the globe are finally beginning to see that by diplomatically isolating Taiwan they are hurting themselves.

Today, those who walk the halls of power in Washington, D.C. are looking at Taiwan in a new light. What they see are Taiwanese microchips and Taiwanese cyber experts contributing to US national security at a time when our medical communications networks are being hammered by Chinese Communist Party hackers. What they see are Taiwanese face masks protecting our president and his family, and millions of everyday Americans. What they see are Taiwanese airmen, sailors, soldiers, and marines holding the center of the first island chain

Written by Ian Easton  
Monday, 08 June 2020 05:05

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while the titans of our Navy recover from the shock of mass shipboard infections. Taiwan has never looked so good.

So far, no other country has done as well in the face of this fearful pandemic. From the American perspective, this is exactly the kind of high-performing friend and ally we need going into the 2020s — a period of time that former US Pacific Fleet intelligence chief Jim Fanell sagely called “the decade of concern.”

The choices before our elected leaders in the United States are monumental. It is going to take wise statecraft to rise from the ravages of the pandemic and rebuild a world in which Taiwan can fully contribute to the prevention of the next great disaster. The task is urgent.

The Chinese Communist Party’s hostility and bellicosity toward Taiwan are growing. It is perfectly understandable why Xi Jinping (习近平) and his comrades are loath to see this island nation thrive. Taipei’s shining achievements cast a long shadow, making Beijing’s appalling governance failures appear even worse in juxtaposition.

Since the pandemic started, China’s provocations against Taiwan include everything from fiery rhetoric and mass war games to electronic jamming and cyber-attacks. Chinese authorities have sent unauthorized individuals from Wuhan to Taiwan on chartered flights in violation of prearranged agreements. They have also sent fighter jets across the Taiwan Strait median line, one of which attempted to lock a missile onto its Taiwanese escort. They have even sent their maritime militia boats on ramming missions against Taiwanese Coast Guard cutters. These are not isolated incidents. Viewed in totality, they signal hostile intent.

On May 1, 2020, General Chiu Kuo-cheng (邱國耿), the director of Taiwan’s National Security Bureau (Taiwan’s CIA equivalent), testified before the island’s parliament that, “When the pandemic subsides, Beijing will want to diffuse the domestic pressure it faces over COVID-19, so it might shift the focus from China’s internal problems to outside... Therefore, Beijing is likely to make aggressive, threatening moves against Taiwan.” His intelligence estimate is starting to come true.

One possible outcome of the mounting tensions could be a fourth cross-Strait crisis. While disquieting to consider, there is every reason for greater vigilance but no reason for fear. Such

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an event would drive the United States and Taiwan closer together, much like the last three crises did. Already, the Trump Administration is carefully repairing this long-neglected diplomatic relationship. If Joseph Biden is elected president in November, it seems likely he will agree with, and continue, this prudent policy.

We may be coming to a turning point. By 2030, US-Taiwan relations could improve in ways scarcely imagined today. In 2030, there could be an American embassy in Taipei where the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) currently stands. We could see Taiwanese diplomats working proudly in concert with their American colleagues in newly created international organizations, those in which only democracies are allowed to join as member states.

By 2030, there could be a US-Taiwan free trade agreement. There could be a raft of bilateral US-Taiwan task forces working on 6G communications technology, the biomedical economy, and green energy. There could be thousands of US military personnel stationed in Taiwan, with American ships and aircraft routinely passing through the island's harbors and airports to ensure strategic stability. All of this is possible and will likely prove necessary.

China can threaten to attack its peaceful neighbor. Soon it may even spark a violent confrontation. But acts of aggression against Taiwan will further stain the already ugly reputation of the regime in Beijing. And they will undoubtedly cement the growing consensus of Americans who believe an international community that has the benefit and privilege of including Taiwan is something worth rebuilding.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/06/08](#)