

No need to panic over Bolton book

Written by Chen Kuan-fu 陳冠富
Saturday, 04 July 2020 07:40

The bombshell book by former US national security adviser John Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*, has sparked intense debate. Unlike Americans, who are focusing on US President Donald Trump's ability to govern, local media have highlighted chapter 10, "Thunder Out of China," and used that as a basis for how they view the future development of US-Taiwan relations.

For example, on page 288, Trump compares Taiwan to the tip of one of his Sharpie pens and China to the Oval Office's Resolute desk, and on page 290, Bolton predicts that after Trump's abandonment of the Kurds, Taiwan could be next.

It is not clear whether Bolton's motivation for publishing this book was to take revenge on Trump or to wade in as an influence in the US presidential campaign. Perhaps only those involved know what is true.

What Taiwanese should be paying attention to is whether there might be pro-China forces in the nation trying to use the book to manipulate public opinion, once again creating the narrative that the US is "abandoning Taiwan."

Regardless of whether the US will stand up for Taiwan, there is no doubt that the nation must be prepared to resist China's threats. Discussing whether the US will abandon Taiwan is a red herring in the contest between the government and the opposition.

Trump's China policy has been influenced by US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, who succeeded Bolton nine months after he was sacked, and his positions on the Taiwan issue and US national security. Observers had expected O'Brien to continue Bolton's hardline, hawkish China stance, and even China's assessment was that O'Brien is a hawk disguised as a dove, whose anti-Chinese stance remains unchanged, although he might use more peaceful means.

In his book *While America Slept: Restoring American Leadership to a World in Crisis*, O'Brien bluntly states that the US in the past made the mistake of ignoring Chinese expansion, and he strongly criticizes former US president Barack Obama's administration, and its stance on

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foreign policy and military buildup.

Bolton, by the way, wrote a blurb for the book's dust jacket.

O'Brien is familiar with the Taiwan issue. Not only did he visit the nation in 2016 and does he have a good understanding of the political and economic situation on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, but as early as in 2011, he started to urge the US to sell Taiwan F-16C/D fighters to narrow the military gap with China.

US Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Pottinger, who O'Brien selected for the post, is a retired marine who worked as a journalist stationed in China. He was once while reporting beaten and detained by police in Beijing, and as a result, some say Pottinger is the man around Trump who China fears most.

Prior to filling the position, Pottinger appeared with Taiwan's then-deputy minister of foreign affairs Hsu Szu-chien (許世昌), who is now deputy secretary-general of the National Security Council. Their position on countering China's non-peaceful rise is consistent with that of Trump: The premise for "making America great again" is to strengthen cooperation with allies. Adequate military power is the only guarantee of having the strength to maintain peace.

Since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took office, Taiwan, one of the US' democratic allies, has been continuously deepening its autonomy and strengthening its national defense. There is no need to panic because of a couple of paragraphs in Bolton's book.

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Translated by Lin Lee-kai

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/07/04](#)