

Ezra Vogel is on the wrong side of history

Written by Gerrit van der Wees
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Ezra Vogel is a well-known figure in American academia.

For many decades he was a professor of social sciences at Harvard University, and in the 1970s and 1990s he was director of the university's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies.

His work primarily focused on China, Japan and Chinese-Japanese relations.

That is why it is surprising that he suddenly has some advice for President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on how to conduct relations with China.

Vogel has no background in Taiwan's history, and knows little about the country and its people.

In an interview published on Tuesday last week in the Chinese-language, pro-unification magazine Global Views, Vogel made a statement directed at Tsai, saying: "The cross-strait issues will not be resolved by the next generation. Be very careful."

It is of course rather perplexing that Vogel uses the words of Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平), who has threatened Taiwan that he is not willing to wait to resolve what he calls "the Taiwan issue" until the next generation.

This in itself shows that Vogel does not really understand what is happening. He is coming down on the wrong side of history.

It is of course nice that in the Global Views interview Vogel states that countries need to build bridges, and that leaders need to understand each other and should "interact positively, listen to each other's voices, and resolve differences and work together to maintain mutual understanding through mutual understanding and friendly exchanges. World peace."

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The problem is that in spite of Tsai's multiple offers to Beijing to interact positively, listen to each other's voices, and resolve differences and work together to maintain mutual understanding through mutual understanding and friendly exchanges, Xi has increased the threats, sent fighter aircraft across the median line of the Taiwan Strait, blocked Taiwan from international organizations, and tried to reduce Taiwan's friendly relations with the US and other Western countries.

In the interview, Vogel also admonishes Tsai "not to just listen to the unilateral voice of the United States, but to listen to the messages released by Beijing at the same time, carefully interpret the implications and lead Taiwan in the right direction."

Vogel is barking up the wrong tree. We have to ask which side Vogel is on.

It is clear from basic observations that there is a "China problem," and that Xi is causing issues by not accepting Taiwan as a friendly neighbor and continuing to fight the tail end of a Chinese Civil War that ended 71 years ago.

It is also utterly amazing that in his long interview, Vogel totally neglects to mention the most urgent issues to be resolved: the repression by China of Uighurs in East Turkestan, now called Xinjiang, and Tibetans in Tibet; the restrictions on freedoms in Hong Kong through the newly passed National Security Law; and the military threats against Taiwan.

So, if Vogel really wants to make some meaningful recommendations, he should address them to Xi, and tell him to stop repressing the Uighurs and Tibetans, stop restricting freedoms in Hong Kong and stop threatening Taiwan.

Those problems are actually caused by Xi himself, and cannot be left for the next generation to resolve.

Gerrit van der Wees is a former Dutch diplomat. From 1980 through 2016 he and his

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