

US will not let Biden be a Xi lover

Written by Chin Heng-wei 陳景輝

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US President Donald Trump enjoys widespread support in Taiwan, because it is difficult to imagine any other US president pressuring Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) as directly and effectively as Trump has.

For the same reason, Hong Kongers would also have liked Trump to stay in office for a second term.

What about Chinese? Interestingly, Chinese liberal intellectuals and the “red second generation” — the offspring of Chinese Communist Party leaders — are united in their support for Trump. The difference between them is that liberals are worried about Xi obstructing China’s path to democracy, whereas the “red second generation” resent Xi’s monopoly hold on power.

Will US president-elect Joe Biden withdraw from the “anti-China united front” after he takes office? Biden met Xi numerous times when he was vice president in former US president Barack Obama’s administration. Some media even described Biden and Xi’s relationship as cordial. In the run-up to the US presidential election, some media accused Biden’s son Hunter of having major collusions of interest with China. Trump blasted Biden, saying that China would “own” the US if Biden was elected.

In more political terms, might Biden turn out to be a second Neville Chamberlain by appeasing China, just as Chamberlain as British prime minister appeased Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in the late 1930s?

What Biden will do is difficult to predict, because he will not start making meaningful moves until he gets into the White House.

However, something can be said about the conditions under which he will be working.

First, while nearly 79 million Americans voted for Biden, more than 73 million voted for Trump,

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so Trump's continuing influence should not be underestimated.

Biden keeps saying that "unity" is his biggest priority. This shows that he would not and dares not start a process of reckless "de-Trumping," which would needlessly offend the other half of the electorate. As well, the Republican Party still controls the US Senate, where it will not give Biden a free rein to do whatever he wants.

Second, there is a consensus between the Democratic and Republican parties with respect to resisting China.

Third, the US mainstream media went all-out to attack Trump and support Biden in the election, but biased as they might be, left-wing and right-wing media alike are united in their "anti-China" stance and their support for Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Fourth, the core values that the US upholds are also universal values and the US media are tireless in their pursuit of these values. Even if Biden turns out to be a Xi lover, he would still need to worry about the power of the media.

"Populism" is not a clearly defined concept. That is why US Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Pottinger, in a speech he gave in Chinese on Oct. 23, could use a different Chinese equivalent than usual for the English word "populism."

According to a survey published by the Washington-based Pew Research Center on Oct. 6, negative views of China in nine out of 14 countries surveyed had reached the highest point since the center began conducting the survey more than a decade ago. In the US, negative views of China stand at 73 percent.

Fifth, no matter how China-friendly Biden might be, he must heed public opinion, which is his most important consideration.

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Some people accuse President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her government of betting on Trump, but Tsai's government is not in a position to bet on him.

One president in Taiwan who really could bet on US national elections was Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石). In the 1948 US presidential election, Chiang bet on Republican candidate Thomas Dewey. Although Dewey lost the election, Chiang still had a big "China lobby" in the US.

The "China lobby" was backed by members of the US Senate and House of Representatives, media moguls, retired generals, business tycoons, religious figures and so on.

By contrast, Tsai's administration cannot even afford an entry ticket to the racecourse, let alone bet on the horses. Trump's foreign policies have been good for Taiwan.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus convener Lin Wei-chou (林錫山) had the most laughable idea about the US election. His reason for betting on Biden was that as soon as Biden got elected, the KMT would propose a referendum to cancel imports of US pork that might contain traces of the food additive ractopamine.

The problem with Lin's idea is that marketing US pork is one of Biden's top priorities. All the more so because hog and cattle farmers in the Midwest and southern states are voters whom Biden badly needs to get on his side.

Tsai and her government need to deal with the entire US government, not just Biden.

The KMT's childish wishful thinking that Biden would be friendly to China and give the Democratic Progressive Party less room to maneuver politically is thoroughly illogical.

Who is afraid of Biden? The country that needs to worry about him is China, not Taiwan.

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