

## Supporting Taiwan against China

Written by Lindell Lucy

Friday, 18 December 2020 07:07

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Every time I read another news article about China's harassment of Taiwan, its nonstop efforts to undermine Taiwan's relations with the international community, I feel outraged. And my outrage is not just directed at China, it is directed at China's enablers.

Those enablers include every major country in the free world. For far too long, they have allowed Beijing to dictate the terms on which they engage with Taiwan. Whenever foreign officials do so much as talk to Taiwanese officials, China angrily accuses them of meddling in its "internal affairs." But this is exactly what China is guilty of. It has no right to tell other countries who they can and cannot talk to.

Before establishing diplomatic relations with a foreign country, China requires that country to break off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and agree to its "one China" principle, which states that Taiwan is a part of China.

Most of the world has made this devil's bargain. As a result, countries that are self-proclaimed champions of freedom, democracy and human rights hypocritically treat Taiwan like an outcast. Not a single one retains diplomatic relations with Taiwan, in spite of the fact that Taiwan has become a flourishing liberal democracy. They instead opt to appease China, an infamous, authoritarian abuser of human rights.

Although Taiwan has its own government, military, currency and unique identity, and has never been part of the People's Republic of China, it is nevertheless excluded from major international organizations, most notably the UN and the WHO.

This is absurd given that Taiwan has on some measures handled the COVID-19 pandemic better than literally every other country in the world. If anyone deserves WHO membership, it is Taiwan.

The current state of affairs, in which Taiwan is treated like a second-class member of the international community, is euphemistically referred to as the "status quo." World leaders, policymakers and mainstream commentators are near unanimous in arguing that Taiwanese independence must continue to be rejected to avoid provoking China, which has threatened to

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launch a bloody invasion if Taiwan secures dignity and equality in its relations with foreign countries.

The Chinese economy is so big, its military so powerful and its leaders so belligerent, the rest of the world has been quick to bow to China's will. Standing up to Beijing is judged as too risky, too costly and just not worth it.

Is it worth it? Given that China has just taken over Hong Kong and imposed a reign of terror by crushing free speech, canceling the latest elections, purging the legislature of dissenting voices, locking up the territory's pro-democracy icons and driving the rest into exile, standing up to China now appears to be an urgent necessity.

Without international support, Taiwanese are at risk of suffering the same tragic fate as Hong Kongers. Beijing is reportedly about to issue a blacklist of prominent individuals who support Taiwanese independence, and this list would allegedly include Taiwan's very popular President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文).

China punishes support for Taiwanese independence with life in prison. Such intimidation tactics have justifiably caused Taiwanese to increasingly oppose unification with China.

The international community is also viewing China more negatively than at any point in history.

Given that Taiwan has earned a reputation as a responsible and respectable member of the international community, while China has done the exact opposite, I believe that Taiwan's independence deserves to be supported, both officially and enthusiastically. The "status quo" is an unjust anachronism.

For the past 40 years, the US has employed a policy of "strategic ambiguity" in its relations with Taiwan. Strategic ambiguity is intended to keep everyone uncertain about how Washington would react if Beijing invades.

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The US deters Chinese aggression by suggesting that it might come to Taiwan's defense, but it also hints that it might throw Taiwan under the bus, to deter Taipei from attempting to disturb the "status quo."

The justification for pressuring Taiwanese to keep quiet about independence is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has convinced everyone that they are so emotionally sensitive and unstable that the mere statement of the words could cause them to go berserk and launch an invasion. As a result, the entire world has engaged in self-censorship, and the US has helped China enforce this censorship in Taiwan by making military support contingent upon it.

A few months ago, US Council on Foreign Relations president Richard Haass made waves in foreign policy circles when he cowrote an article arguing that strategic ambiguity is no longer effective. China's military might has been growing so rapidly that it could eventually acquire the capability to quickly pounce on Taiwan before the US has time to respond.

The temptation to break the "status quo" will eventually become too much for China to resist, and it will attempt an invasion.

Haass advocates a new policy of "strategic clarity" in which Washington would unequivocally guarantee to defend Taiwan and beef up its deterrence of Beijing by moving more military forces into the region.

"Deterring Taiwan from declaring independence is no longer a primary concern," Haas said.

However, he advocates that the US state very clearly that it does not support Taiwan's independence, in order to appease China, maintain the "status quo" and reduce the likelihood of an attack.

Haass is mistaken in his belief that words alone, which are obviously insincere, would reduce the likelihood of an attack. The Chinese are not stupid. If the US unconditionally pledges to defend Taiwan, then the US is still going to defend Taiwan no matter how loudly it proclaims its

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distinctness as a nation and its separateness from China.

A policy of strategic clarity is by logical and practical necessity a policy of supporting Taiwan's independence, as this is undoubtedly the future which Taiwanese have chosen, as evidenced by the landslide re-election of Tsai, who holds the view that Taiwan is already an independent nation that has no need to "declare independence."

Pretending that the US does not support Taiwanese independence just makes it look dishonest, if not cowardly. There is nothing to be gained by it. It just signals US weakness and rewards China for behaving badly, thereby reinforcing China's belligerent behavior.

I believe there is only one policy that is worth pursuing — endorsing full-fledged Taiwanese independence. I am calling it "strategic integrity."

In contrast to strategic clarity, a US policy of strategic integrity would be characterized by moral integrity (aligning US policy with US values) and also logical integrity (making American words consistent with American actions). It would mean deliberately and assertively crossing China's unreasonable "red lines" and drawing the US' own red lines exactly where they should be.

It would mean re-establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan and acknowledging its independence. The US has a moral obligation to lead the international community in this regard, since it is the only nation with the military power to stand up to China's bullying.

Once the US has re-established diplomatic relations, any democratic country that did not follow would face increasing criticism and shame for lacking the courage to do what is right. The dominoes would begin falling in Taiwan's favor, generating international headlines, mostly positive and supportive, raising awareness of how unfairly Taiwan has been treated.

Global opinion would shift dramatically in favor of supporting Taiwan's independence, which would make it more difficult for China to invade without facing a costly international backlash.

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Standing up for what is right is not easy or without risks. It is conceivable that China would disregard international opinion and start launching missiles and massacring Taiwanese to coerce the world to bend to its will. Indeed, this is exactly what Beijing has repeatedly threatened to do.

To deter China from this, the US should signal in the strongest possible way that an attack on Taiwan would not be tolerated, that the US would retaliate with the full force of the US military, with whatever it takes to stop it.

Captain Walker Mills of the US Marine Corps has said that the US should base ground troops in Taiwan, something it has not done since 1979, when Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. This would guarantee that any attempt by Beijing to take Taiwan by force would lead to a fight with the US and show China that it is serious about standing up for Taiwan.

Some might wonder whether the CCP is so irrational that literally nothing would deter it. Considering the hyperbolic nature of its propaganda and reputation for “wolf warrior” diplomacy, it would be willing to turn thousands of young Chinese men into cannon fodder and put millions of Chinese civilians at risk of becoming collateral damage in a retaliatory attack.

If the CCP did risk this, there are probably limits to how much death Chinese would accept before they became disenchanted with the party’s leadership.

What began as a war to “liberate” Taiwan from its freedoms, democracy and good relations with the international community could potentially transform into a revolution aimed at liberating China from an out-of-touch, psychopathic, authoritarian regime.

I personally do not buy the argument that the CCP leadership has the stomach for fighting the US. There is not enough to be gained and too much to be lost. In short, it would be suicidal.

For Taiwanese, on the other hand, there is much more at stake: their home and their way of life, freedom and democracy, dignity and equality. These are things worth fighting for.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/12/18](#)