

Watershed moment for ties with US

Written by Sumit Kumar
Sunday, 07 August 2022 04:32

The visit by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan on Wednesday should be seen as a watershed development in the relationship between Taiwan and the US. The visit assumed significance not only because Pelosi's presence in Taipei burst the bubble of Chinese military hype regarding Taiwan and the US, but also because it renewed the US' commitment to helping Taiwan protect its independent national identity.

It was in this context that speaking at an event alongside President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), Pelosi said: "Now, more than ever, America's solidarity with Taiwan is crucial, that's the message we bring in today."

This was not the first visit by a US House speaker and what Pelosi said is a well-established position on Taiwan of the US administration. The question that has remained unexamined is why China was so critical of her visit.

The reason is that Beijing is disturbed that under Tsai's leadership since 2016, the relationship between Taiwan and the US has improved by a great degree in all dimensions, with a special focus on security and defense ties, highlighted by the US including Taiwan in its Indo-Pacific strategy.

Thus, while Taiwan has improved ties with other regional powers, including India, Japan and Australia, Taipei and Washington also signed an agreement identical to the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. This sent a clear message to China that US President Joe Biden's statement that the US would militarily protect Taiwan if China were to attack was not an off-the-cuff remark. China is also aware of Taiwan's increasing popularity among Americans and elsewhere. Taiwan's cooperation with the rest of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic has made other countries realize the nation's value as a liberal democracy.

Concerned about Taiwan's increasing popularity, China saw an opportunity in the failure of US-led NATO to prevent Russia's invasion of Ukraine to intensify pressure on Taiwan. Over the past four months, there has been a significant rise in the sorties by Chinese warplanes toward Taiwan's air space.

Watershed moment for ties with US

Written by Sumit Kumar
Sunday, 07 August 2022 04:32

However, Taiwan has not bitten, calmly responding to Beijing's provocations.

Meanwhile, global opinion has increased against China's intimidation tactics.

If Taiwan's unperturbed response the assertive posturing was not enough to frustrate China, the announcement of Pelosi's visit was enough to infuriated it. China wanted to reassert its claim over Taiwan by preventing Pelosi's visit. Using its economic and military might, China attempted to intimidate the US by saying that Washington would "pay a price" for its "mistakes."

However, it failed to assess the US' resolve to support Taiwan. The bipartisan support for Pelosi's visit has underscored the US' strong support for the self-identity of Taiwanese.

Moreover, the visit exposed China's limitations in its assertive posturing.

Pelosi's strong criticism of China for its human rights violations and Chinese President Xi Jinping's (习近平) effort to remove challenges to his third term are other reasons for China's anger.

At the same time, given that Taiwan's relations with the rest of the world have improved significantly, there is increasing fear in Beijing that other countries will send delegations of elected representatives, giving Taiwan more legitimacy for its nationhood.

An elected member of the Indian parliament has already asked the speaker of the Lower House of the Indian parliament to lead a similar delegation to Taiwan.

Such a proposal was previously unthinkable as far as India-Taiwan relations were concerned. Pelosi's visit will play a major role in repositioning the US in the region. This is because the war in Ukraine and the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan created an impression that Washington was neither in a position nor interested in leading the world. Consequently, a section of international relations experts had begun to argue about the uncertain future of Taiwan.

Watershed moment for ties with US

Written by Sumit Kumar

Sunday, 07 August 2022 04:32

However, Pelosi's arrival completely changed the worldview of the US' stand on Taiwan. Her presence in Taipei underscored the US' clear vision in its policy of "strategic ambiguity."

The successful visit does not mean that China will remain silent. Taiwan and the US must have anticipated the possible actions from the Chinese side, so its symbolic military drills and other activities directed at Taiwan should not be seen as a major development unless the Chinese reaction is elevated to another level.

While Pelosi's visit has established Taiwan as an independent country for all practical purposes, it remains to be seen how much further China will go to express its displeasure.

Sumit Kumar is a former Ministry of Foreign Affairs visiting fellow at National Chengchi University.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2022/08/07](#)