

Taiwanese must fight for support

Written by Stanley Kao 高志強

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China's large-scale military exercises around Taiwan following US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei last month drew international condemnation. As tensions escalate in the region, the complex relationship between Taiwan, China and the US has come under the global media spotlight.

With the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on Wednesday approving the Taiwan Policy Act of 2022, Taiwan has again grabbed international attention. At such a critical moment, how the nation maintains support is of utmost importance.

In June 2016, as representative to the US, I had just finished facilitating President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) trip to allies in Latin America, which included a stop in the US, when I received a telephone call from Washington Post senior associate editor Lally Weymouth, saying that she wanted to visit Taiwan in July to interview the nation's first female president. As the Post is one of the US' most prestigious and influential publications, I immediately expressed my approval of the idea and relayed the message to Taipei.

I did not know at that time the background of Weymouth, who comes from an influential family. Her mother was the late Katharine Graham, the former publisher who built the Post into a leading force for 30 years. She had overseen the paper's coverage of the Pentagon Papers and the investigation into the Watergate scandal, which eventually led to the resignation of former US president Richard Nixon. She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for her autobiography, *Personal History*, and became the grande dame of modern US journalism after her death.

Taiwanese are perhaps most familiar with Graham's visit to Taiwan to meet then-president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) on Oct. 7, 1986. Chiang used the occasion to suggest the possibility of lifting martial law and easing restrictions on the press and political parties. On Sept. 28, 10 days before the meeting, 132 people founded the Democratic Progressive Party at the Grand Hotel in Taipei.

Chiang lifted martial law on July 15, 1987, ending the 38-year Martial Law period, also known as the White Terror era. As one of the secretaries in Taiwan's office in Washington, I received unanimous and positive feedback from Taiwanese compatriots, US politicians and academics regarding the earth-shattering policy shift. Since then, Washington's support of Taiwan has become a bipartisan consensus and has reached new heights.

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Thirty years after her mother's visit, Weymouth traveled to Taiwan to interview Tsai on her vision for the country and the "benign" promises between Taiwan and China. Tsai explicitly rejected Beijing's deadline for her government to accept the so-called "1992 consensus" and its framework, leaving no space for ambiguity.

As it was Tsai's first exclusive interview with a major media outlet since assuming office, the interview took up a full page in the Post and received rave reviews in Washington.

Graham's and Weymouth's visits came at watershed moments in Taiwanese history, with the former witnessing a turning point in the political development of a special era and the latter, a crossroads moment for cross-strait policies, thereby making the visits all the more remarkable.

On Jan. 12, 2020, the day after Tsai won her second presidential term, the Post published an article of mine in full — without changing a word — where I talked about Taiwan's democracy reaching a new milestone. The only alteration was to the headline, which was changed to the more eye-catching "Why Taiwan's success with elections terrifies Beijing."

The article not only reflected the stance of the liberal-leaning newspaper, but also marks the first publication of an article by a representative to the US on its opinion page in decades. It was met with positive reviews and gave Taiwan an edge in the eyes of Washington.

As the global order poses fresh challenges and uncertainty, Taiwanese should push back against pessimism and defeatism. God helps those who help themselves, and if we have the nation's best interests at heart and are willing to fight for the support of others, Taiwan would definitely not stand alone in the international community.

Stanley Kao was Taiwan's representative to the US from 2016 to 2020.

Translated by Rita Wang

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