

Taiwan should prepare for the “possibility of a very difficult period ahead for US policy in the cross-strait area,” a Washington symposium heard on Tuesday.

Steven Goldstein, director of the Taiwan Studies Workshop at Harvard University, said he was “quite pessimistic” about the future.

Taiwan’s external policies, he said, were all about domestic politics, which were highly polarized over policies toward China.

“Over the next year or so that polarization is going to center around the ECFA [economic cooperation framework agreement] issue,” Goldstein added.

There would be plenty of opportunity for political fractures to emerge in a bitter public debate, he said, adding that while China would have limited leverage in the internal Taiwan debate, its policies toward Taiwan would not change.

“It would like to see peaceful reunification at some point in the future, it would like not to use force, but it is prepared to use force, it has the capability to use force and that capability is increasingly growing,” Goldstein said.

“Let us assume that in the next year Taiwan goes through a bitter, sharply divided, vocal, controversial, process addressing the issue of ECFA,” he said. “Let us say that a lot of positions are taken and a lot of things are said that are going to be outrageous to the mainland.”

REACTION

Goldstein asked if at that point it looked like the ECFA was going to be amended or reversed, how would the US react?

The US, he said, would argue that this was how democracy functions and that it was up to the Taiwanese to work it out.

“But the mainland reaction would be very different,” he said.

The Chinese reaction, he said, would be “outrage.”

“But more than outrage, it will perhaps begin to generate a sense that Taiwan is playing for time, Taiwan is stalling, that the process is not going forward, Taiwan is pocketing the benefits and that what is beginning to emerge is a scenario for separation,” he said. “So here you will have the United States saying that the Taiwan people are working it out and the mainland saying that the Taiwan people are looking for indefinite separation.”

China, Goldstein said, will likely turn to the US to do something — but it will be very difficult for the US to do anything or to intervene in the process.

And so, he concluded, there will be a “suspicious, angry” China and a “frustrated” US.

Goldstein refused to offer a solution, saying that it was his job as an academic to pose problems, not to solve them.

He was the last speaker in the day-long symposium organized by the Brookings Institution and the Center for Strategic and International Studies and his presentation ended the event on a note of unease about the future of an ECFA.

ASSESSMENT

The symposium was called to make a mid-term assessment of the policies of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration.

The opening speaker, US Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Joseph Donovan Jr, outlined US policy toward Taiwan and Taiwanese Representative to the US Jason Yuan (袁國忠) praised the Ma administration and its policies.

Yuan said that this halfway point in the Ma administration was a good opportunity not only to look back on the past two years, but also to look forward.

“In 2011, Taiwan will celebrate the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China,” he said. “President Ma has observed that against the backdrop of thousands of years of Chinese history, the last century might be seen as merely a comma, but from a larger perspective — and with Taiwan’s economic and democratic achievements — he believes it is nothing short of an exclamation mark.”

Other speakers included Paul Chiu (邱建良), chairman of Bank SinoPac and former vice premier of Taiwan; Daniel Rosen, visiting fellow at Peterson Institute of International Economics; Liang Kuo-Yuan (梁國彥), president of Polaris Research Institute; Wu Rong-i (吳榮益), vice president of Taiwan Brain Trust; Alan Romberg, distinguished fellow at the Henry L Stimson Center; Philip Hsu (許介顯), associate professor at National Taiwan University; Liu Shih-chung (劉士雄), senior research fellow at Taiwan Brain Trust; Alexander Huang (黃國昌), professor of strategy and war gaming at Tamkang University; and Joanne Chang (張建群), research fellow at Academia Sinica’s Institute of European and American Studies.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/05/20](#)