

Upgrade ties with Taiwan: former US defense official

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A former US defense official has called for major changes in Washington's policies toward Taiwan.

"Despite Taiwan's great achievements in building a democratic society and robust economy, Washington still treats Taipei as a second-class global citizen," American Enterprise Institute director of Asian Studies Dan Blumenthal said.

Writing in Foreign Policy magazine, Blumenthal, who served as the Pentagon's senior director for China and Taiwan, said the US needs all of its Asian friends to help resist Chinese aggression.

"Taiwan is still strangled by Cold War legacies," he said.

"There is no reason, legislative or otherwise, to have such abnormal relations with the island," he said. "Instead, it is our own stubborn refusal to reinterpret rules we authored unilaterally back when Jimmy Carter was [US] president."

Blumenthal said that high-level Taiwan visits by US diplomatic and military officials are banned.

"It is up to low-ranking US defense officials to oversee our intensifying defense relations," Blumenthal said.

"Normally, when we work to improve a friend's deterrent capability, our bilateral relations are run by generals, admirals and even secretaries of defense — not so in Taiwan, even though the country faces a daunting challenge from China," he added.

Blumenthal said Taiwan is kept out of many of the region's more important multilateral organizations and was not invited to be a member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) even

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though its economy is far more advanced than that of many of the other members.

He said Taiwan is shut out of talks on the future of the South China Sea maritime territorial disputes even though it has a claim to Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island, 太平島) and part of the Spratly Islands (Nansha Islands, 南沙群島), and is located in a geostrategically important position relative to the South China Sea.

Blumenthal said that US President Barack Obama recently visited Cuba and that if the White House wanted to end Cold War legacies, Obama could “take a real geopolitical risk by gradually changing the nature of our awkward and self-defeating relations with Taiwan.”

Blumenthal said that Obama could invite president-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to Hawaii for a meeting and send a team of high-ranking military officials to Taiwan to help Tsai assess her security needs.

“This change in policy is not forthcoming — our president wants easy, symbolic photo-ops, not policy changes that actually matter,” Blumenthal added.

He said that upgrading US relations with Taiwan would serve both strategic interests and US values by supporting a liberal democratic partner.

Blumenthal said that China’s growing economic stagnation and consequent internal political problems are real and could affect Taiwan.

“We are in for an unpredictable ride that will require much more strategic coordination with the island at the highest levels,” he said. “China is less stable, but still very powerful. Stirring up trouble with Taiwan is the easiest way for the Chinese leadership to distract from problems at home.”

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