

Beijing wants Tsai to fail: US analyst

Written by Taipei Times

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Beijing does not want to see president-elect Tsai Ing-wen [蔡英文] and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) succeed, a leading US-Asia expert said on Tuesday.

“It is not in their interests to have them succeed and this will shape the approach that Beijing takes to Taiwan in the future,” said Bonnie Glaser, director of the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“If Tsai does well, if she succeeds, if the economy does well, the DPP might be the dominant party in Taiwan for a very long time to come — and that is an outcome China really does not want to see,” she said.

She was addressing a roundtable conference at The George Washington University’s Sigur Center for Asian Studies on “Prospects for the Tsai Ing-wen Administration.”

Glaser said that based on discussions she had in March last year in China, she had concluded that Beijing was “quite concerned” about the future of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), however, it did not seem to have developed an effective policy to deal with fundamental social and political changes taking place in Taiwan.

Earlier, she reminded the conference that while the US had a strong interest in Taiwan’s security it was not obligated to come to the nation’s defense.

“My view is, just personal, that if the PRC [People’s Republic of China] were to attack Taiwan, that the US probably would come to Taiwan’s defense, especially if it was quite clear that Beijing was the aggressor,” she said.

Glaser said that a serious “downturn and setback” in the cross-strait relationship would have a negative impact on US interests.

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She said that Tsai had claimed throughout her campaign that she wanted to maintain the “status quo” in cross-strait relations including a positive economic relationship and a functioning political relationship with channels of communication and cooperation on issues such as law enforcement.

Glaser said this would be very much in Taiwan’s interests and necessary in order for Tsai to implement her domestic agenda.

“Having a major setback in relations with Beijing would I think be seriously problematic for Tsai Ing-wen,” Glaser said.

Glaser said that in her view there still remained an opening to consider some new formulation that might be acceptable to both sides of the Taiwan Strait, although Beijing had “set the bar high.”

She said Taipei and Beijing might find enough common ground for the relationship to develop, but the possibility was “fairly low.”

Glaser said a second scenario might be that the two sides did not agree on a new formulation for the so-called “1992 consensus” but that Tsai continued through her words and deeds and policies not to take measures that caused alarm.

The “1992 consensus” — a term former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) admitted making up in 2000 — refers to a tacit understanding between the KMT and the Chinese government that both sides acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means.

That might be sufficient to forestall significant punitive action, she said, but Beijing might quietly suspend official and quasi-official channels.

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A third scenario might be for Beijing to decide that Tsai did not sincerely want to maintain the “status quo” and was moving toward independence.

This would result in a series of overt policies designed to pressure and punish the DPP, including a halt to the implementation of existing agreements, encouraging Taiwan’s allies to switch their diplomatic allegiance and a rolling back of Taiwan’s gains in the international arena.

“There is a possibility that military pressure on Taiwan would increase as well,” Glaser said.

Glaser said the risk of a “hot war” or military conflict between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was “probably fairly low.”

“We could get to that situation, but I certainly don’t want to leave the impression that I believe there is going to be a military conflict,” she said. “Ultimately it does not serve the interests of the two sides to have a military conflict. Things are going to be different under Tsai Ing-wen; it remains to be seen how different.”

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