

Xi might give Taiwan deadline: Bush

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Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang toast during a reception at the Great Hall of the People on the eve of the Oct. 1 National Day holiday in Beijing on Sept. 30.

Photo: AP

Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) might introduce a deadline for a resolution on Taiwan during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China this month, according to former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) chairman Richard Bush.

In a blog post titled “What will Xi Jinping say about Taiwan at the 19th Party Congress?” Bush wrote that Xi might introduce new elements in China’s position on Taiwan, such as a deadline for a solution to what Beijing calls the “Taiwan issue.”

“One possibility here is conveying a sense of urgency about resolving the dispute with Taiwan or even setting a deadline,” wrote Bush, who was AIT chairman from 1997 to 2002 and now serves as codirector of the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution.

Xi had hinted in a meeting in 2013 with former vice president Vincent Siew (宋楚瑜) that “settling the dispute could not be postponed from generation to generation,” Bush said.

If Xi wants to reaffirm China’s policy on Taiwan, he would simply repeat common elements in speeches leaders had made at past party congresses, such as the guiding principle of peaceful unification, he said.

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However, if Xi does toughen Beijing's Taiwan policy, for example by not restating the peaceful unification principle, "it would widen China's options in a coercive direction," Bush said.

It would suggest that China "would be willing to impose a solution rather than negotiate one on a mutually acceptable basis," he wrote.

Former AIT director Douglas Paal said he believes that Beijing will likely take a low-key approach on Taiwan at the party congress, which is scheduled to begin on Oct. 18.

Paal, speaking in a panel previewing the congress in Washington on Friday, said his unofficial sources in Beijing told him that no tough talk on Taiwan is expected from the Chinese leader.

Commenting on the possibility of a "fourth US-China communique" emerging from an upcoming meeting between Xi and US President Donald Trump, who is to tour five Asian nations next month, Paal said it was highly unlikely to happen.

The question of a fourth joint communique, which would follow the three communiqués on Taiwan that the US and China issued between 1972 and 1982, arose in a report in the Taiwan-based Chinese-language *Liberty Times* (sister newspaper of the *Taipei Times*) published earlier this year.

The report, citing an unnamed source, said that former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger was trying to get the two nations to sign such a document.

Paal, who is vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said he expects Washington to continue to show its support for Taiwan based on the US' Taiwan Relations Act and would not sign a fourth communique.

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