

Airlines cave to Beijing despite White House protest

Written by Taipei Times

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Global airlines are obeying Beijing's demands to refer to Taiwan explicitly as a part of China, despite the White House's call this month to stand firm against such "Orwellian nonsense."

The Associated Press found 20 carriers, including Air Canada, British Airways and Lufthansa, that now refer to Taiwan, the self-ruled nation that Beijing considers Chinese territory, as a part of China on their global Web sites.

There are just three days left for dozens of foreign airlines to decide whether to comply with Beijing's orders or face consequences that could cripple their China business, including legal sanctions. Many have already sided with Beijing.

The spread of "Taiwan, China" on the drop-down menus and maps of airline Web sites represents a victory for Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) and his ruling Chinese Communist Party's nationalistic effort to force foreign companies to conform to their geopolitical vision, even in operations outside of China.

On April 25, the Civil Aviation Administration of China sent a letter to 36 foreign airlines ordering them to explicitly refer to Taiwan as a part of China. The regulator did not respond to requests for comment.

The AP found that Air Canada, Lufthansa, British Airways, Finnair, Garuda Indonesia, Asiana Airlines, and Philippine Airlines have all changed the way that they refer to Taiwan to bring their global Web sites in line with the Chinese Communist Party's vision.

SAS airlines, Swissair, Malaysia Airlines, Cebu Pacific Air, Aeroflot, Italy's Alitalia, Austrian Airlines, Air Mauritius, Etihad Airways, Spain's Iberia, Israel's EL AL, MIAT Mongolian Airlines and Russia's S7 Airlines all also refer to Taiwan as part of China, but it was not immediately clear how long they had been using that formulation.

Major US carriers have not yet caved. United Airlines, American Airlines, Delta and Hawaiian

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Airlines, as well as Australia's Qantas Airways — all of which received April letters from the regulator — did not refer to Taiwan as part of China on their Web sites as of yesterday.

The sweep of concessions will likely make it more difficult for companies to resist Beijing's call.

"If they make individual corporate decisions, they will likely accede, individually but entirely, to Chinese demands," said Robert Daly, the director of the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

In one apparent exception to Beijing's rules the national flag carrier Air China seems not to have gotten the regulator's memo. On its US site, Taipei is a part of "Taiwan, China, but its Taiwan Web site lists it as "Taipei, Taiwan."

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