

Changing Guards and Changing Policies Toward China: Taiwanese and American Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to examine recent changes in political leaderships and subsequent policy shifts toward China in Taiwan and the United States. The primary focus will be on the historic democratic transition and the resulting changes of Taiwan's China policy in the March 18, 2000 presidential election, in which the 55-year rule of the Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang (KMT), was peacefully replaced by the opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). More precisely, the focus will be sharpened to look at the policy shift the new president, Chen Shui-bian, was forced to make to depart from his predecessor, Lee Teng-hui. The policy contrast between the two presidents says a lot about not only the statesmanship of the two leaders but also Taiwan's predicament in dealing with the complex cross-Taiwan-Strait relations. In addition, it shows the difficulty the new Chen administration faces in running a minority government in the newly democratized polity.

For comparison, the paper will also look at the leadership change in Washington and the new foreign policy toward China of the new president, George W. Bush. In Taiwan, from Lee Teng-hui to Chen Shui-bian, and in the United States, from Bill Clinton to George Bush, the policy shifts are interesting.

By pinpointing policy shifts in Taipei and Washington, if not explicitly, the paper should present a macro-picture of the dynamics and complexity of the triangular Taiwan-China-US relations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

If war is an extension of diplomacy, then diplomacy, or foreign policy, is an extension of domestic politics. This is particularly so in the politics of Taiwan's fledgling democracy. The change of guards from KMT's Lee Teng-hui to DPP's Chen Shui-bian in May 2000 was such a dramatic event that it must have impact on Taiwan's most important, indeed critical, relations with its giant neighbor across the Taiwan Strait. However, the irony is that the expected sea change has so far failed to eventuate as many people predicted. On the contrary, in terms of China policy, Chen Shui-bian has not only not gone further than Lee Teng-hui but rather retreated from the 'two-state' position, the legacy Lee had left behind when he stepped down.

In Taiwan, there is a popular analogy. Taiwan's Moses, Lee Teng-hui, was supposed to lead Taiwanese people out of Egypt and he did. Like Moses' successor, Joshua, Lee's 'true' disciple, Chen Shui-bian, is supposed to bring Taiwanese people to Canaan, the promised land. Will Chen do so? Many Taiwanese are pondering over such a poignant question.

II. LEE TENG-HUI AND 'NEW TAIWANESE'

In a transitional society, leadership is important. In Taiwan, the leadership change from Chiang Kai-shek and son Ching-kuo to Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian marked a paradigm shift. The Chiangs retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after they lost the Chinese civil war to Mao Zedong and his communists. Both of them wanted to reclaim their 'mandate of heaven' and return to rule the Middle Kingdom. Lee and Chen are both 'native sons' of Taiwan. They have nothing to do with the Chinese civil war. They do not want to have quarrels with the Chinese communists. All they want is to democratize Taiwan and build it into a new, free and prosperous nation-state.

Lee Teng-hui was born in Taipei County, Taiwan, in 1923. He attended Japanese school, up to high-school level, in Taiwan and in 1943 went to the Imperial Kyoto University to study agriculture economics. He was a *kendo* (Japanese swordsmanship) enthusiast. While still in high school, in 1940, he changed his Chinese name to Japanese name. Before 1945, he thought he was Japanese.

After the War, he returned to attend the National Taiwan University and became a lecturer there. He witnessed the 2-28 (February 28, 1947) massacres and was once arrested for suspicion of links with communist activities. He went to the United States to do postgraduate studies twice, obtained a Master's degree from the Ohio State University in 1953 and a PhD from Cornell University in 1965.

He attracted Chiang Ching-kuo's attention in the early 1970s, when in order to legitimize and sustain his Nationalist regime, Chiang tried to recruit Taiwanese young elite into his administration. Lee was appointed to Chiang's new cabinet in 1972. Under Chiang, he played politics with *kendo* spirit, great patience, hid his Taiwanese-Japanese identity, and showed no political ambition.

Because the KMT old guards believed he would not pose any real threat to their power, he was accepted as Chiang's vice-presidential candidate in 1984 and succeeded Chiang when he died in January 1988. Although resistance against his Taiwanese

leadership in the KMT was strong, he began to consolidate his power in the party and government in the late 1980s and early 1990s, showing great political acumen. By democratizing Taiwanese political system steadfastly, he managed to neutralize the conservative forces in the KMT and slowly but surely Taiwanize both the ruling party and politics in Taiwan.

Chiang Ching-kuo died in January 1988. Vice-President Lee Teng-hui unexpectedly succeeded him and was to become a strong KMT leader for the next 12 years. In spite of continuous obstructionism from the KMT old guards, most of them mainlanders such as former premiers Li Huan and Hau Pei-tsun, Lee Teng-hui was able to accomplish a great number of his Taiwanization programs. He abolished the 'temporary provisions effective during the period of national mobilization for suppression of Communist rebellion' that had frozen the original 1947 Republic of China (ROC) constitution since 1949, allowed the new parliament to be totally elected in the Taiwan area, changed the constitution to have direct presidential elections, and downgraded both the National Assembly and the Taiwan provincial government so that Taiwan looks more like an independent sovereign nation-state, separated from China. (Lee 1999)

As early as March 1989, departing from the practice of both Chiang Kai-shek and son Ching-kuo, Lee Teng-hui embarked upon his "head of state diplomacy" by visiting Singapore. After he consolidated his power by skillfully dealing with the political crises of March 1990, in which students demonstrated against the anachronistic National Assembly at the Chiang Kai-shek memorial hall, and of February 1993, in which Lee ousted powerful premier Hau Pei-tsun, in February 1994, Lee visited the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. All these Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore, had official relations with China, thus no official links with Taiwan. Lee's visits incurred anger and protest from Beijing. Less than three months later, he made official visits to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, South Africa and Swaziland. In April 1995, he visited Jordan and United Arab Emirates.

Then in spite of strong opposition both from Chinese and US governments, Lee made his historic trip to his alma mater, Cornell University, in June 1995. At Cornell, he made a passionate speech, 'With the People Always in My Heart,' in which he stressed the importance of the will of the people, successes of Taiwan's economic development and political democratization and the existence of the ROC on Taiwan as a sovereign state. The trip enraged China so much that Beijing tested their missiles and carried out live-fire military exercises in the Taiwan Strait. China's military threat caused so much alarm in Washington that President Bill Clinton was forced to dispatch two aircraft carrier battle groups to the waters near Taiwan. The Strait crisis has impacted on the Taiwan-US-China relations ever since.

In addition to the rapid democratization under his leadership, Lee terminated the 'temporary provisions' in May 1991, thus recognizing the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the legitimate government of China. Earlier he set up the National Unification Council to draft the National Unification Guidelines, the Mainland Affairs Council in the cabinet to implement government policies toward China and the semi-official Strait Exchange Foundation to negotiate with its Chinese counterpart, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait. The unification guidelines spell out Taiwan's China

policy. Although Taiwan expects eventual reunification with Mainland China, the reunification can only be attained when 'a democratic, free and equitably prosperous China' is achieved. Moreover, before negotiations for such reunification can be started, China has to end military threat, accept Taiwan as a separate 'political entity' and let Taiwan be a member of the international community.

Although, in April 1993, Koo Chen-fu, head of the Strait Exchange Foundation, and Wang Daohan, head of China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, held successful talks in Singapore, no substantive issues were settled. Even the basic dispute about the so-called 'one-China principle' was side-stepped, with both sides maintaining their own interpretations of the principle. On January 30, 1995, Jiang Zemin announced his 'eight-point' Taiwan policy, in which some concessions were made. However, on April 8, when Lee responded by putting out his own 'six-point' China policy, there was little improvement in the cross-Strait relations. After Lee Teng-hui made his Cornell trip, Beijing believed Lee's hidden agenda was to push for Taiwan independence and the unification guidelines were designed by Lee to delay peace talks and prevent reunification. Beijing called Lee the 'grandmaster of Taiwan independence' (*tai-du zhu-shi-ye*), condemned him as 'sinner of thousands of years' (*qian-gu zui-ren*) and threatened him to be 'swept into the historic dustbin'.

China launched its third-wave military exercises and missile tests in March 1996, when Taiwan was carrying out its historic first direct presidential election, in which Lee Teng-hui won a landslide victory. Most observers agreed that Chinese saber rattling and verbal vilification (*wen-gong wu-he*) of Lee were counterproductive. It did not cow the Taiwanese people into voting against their defiant president. Instead, they showed their disdain by giving him a clear mandate, 54% of the vote in a five-candidate race.

The new popular mandate hardened Lee's attitude toward China. In the 1996 presidential election, he began to propagate the idea of 'new Taiwanese' national identity. (Chiou 2000:54-9) He helped the KMT candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, to win the Taipei mayoral race against Chen Shui-bian in 1998 by openly advocating the 'new Taiwanese' stance.

On July 9, 1999, before he completed his presidency in May 2000, in an interview with Germany's Deutsche Welle, he floated the idea of 'special state-to-state relations' between Taiwan and China. The 'state-to-state' pronouncement has since cut off talks between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait that had just been restarted in early 2000. Most people agree that Lee's 'two-state' assertion means 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan', thus in fact Taiwan independence.

On March 18, 2000, Taiwanese voters stunned not only Taiwan and China but also the rest of the world by throwing out the KMT government and bringing in the pro-independence DPP new administration. Chen Shui-bian's winning the Taiwanese presidency made history, not only in terms of democratization but also assertion of Taiwanese nationalism, expression of national independence and saying 'no' to China.

In May 1999, one year before the end of his presidential term, Lee Teng-hui published his autobiography, *The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity*. In the book, he (1999:51-2) wrote a brief section on his concept of Taiwanese identity. He mentions the fact that Chiang Ching-kuo had once told him 'I am also a Taiwanese'. He stresses:

“It is impossible to form a political culture that embodies Taiwan’s identity without, first and foremost, an intense love for Taiwan itself. I say this all the time, but the person who will lead Taiwan in the future must be a real fighter, someone who loves Taiwan deeply and will shed blood, sweat, and tears for Taiwan.”

Then, in the last chapter on Taiwan in the twenty-first century, he raises the issue of new Taiwan and new Taiwanese. He uses Ma Ying-jeou as an example. Ma came to Taiwan with his KMT-official father after 1949. Although he grew up and got his education, up to the tertiary level, in Taiwan, he regards himself as a *wai-sheng-ren* (out-of-province person), a Chinese mainlander. Although he is a faithful KMT member, he has not identified with and supported Lee Teng-hui’s Taiwanization agenda. Like most mainlanders, he is against Taiwan independence and wants eventual reunification with China.

However, during the 1998 Taipei mayoral election, against the strong incumbent, Chen Shui-bian, Ma needed Taiwanese votes to win. As a master campaigner with charismatic attraction to Taiwanese voters, Lee Teng-hui campaigned for Ma. Lee (1999:191) points out that Chen Shui-bian called for Taiwan independence, although with a slogan ‘priority to Taiwan’. He advised Ma that Chen was identified with the Taiwanese, therefore, if he was going to win, Ma needed to counter Chen’s ‘priority to Taiwan’ (*Taiwan you-xian*) with ‘Taiwan first’ (*Taiwan di-yi*). Ma needed to voice strongly a campaign promise to take the country forward as a society of ‘new Taiwanese’. Lee (1999:192) explains:

“Hence, Ma dispelled the rivalry between the Taiwanese and mainlanders by issuing an appeal to rise above the discord and managed to gain the needed margin for victory in a very tight race. His tactic began to take shape during a campaign speech I made, in which I suddenly confronted him with a question: ‘Listen, my friend Ma, where are you from? What are you?’ With great dignity, Ma, facing the audience, rose and answered, ‘I was brought up in Taiwan and raised on the nourishing food of Taiwan. I love Taiwan. I am a new Taiwanese.’”

Lee was correct. That ‘I am a new Taiwanese’ campaign theme won Ma the Taipei mayoral race. Lee further states, ‘The effect of “new Taiwanese” is to confirm Taiwan’s identity; the term sums up the achievement of the Taiwanese people in having created their own government and having established a political system that works for them.’

Lee (1999:200) postulates: ‘Thus, the political leaders the “new Taiwanese” choose should be people who appreciate what has gone into the formation of Taiwan and can utilize what has been achieved so far.’

III. CHEN SHUI-BIAN AND HIS RETREAT

Since the bloody 2-28 uprising, in which about 20,000 Taiwanese, most of them intellectuals, students and other socio-political elite, were massacred by the Nationalist army, Taiwanese oppositions have advocated self-determination and independence for the island state (Chiou 1993; Kerr 1965; Lai, et al. 1991; Phillips 1999). Professor Peng Ming-min and his two postgraduate students' 1964 'Declaration on Taiwan Self-Salvation Movement' was the ideology for Taiwan independence (Peng 1972; Tao 1995). Although the *dangwai* (literally outside the KMT) opposition of the 1970s and 80s primarily fought for democratization, their ultimate goal was to create a republic of Taiwan. (Chiou 1995) When the *dangwai* broke martial law regulations and formed the DPP in September 1986, it was their intention to pursue Taiwan independence. In October 1991, the DPP adopted the Taiwan independence party platform, in which the party aimed to establish an independent Taiwan through plebiscite. The platform was formulated by Chen Shui-bian.

Thus, when on March 18, 2000, it turned out that Lee Teng-hui's successor was not his anointed KMT candidate, Vice-President Lien Chan, but the opposition DPP's Chen Shui-bian, the expectation was that Chen would pursue the new ruling party's radical independence policy. There was fear, not only in Taiwan but also the US and the rest of the world that such a radical action would bring about war in the Taiwan Strait.

Chen Shui-bian was born in a poor peasant's family in an impoverished countryside of Tainan, southern Taiwan, in 1950. In his autobiography (1999:46) he wrote that after he lost the 1998 Taipei race, he discovered his childhood abject poverty as a 'gift' from heaven, that has forced him to work hard all his life. Chen has certainly been one of the hardest, if not the hardest, working political leaders in Taiwan for the last two decades. He studied well, always number one in his class, in his schooling years. (Chen 2000; Tao 1994)

After graduating from the law school of National Taiwan University, he started a successful law practice. In the 1980 Kaohsiung incident trials, he was one of the defense lawyers. The trials made him aware of the dark side of the KMT authoritarian rule. Afterward, he joined the ranks of the *dangwai* and quickly became one of the brightest stars in Taiwan's growing oppositionist politics.

He was elected to the Taipei city council with the highest vote in 1981. He was sentenced to a one-year prison term for defamation against a high KMT official in 1985. The same year, he went back to Tainan to contest the county magistrate election. He lost the tight race. The day after the election, his wife, Wu Su-chen, was hit by a car and became paraplegic. After serving his one-year jail sentence, in 1987, he joined the newly formed DPP and became its central committee member. In 1989, he won a seat in the national parliament, the Legislative Yuan. He was consistently voted by parliamentary reporters as the most effective parliamentarian. In 1992, he won a second term in the legislature. In 1994, he captured the capital Taipei's mayoral office, effectively making him the highest office-holder in the DPP. He lost the second term to Ma Ying-jeou, but bounced back to win the 2000 presidential race.

Chen Shui-bian is the 'native son of Taiwan'. He had been one of the strongest advocates of Taiwan independence before he won the presidency. He does not have Japanese or American educational backgrounds, as Lee Teng-hui, Peng Ming-min, Lien Chan and many other political leaders in Taiwan have. During the 2000 presidential campaign, most people in Taiwan regarded him, not other two main candidates, Lien Chan and James Soong (Song Chu-yu), former KMT secretary-general, as a true successor to Lee Teng-hui's 'new Taiwanese' leadership.

However, in his autobiography, *Taiwan Zhi Zi* (son of Taiwan), written after his defeat in the 1998 Taipei race and with the 2000 presidential election in mind, he tones down considerably his rhetoric on Taiwan independence. He (1999:109-23) talks about Anthony Giddens' 'third way', Tony Blair's 'new Labor' and Taiwan's new DPP and its new thinking. He (1999:210-1) stresses the 'new national consciousness', but avoids talking about nationalism and independence. He stuck to this 'new middle way' (*xin zhong-jian lu-xian*) throughout the March 18 campaign.

Although he won the unexpected victory, the political landscape was very inhospitable to the new president. Not only did he win his presidency by a mere 39% plurality in a five-horse race, a weak mandate compared with Lee Teng-hui's 54% in 1996, but also the parliament was controlled by the KMT with a huge majority. Supported by other opposition parties, the KMT could block virtually every piece of legislation the new administration wanted to pass and they often did.

Both before and after Chen's election, Beijing mounted continuous campaigns against him. China issued a white paper on the Taiwan issue that warned that Taiwan's refusal to settle cross-Strait issues through negotiations might be grounds for war. Beijing insisted that Chen Shui-bian accept the 'one China' principle as pre-condition for dialogue. They even threatened to impose a political litmus test for Taiwanese businessmen who trade or invest with the mainland. Some top industrialists, such as Chi Mei's Hsu Wen-lung and Acer's Stan Shih, who came out to support Chen on the eve of the presidential election, have since received pressure from Beijing on their investments in China.

With the Chinese communists rejecting to have anything to do with the DPP and the new president and threatening use of force, Chen Shui-bian had little room to maneuver. To maintain political stability and peace in the Taiwan Strait became his top priority in government.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council is in charge of dealing with affairs in the complex Taiwan-China relations. It has compiled public opinion survey results obtained by Taiwan's universities and other poll organizations to gauge the popular feelings on matters such as choice between status quo, reunification and independence and Taiwanese people's ethnic identity. In August 1996, one survey showed: (1) 34.1% of people preferred maintaining status quo, namely no reunification and no independence, for now and would decide later what to do, (2) 22% preferred status quo now, reunification later, (3) 19.3% preferred status quo indefinitely, (4) 9.9% preferred status quo now, independence later, (5) 6.3% preferred independence as soon as possible, while (6) 4.8% preferred reunification as soon as possible. In May 2000, (1) rose to 42.3%, (2) dropped to 19.1%, (3) dropped to 16.6%, (4) rose to 12%, (5) dropped to 5%, while (6) dropped to 4.1%. Just a month earlier, in April 2000, (1)

dropped to only 30.2%, (2) dropped to 16.2%, (3) rose to 21.1%, (4) rose to 14.6%, (5) dropped to 3.9%, while (6) dropped to 2.7%.¹

These figures roughly show that about three quarters of Taiwanese people prefer status quo for now and only about 20% prefer independence. They also show people who are rather confused, running scared. Most of them cannot quite make up their minds. Although increasing people prefer independence and those who prefer reunification are declining, there is no strong popular basis on which Chen Shui-bian can push for DPP's independence agenda. However, some may argue that under similar circumstances, probably slightly worse, Lee Teng-hui was able to maximize 'new Taiwanese' sentiment and push his independence stand.

On the question, 'Who are you?' In June 1995, 27.9% replied they were Taiwanese, 43.6% said they were both Taiwanese and Chinese, 23.8% said they were Chinese. In April 2000, 42.5% said they were Taiwanese, 38.5% said they were both Taiwanese and Chinese, while only 13.6% said they were Chinese.

Although more people in Taiwan now identify themselves as Taiwanese and only a small minority still insists they are Chinese, ethnic conflicts still seriously divide the Taiwanese society. The ethnic ground is not yet fertile for the healthy growth of Taiwanese nationhood.

In his inauguration speech on May 20, 2000, Chen Shui-bian did declare, 'Taiwan stands up, representing the self-confidence of the people and the dignity of the country.' He also shouted the slogans, 'long live freedom and democracy' and 'long live the people of Taiwan', purposefully ignoring the usual 'long live the Republic of China'. However, in his long speech, he devoted only two short paragraphs to the thorny 'one China' and 'state-to-state' questions:

"The people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait share the same ancestral, cultural, and historical background. While upholding the principles of democracy and parity, building upon the existing foundations, and constructing conditions for cooperation through good will, we believe that the leaders on both sides possess enough wisdom and creativity to jointly deal with the question of a future 'one China'.

I fully understand that, as the popularly elected 10th-term president of the Republic of China, I must abide by the Constitution, maintain the sovereignty, dignity and security of our country, and ensure the well-being of all citizens. Therefore, as long as the CCP regime has no intention to use military force against Taiwan, I pledge that during my term in office, I will not declare independence, I will not change the national title, I will not push forth the inclusion of the so-called 'state-to-state' description in the Constitution, and I will not promote a referendum to change the status quo in regard to the question of independence or unification. Furthermore, there is no question of abolishing the Guidelines for National Unification and the National Unification Council.²"

In his 2001 New Year address to the nation, he defines 'Taiwan spirit' as follows: 'The 20th century has especially favored Taiwan, as it has given the people of this land a chance to challenge and better themselves. Taiwan is like a "rose that will never be crushed," in the words of the senior Taiwan writer Yang Kuei. Even in the darkest age of suppression, the people on Taiwan still maintained their pragmatism, diligence and undaunted character. Over the course of a century, the people of Taiwan established the best definition of the "Taiwan spirit".³

He also calls on China to denounce the use of force and engage Taiwan to push for integration. He proposes that with ongoing integration of economies, trade and culture between the two sides, faith and confidence can be built and this, in turn can be the basis for a new framework of permanent peace and political integration. Although Beijing leaders said they did not understand what Chen Shui-bian meant by 'integration', Chen's integration (*tong-he*) proposal has caught a great deal of attention.

Chen's supporters argue that the president's 'integration' could mean federation, confederation, commonwealth or even European Union sort of arrangement, thus not necessarily straightforward reunification with China. Many people, on the other hand, stress that 'integration' means eventual reunification.

Chen Shui-bian has more than just kept his words when he said before his May 20, 2000 inauguration that China would not find any excuses to increase tension in the Strait and the United States would be perfectly happy with his new presidency. He let Clinton enjoy half-a-year peace of mind in the Western Pacific, even though Clinton visibly tilted toward China in his last year in office and vetoed Taiwan's request to purchase Aegis destroyers and Patriot-3 missiles. China has yet to resume dialogue with Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing has found no ground to rattle its saber again against Chen as they did to Lee Teng-hui twice before.

IV. THREE COMMUNIQUES AND TAIWAN RELATIONS ACT

The present US China policy of engagement was started by President Richard Nixon and Dr Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s. The policy is based on three Sino-US communiqués. The first 1972 Shanghai Communiqué signed by President Nixon and Premier Zhou Enlai began the normalization process of the two countries. In the communiqué, China asserted Taiwan is a province of China, the Taiwan problem is China's internal affair and the Chinese government opposes any activities which aim at the creation of 'one China, one Taiwan,' 'two Chinas' and 'Taiwan independence.' The US side, on the other hand, declared that the US acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The US government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.

The second joint communiqué to establish diplomatic relations between the United States and China was signed on January 1, 1979. No major policy change was initiated. It more or less followed the formula of 'agreeing to disagree' on Taiwan, although it does declare the United States 'recognizes the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China.'

The third communiqué, known as the second Shanghai Communiqué of August 17, 1982, was signed by President Ronald Reagan and Premier Zhao Ziyang. In addition to reiterating both sides' positions since 1972, 'the US government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and it intends to reduce gradually its sale of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution.'

Soon after the establishment of official relations with China, on April 10, 1979, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act. The Act set up semi-official ties between Washington and Taipei. It states:

It is the policy of the United States:

- (1) to preserve and promote extensive, close and friendly commercial, cultural and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan, as well as the people on the China mainland and all other peoples of the Western Pacific area;
- (2) to declare that peace and stability in the area are in the political, security, and economic interests of the United States, and are matters of international concern;
- (3) to make clear that the United States decision to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China rest upon the expectations that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means;
- (4) to consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States;
- (5) to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character, and
- (6) to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.'

Between the three Sino-US communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act, the consecutive US administrations from Nixon to Clinton, although gradually tilting toward China, had maintained a difficult but by and large fair balance between China and Taiwan. President George Bush Sr announced to sell Taiwan 150 F16 fighter jets on September 2, 1992, before he lost the election to Bill Clinton.

V. BILL CLINTON AND GEORGE BUSH

Although with reluctance, President Clinton, under tremendous pressure from the Congress, overruled objection from the State Department and allowed President Lee Teng-hui to visit Cornell University. Moreover, Clinton sent two aircraft carrier battle groups into the region to counter China's military exercises and missile testing in the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis. However, Lee Teng-hui's strong push for Taiwan's independence pricked the Clinton government. In June 1998, Clinton visited China. In Shanghai, on June 26, for the first time as US president, he firmly and clearly announced that the US would not support Taiwan independence, 'one China and one

Taiwan,' and Taiwan's membership in any international organization which requires statehood.

In Taiwan, Clinton's Shanghai statement was regarded as unfriendly and unnecessary. It overstepped the letter and spirit of the three communiqués and clearly tilted toward Beijing. Partially because of this uncertainty about US support, Lee Teng-hui announced his 'state-to-state relations', which in turn further aggravated the discomfort in Clinton's White House.

It is still early days for the new George W. Bush administration. Before and after the November election, it was generally perceived that Bush's China policy would be more hawkish than his predecessor. Clinton tried to develop 'strategic partnership' with Beijing. Bush and his foreign-policy advisers, particularly his national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, have so far discarded such a partnership policy. Instead, they stress that China is a strategic competitor vying with the US for influence in the Asia-pacific region. In terms of strategic partnership, they would like to renew their long alliance relations with Japan and other Asian allies, implicitly including Taiwan. Bush is more enthusiastic, thus more hawkish, than Clinton, in pushing for the construction of missile defense systems, both NMD (national missile defense) and TMD (theater missile defense), which are vehemently opposed by China, particularly the TMD if the system includes Taiwan.

Seeking to cope with what it calls 'the drastic changes in the military situation around the world,' China announced on March 6, 2001, that it would increase its defense spending this year by 17.7%, its highest military expansion in the last 20 years.⁴

Responding to the Chinese decision, Secretary of State Colin Powell said, 'We will be watching their build-up carefully, see how they spend this money, see if it in any way is threatening to our interests in our region or whether it's just modernization, because they need modernization.' He added, 'We will also be especially sensitive to how this build-up relates to its situation to Taiwan, whether it presents a new threat to Taiwan, and we'll look at that carefully.'⁵

On March 7, 2001, testifying before the International Relations Committee of the US House of Representatives, Powell lent his support to Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organization (WHO), but has stopped short of a pledge to push for an observer role for the country in the upcoming meeting of the World Health Assembly.⁶ Although he noted that the US policy has been that membership in international organizations, such as the WHO, that requires statehood be reserved for China, Powell's open support for Taiwan's participation in the WHO went further than the Clinton administration. Powell said he was disappointed that the Clinton administration 'did nothing' in helping Taiwan to participate in international organizations.

In the same testimony, he also reiterated: 'Under no circumstances will we ever tolerate anything that changes the status of Taiwan unless it is being changed as a result of open, free, balanced negotiations between the two parties, which is what was anticipated by the original Taiwan Relations Act and the three communiqués and President Nixon's opening back in 1972.'

In his second day, March 8, testimony, Powell told the House committee that the US would abide by President Reagan's 1982 promise that Washington would not

consult Beijing beforehand on its arms sales to Taiwan.⁷ Just as interesting, in the two-day testimony, Powell twice used 'the Republic of China' to address Taiwan. That was most unusual. Since 1979, few, if any at all, US high foreign-affairs officials have used Taiwan's official name in the Congress and for that matter any other government organizations. Powell's verbal expression was welcome in Taipei but more than irritating in Beijing. Xinhua (New China News Agency) reported that China was deeply concerned and displeased. Chinese vice foreign minister Li Zhaoxing was quoted to say that the US government had apologized. However, the State Department spokesperson, Richard Boucher, denied the apology report but confirmed that China had made an inquiry and the US assured China that no policy change was intended.⁸

Bush's China policy has so far worried Beijing so much that they have taken initiatives by sending a number of high-level delegations to the United States to lobby the Bush administration not to sell advanced weaponry, such as Aegis destroyers and Patriot-3 missiles, to Taiwan and not to include Taiwan in its TMD program. The most prominent guest so far was Vice Premier Qian Qichen who went to Washington on March 18 to carry out week-long intensive lobbying activities, without a US-initiated invitation. That was most unusual, clearly indicating Beijing's anxiety about the new administration's changing China policy.⁹

When Bush met Qian on March 22, the president reportedly assured the vice premier that it was in the US best interest to have good relations with China and nothing we do is a threat to you, and I want you to tell that to your leadership.¹⁰ However, Bush also said he would honor US obligations to Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act and provide defensive weapons to Taiwan. He was critical of China's human rights record. He told Qian: 'Our relationship will move forward, but it would certainly be a lot easier to move forward in a constructive way when [the] people with whom we conduct our affairs honor religious freedom within their borders.' He demanded the release of detained US-based sociologist Gao Zhan and complained the way Gao, husband and their five-year-old son, an American citizen, were arrested and separately held in jail in Beijing for almost a month.¹¹

Bush accepted Qian's invitation to visit China later of the year when Bush attends the APEC summit in Shanghai. Some newspaper reports on the Bush-Qian meeting declared it as '*ge-shuo ge-hua*' (you say yours and I say mine) or '*mao-he shen-li*' (meeting in appearance but far apart in spirit).¹²

At the time, there was a reported defection of a high-ranking PLA official, who was in charge of North American affairs. He was part of a Chinese military delegation that visited Canada and the US last December and went missing while visiting the US east coast.¹³ That further strained the already frosty Sino-US relations.

The *South China Morning Post's* March 24 headline 'US identifies Beijing as its enemy number one' seems alarmist.¹⁴ The report asserts: 'The prospect of a new arms race and a deterioration in relations between Washington and Beijing rose sharply at the weekend after reports of a switch in United States defense strategy, with China supplanting Russia as the US's primary foe.' It reports that the US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has told President Bush that he plans sweeping changes in military policy to redirect the thrust of US strategic planning toward China.

However, no one expected the US-China strategic competition, indeed confrontation, came so soon. Only barely two and a half months into his presidency, George Bush was forced to face Jiang Zemin eyeball-to-eyeball in the April 1 crisis over a collision of an American Navy EP-3 surveillance aircraft and Chinese F-8 fighter jet in the South China Sea. The Chinese jet crashed killing the pilot while the American plane was forced to have an emergency landing on Hainan Island, with both crew and plane held by the Chinese authorities. Bush's initial reaction was firm but restrained. He made a brief announcement on April 2, stating, 'Our priorities are the prompt and safe return of the crew and the return of the aircraft without further damaging and tampering.' Next day, when it became clear Beijing was defiant, Bush said, "The accident has the potential of undermining our hopes for a fruitful and productive relationship between our two countries. To keep that from happening, our servicemen and women need to come home."¹⁵

Chinese initial verbal statements were also tough. In Beijing, on April 3, the government spokesman, Zhu Bangzhao, quoting Jiang Zemin, said, 'Jiang said we cannot understand why the United States is flying so close to the Chinese side, and after bumping our plane, they violated international law, landing without our permission. So the United States should stop such practices in Chinese airspace, so this doesn't happen again in the interests of Sino-US relations.' Jiang was quoted to say, 'The responsibility fully lies with the American side. We have full evidence for that.'¹⁶ On April 4, the official Xinhua news agency quoted Jiang as saying, 'The United States should apologize to the Chinese for this incident and bear all responsibility for the consequences.'

Responding to Jiang's demand, Colin Powell said, 'We have nothing to apologize for,' while the White House press secretary, Ari Fleischer, said, 'The accident took place over international airspace, over international waters, and we do not understand any reason to apologize. The United States did not do anything wrong.'¹⁷

After eleven days' tense negotiations, with a carefully drafted letter to Beijing, Bush did not apologize but did express regrets over the death of the Chinese fighter pilot and landing the US EP-3 plane on Hainan without Beijing's official permission that saved the Chinese face and resulted in the release of the 23-member crew.¹⁸ It would take another three months' further negotiations before the disabled plane was finally allowed to be brought back to the US soil.

In short, in the first half of 2001, things were shaping up badly for the Sino-US relations. There was no sight of strategic partnership and George Bush was taking a tougher, more hawkish, stand than Bill Clinton on China. Indeed, China and America have become open strategic rivals.

VI. CONCLUSION: IRONY OF CHANGE

During the March 18 presidential campaign, not only China openly attacked Chen Shui-bian as a traitorous independence advocate, other four candidates, Lien Chan, James Soong, Hsu Hsin-Liang and Lee Ao, also all criticized Chen as dangerous and reckless. Even Lee Teng-hui, while campaigning for Lien Chan, constantly pointed out that as a life-long protagonist for Taiwan independence, Chen's presidency would jeopardize

Taiwan's security and prosperity. In spite of the scare campaign against him, Chen won the election.

However, once in power, Chen Shui-bian has handled Taiwan's China policy with great care and indeed retreated from Lee Teng-hui's 'state-to-state' position. At times, it seemed Chen was ready to return to the so-called 1992 consensus of 'one China with separate interpretations' (*yi-ge zhongguo ge-zhi biao-shu*), or rather the 'agree to disagree' expediency that had been totally unpalatable to him before. People would argue his advocacy for 'one future China' and 'integration' is tantamount to surrendering his Taiwan independence stance and accepting the 'one China' principle. Although the criticism is not fair, it does hit the most vulnerable spot of Chen Shui-bian's presidency.

The apparent retreat shows how difficult and weak is the new president's position in Taiwan's vibrant but volatile and chaotic democracy. There is still no strong popular support for Taiwan independence. Most Taiwanese prefer status quo. Just as seriously, Chen's new government does not have a working majority in the unruly parliament. The opposition parties led by the rancorous KMT insist Chen's Executive Yuan does not have a mandate to govern. They have succeeded paralyzing the executive branch of the government and made Chen's presidency virtually a lame duck.

It also shows different political leaderships between Chen Shui-bian and Lee Teng-hui. In terms of policy toward China, Lee proved to be tougher, more hawkish, more ready and proactive in challenging Chinese irredentism than Chen. Lee has proven to be a master politician in brinkmanship, while Chen has yet to develop such political nerve and acumen. It is probably too early and unfair to compare the two presidencies and reach such a conclusion, but many people do make such a comparison and reach such a conclusion.

Lee Teng-hui's *kendo* spirit and training seems to have made him a formidable player in the power game in which Taiwan is the smallest and weakest party. He seemed to thrive in the game and show great political instinct and judgment. Trained as a lawyer, Chen Shui-bian, in comparison, seems more cautious, pragmatic and ready to compromise, although in the past, he had shown to be a tough oppositionist.

The irony of history is that KMT's Lee Teng-hui was supposed to be anti- while DPP's Chen Shui-bian pro-independence, yet the opposite seems to have emerged. While Bill Clinton was tilting toward China and trying to foster strategic partnership with Beijing, Lee Teng-hui played high-stack poker game, pushed the limits of US policy and tested Chinese patience to the extreme. Now, it seems George Bush is getting tougher toward Beijing, but Chen Shui-bian yet to be able to positively respond and follow suit.

In the States, George Bush has shown to be more hawkish and ready to take on China as a strategic opponent. Thus, while Lee Teng-hui's tough China policy at times pushed Clinton to an uncomfortable confrontational awkwardness, Chen Shui-bian has so far spared not only Clinton the anguish but made Bush look more anti-China than he. The contrast may be superficial at present, nevertheless is interesting to observe.

Chen Shui-bian's retreat from Lee Teng-hui's 'state-to-state' position, is a matter of great concern as well as a subject of different interpretations in Taiwan. Many Taiwan independence advocates feel betrayed and disappointed. However, with his

weak political position that may not be altered even after the parliamentary elections later of the year, and his second term in 2004 uncertain to say the least, Chen is between a rock and a hard place. He will need a great deal of Lee's *kendo* spirit and brinkmanship to confront an increasingly strong China and push for the new Taiwanese nationhood. He may yet bring the Taiwanese people to Canaan. However, at present the sight of the promised land is too far to be seen.

FOOTNOTES

1. These survey figures can be found on the Mainland Affairs Council's web site, *www.mac.gov.tw*.
2. In early December 2000, the newest opinion survey showed the same trend, *China Times*, December 4, 2000.
3. The speech is published in *Taipei Journal*, May 26, 2000, pp. 2-3.
4. John Pomfret, 'Beijing Sets 18% Rise in Spending for Military,' *Washington Post*, March 6, 2001.
5. *South China Morning Post*, March 7, 2001.
6. *Taipei Times*, March 9, 2001.
7. *China Times*, March 10, 2001.
8. *South China Morning Post*, March 14, 2001; *China Times*, March 14, 2001.
9. For more details on Bush's hawkish China policy and Beijing's reaction, see Murray Hiebert and Sudan V. Lawrence, 'Dangerous Brinkmanship,' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 15, 2001, pp. 16-21.
10. *South China Morning Post*, March 23 and 24, 2001.
11. Earlier when Qian Qichen met Colin Powell, Powell condemned the arrest and separation of the son from his parents by the Chinese authorities as 'particularly outrageous.'
12. *China Times*, March 23 and 24, 2001.
13. *South China Morning Post*, March 24, 2001.
14. *South China Morning Post*, March 26, 2001.
15. *International Herald Tribune*, April 2, 4, 2001.
16. *International Herald Tribune*, April 4, 2001.
17. *International Herald Tribune*, April 5, 2001; *South China Morning Post*, April 5, 2001.
18. *USA Today*, April 12, 2001.

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