

Asia Times
Daily, 2003, 2003

United States needs to rethink the 'one China' policy

28.11 By Richard Kagan

Rather than continue with a status quo that denies Taiwanese self-determination and feeds the militancy of China, the US should seek a regional arrangement to protect Taiwan, and to utilise the island's resources for the development of mainland China

SHANGHAI, 1972. Then US president Richard Nixon and secretary of state Henry Kissinger agree with chairman Mao Zedong and foreign minister Zhou Enlai to recognise that there is one China, and that Taiwan is part of China. This becomes known as the Shanghai Communiqué. More than a generation later this policy is strongly maintained. And it is today out of date at best, and the potential cause of war at worst.

In terms of international diplomacy, declarations and communiqués are not law. They are statements made by leaders to establish a working policy for international relationships. Although they provide order for a limited period of time, they usually outlive their purpose.

The "one China" policy was declared in

China. The people of Taiwan had no say in the matter whatsoever. The policy was created to keep China out of the Vietnam War, to counterbalance the Soviet Union with China and to open markets for America. The Chinese wanted control of Taiwan because it was seen as an imperialist controlled bridge to Asia. It had been used in the Korean War to provide resources to American troops, and in the Vietnam War to provide human and material assistance to Saigon.

The original purpose of this agreement is no longer valid or relevant. The Vietnam War is over, the Soviet Union has imploded and the US has plenty of trade with China.

However, since 1972, the Beijing authorities have created a muscular myth about Taiwan's identity and China's rights to it. Beijing has even retained the right to use force against a Taiwan that would claim independence or that would put off the decision of reuniting with China too long.

This full-scale propaganda is not unlike the Nazi claim to be an extension of the Holy Roman Empire, or the Islamic fundamentalist claim to reunite the Middle East and Asia.

The 'one China' policy was declared in China. The people of Taiwan had no say in the matter. The policy was created to keep China out of the Vietnam War, to counter-balance the Soviet Union with China and to open markets for America. The original purpose of this agreement is no longer valid or relevant. The Vietnam War is over, the Soviet Union has imploded and the US has plenty of trade with China

China even displays maps of the period of the Han dynasty which show Taiwan and its major cities across the Taiwan Strait. Would maps of ancient Rome show Little Italy in New York?

Why is "one China" harmful? First, the policy limits the US' range of options in East Asia. We are blackmailed by our own policy. Any statement that recognises Taiwan's right to be a member of international organisations, or to receive international aid (such as from the Red Cross or World Health Organisation) is immediately attacked for undermining the "one China" policy.

Second, the claim for "one China" is a recent manifestation of China's nationalism and socialism. Before 1900, there was little mention of "one China." In fact the term "Middle Kingdom" to refer to China was not extensively used until the early 20th century. The term was made current by the imperialists who wanted to call China by a name other than the flowery names or dynastic names that were in vogue.

The policy perpetuates a myth that is used to justify the subjugation and control of an island that has never been under the authority of the Beijing government.

Third, Taiwan is a democratic country of 23 million citizens. President Chen Shui-bian has stirred up the American and Chinese diplomatic community by suggesting that the nation should be called "Taiwan" and not the Republic of China. And that there might be a referendum on independence. Chen argues that "the people of Taiwan firmly believe that there is one country on each side of the Strait," one China and one Taiwan."

To allow Beijing's intimidations of Taiwan to hamper an authentic expression of the people's will on the basis of a myth is contrary to all of our principles of democracy and freedom. It is important for the US leadership to show Beijing why an independent Taiwan is healthy for them, and subduing Taiwan is unhealthy.

Taiwan could be an excellent offshore base for independent and unfettered technological and industrialised development. Taiwan as a business development centre could accelerate China's economic develop-

ment. Taiwan's democracy could become a model for China's own political modernisation. The sharing of economic, intellectual, cultural and political ideas would be expedited by a free and equal Taiwan.

The undermining of Taiwan's political system, or an outright attack on Taiwan would force China into a post-colonial relationship with the population. This relationship would drain the resources of China, contribute to tremendous ill feeling, and result finally in the hollowing out of Taiwan. Both Taiwan and China would become losers.

Rather than continue with a status quo that is destructive of the morale of the Taiwanese people, and feeds the militancy of China, the US should seek a regional arrangement to protect Taiwan, and to utilise Taiwan's resources for the development of China. New thinking is required to change our policies. Otherwise, we will find ourselves in a dead end that is more costly, and less free for all concerned. —Courtesy Taipei Times

The writer is professor of East Asian studies at Hamline University, Minnesota