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THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND TAIWAN

by Laurence M. Vance
January 3, 2017

There are 194 recognized countries in the world, all of which are member states of the United Nations (UN), except for Vatican City. There are also Palestine, Kosovo, and Taiwan.

Palestine, which is recognized by 136 UN member states, is one of two permanent nonmember observer states at the UN, the other being Vatican City. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. It is recognized by 114 UN member states. Taiwan, which is officially the Republic of China (ROC), represented China at the UN until 1971, but lost its UN membership after China, officially the People's Republic of China (PRC), was given China's seat.

The island of Taiwan (the world's fourth-highest island), which comprises 99 percent of the territory under control of the ROC, is about 100 miles off the coast of mainland China. It was previously called Formosa. The civil war between the Chinese communists and nationalists that began in 1927 was interrupted by World War II and the need to fight against the Japanese. Fighting between the Chinese factions resumed in 1946. Major hostilities ended in 1949 with the PRC controlling the Chinese mainland under Mao Zedong, perhaps the most murderous dictator in history, and the ROC withdrawing to Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek, himself a brutal authoritarian. Millions of Chinese died during the Chinese Civil War, many of them civilians who were deliberately massacred. No armistice or peace treaty was ever signed.

China believes there is only one China in the world, claims sovereignty over Taiwan, supports national reunification, refuses diplomatic relations with any country that recognizes the

legitimacy of the government of Taiwan, and strongly opposes any formal declaration of independence by Taiwan.

So what does all of this have to do with the United States?

After World War II, the United States supported the Chinese nationalists against the Chinese communists. The Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and Taiwan, which was signed in 1954 and came into force in 1955, provided that if one country came under attack, the other would come to its aid with military support. What this meant, of course, was that the United States would defend Taiwan from an attack by China, not the other way around. The U.S. Taiwan Defense Command, composed of personnel from all branches of the U.S. military, was headquartered in Taiwan's capital, Taipei. The Treaty ended in 1980, a year after the United States established diplomatic relations with the PRC.

The Formosa Resolution, passed by Congress with only three dissenting votes in the Senate and the House, and signed into law by Dwight Eisenhower in 1955, authorized the president to “employ the Armed Forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa” in case of an attack by China.

The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 established de facto diplomatic relations with the “governing authorities on Taiwan” so as to “help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific and to promote the foreign policy of the United States by authorizing the continuation of commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan.” The Act states that it is the policy of the United States “to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character” and “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 on Taiwan.”

Three Joint Communiqués issued by the United States and China in 1972, 1979, and 1982 regarding U.S.-China relations have statements in them about Taiwan.

All administrations since that of Jimmy Carter's have had to balance a “one China” policy with the requirement to support Taiwan diplomatically and militarily. Last year, the Obama administration announced a \$1.83 billion arms-sales agreement with Taiwan, the first arms shipments to Taiwan in four years. Total sales since 1990 have surpassed more than \$46 billion.

Tensions between China and the United States and between China and Taiwan have risen dramatically since Donald Trump took a congratulatory phone call from the president of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, a few weeks after winning the U.S. presidential election. It was the first time a U.S. president or president-elect had spoken with a Taiwanese leader since 1979. China's foreign ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang, immediately issued a formal complaint about Trump's action and reminded the United States that “there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is an inseparable part of the Chinese territory.” He urged “the relevant side in the U.S. to adhere to the ‘one China’ policy, abide by the pledges in the three joint China-U.S. communiqués, and handle issues related to Taiwan carefully and properly to avoid causing unnecessary interference to the overall China-U.S. relationship.”

In an early response to those who disapproved of his contact with the Taiwanese president, Trump tweeted, “Interesting how the U.S. sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment but I should not accept a congratulatory call.”

Bonnie Glaser, senior advisor for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, was quick to criticize Trump: “President-elect Trump is just shooting from the hip, trying to take phone calls of congratulatory messages from leaders around the world without consideration for the implications.”

During his daily briefing a few days later, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest was also critical of Trump: “It’s unclear exactly what the strategic effort is, what the aim of the strategic effort is, and it’s unclear exactly what potential benefit could be experienced by the United States, China, or Taiwan, but I’ll leave that to them to explain.”

Some conservatives have praised Trump’s actions, especially those who advocate a more confrontational approach to “Red” China.

The Cold War is over, and has been for almost 30 years now. Taiwan is a leftover sore point that could spark a conflict between the United States and China, military or economic, but more than likely an economic conflict. Although the United States is the largest importer of Chinese goods, Trump has been critical of Chinese trade policy and has proposed increasing tariffs on Chinese imports.

There is one word that sums up what the policy of the United States toward China and Taiwan should have been, should be now, and should be in the future: neutrality.

The United States should not take sides in foreign civil wars. The United States should not take sides in foreign disputes. The United States should not guarantee the security of any country. The United States should not go abroad seeking monsters to destroy.

It doesn’t matter what form of government a country has. It doesn’t matter who the ruler of a country is. It doesn’t matter what a country’s domestic policies are. It doesn’t matter what a country’s foreign policies are.

The United States should be at peace with all nations. The United States should engage in commerce with all nations. The United States should be friendly to all nations. The United States should avoid entangling alliances with any nation. Exactly as our third president, Thomas Jefferson, articulated in his first inaugural address: “Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none.”

Neutrality is simply the foreign policy of the Founding Fathers. Jefferson expressed the idea in many of his writings:

I have used my best endeavors to keep our country uncommitted in the troubles which afflict Europe, and which assail us on every side.

The satisfaction you express, fellow citizens, that my endeavors have been unremitting to preserve the peace and independence of our country, and that a faithful neutrality has been observed towards all the contending powers, is highly grateful to me.

Since this happy separation, our nation has wisely avoided entangling itself in the system of European interests, has taken no side between its rival powers, attached itself to none of its ever-changing confederacies.

We ask for peace and justice from all nations; and we will remain uprightly neutral in fact.

No nation has strove more than we have done to merit the peace of all by the most rigorous impartiality to all.

We have produced proofs, from the most enlightened and approved writers on the subject, that a neutral nation must, in all things relating to the war, observe an exact impartiality towards the parties.

Neutrality checks presidential power. Neutrality prevents foreign hatred of America and Americans. Neutrality keeps U.S. soldiers from dying in senseless foreign wars. Neutrality doesn't drain the treasury. Neutrality ensures that the military is not misused. Neutrality is incompatible with empire. Neutrality respects the sovereignty of other nations. Neutrality guarantees a noninterventionist foreign policy. Neutrality is an "America first" foreign policy. Neutrality is a moral foreign policy. Neutrality is a sane foreign policy. Neutrality is the right foreign policy.