

# The Non-Existent State of Affairs: Reexamining the One China Policy

by

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Presented on April 9, 2006  
Intercollegiate Taiwanese American Student Association  
2006 West Coast Conference  
Los Angeles, CA

Dr. Laurence J. Peter (1919-1990) was a famous professor at the University of Southern California in the 1960's who was best known to the general public for the formulation of the Peter Principle<sup>1</sup> in which he said "Bureaucracy defends the *status quo* long past the time when the quo has lost its status."

Dr. Peter could have been referring to the international communities' response to the situation in Taiwan. It is long past the time when the "the existing state of affairs"<sup>2</sup> actually exists or that anyone really understands or can articulate what the status quo means. This state of affairs creates uncertainty and confusion, which breeds misunderstanding and miscalculation, which could lead to disaster.

With the rise of China economically, politically and militarily it is increasingly important to the strategic interests of democracies in the Pacific region, and around the world, to clarify their position on the question of Taiwan.

Last year, United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, James Kelly, testified before the House International Relations Committee, and when pressed on defining the "one China" policy, he admitted he could not "easily define it," opting instead to say what it was not, "It is not the one-China policy or the one-China principle that Beijing suggests, and it may not be the definition that some would have in Taiwan."<sup>3</sup>

Describing what the one-China policy isn't, does not describe what it is, and qualifying what one means by the *status quo*, clearly does not indicate that there is a general sense of agreement of what defines the *status quo*.

*Alice in Wonderland* said it best, "it would be nice if something made sense for a change" The primary dilemma facing many democratic governments, including the United States, Japan, and Australia, is that maintaining a *status quo* does not make sense in light of the changes that have taken place in Taiwan, China, and the world over the past 33 years. The notion of *status quo* – things existing as they have in the past – defies reality. Public policy does not operate in a vacuum, nor is it set in stone. An alert, conscientious, and thriving democracy examines its policies in light of new understanding and new sensibilities, and acts accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> The Peter Principle: "In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence."

<sup>2</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition

<sup>3</sup> 5/2005 Foreign Service Journal, The "One China" Policy: Terms of Art p. 61

## Background on U.S. Policy

In the United States, the pillars of U.S. policy with respect to Taiwan were built in the shadows of the Cold War, and rest on the 1972 Shanghai Communique; the 1979 Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the U.S. and the PRC; the 1982 U.S.-China Communique on Arms-Sales; and the 1979 Taiwan-Relations Act. From 1971 to 1989, U.S. – China relations were sustained by an understanding that ignored the paramount conflict of their essential interests. It is what former U.S. Ambassador to China, James Lilley recently referred to in a speech at Brown University as the “Waltz of the Hypocrites.” An understanding based on pretense: China *pretends* to have a “policy of peaceful unification with Taiwan,” in return the United States *pretends* to have a one-China policy.”

## China's Current Reality

However, China's pretense of a “peaceful policy” towards Taiwan has eroded significantly since 1993.

- From 1992 to the present, China's military spending has increased annually at double-digit rates.
- In August 1993, with the issuance of a “white paper” on Taiwan relations, Beijing reiterated that “any sovereign state is entitled to use any means it deems necessary, including military ones, to uphold its sovereignty and territorial integrity” and asserted that “the Chinese Government is under no obligation to undertake any commitment to any foreign power or people intending to split China as to what means it might use to handle its own domestic affairs.”<sup>4</sup>
- In March 1996, the Chinese People's Liberation Army tested nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missiles in the Taiwan Strait, again closing that important sea-lane to international traffic, in an effort to intimidate Taiwan's voters during their first presidential election.
- In August 1999, Chinese high-performance jet fighters began to patrol the Taiwan Strait challenging Taiwan jet fighters and raising tensions.
- In February 2000, China issued another white paper which called for the use of “all drastic measures possible including the use of force” if Taiwan did not declare itself part of China and agree to negotiations by a certain date.<sup>5</sup>

On March 14, 2005, China's National People's Congress went even further by enacting an anti-secession law. This measure enshrines in law the PRC's determination to prevent “independence forces” from separating Taiwan from China, warning that should peaceful means prove futile in reunification efforts, the government of Beijing “shall employ non-peaceful means and other measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity...”

## Destroying the *Status-Quo*

By any measure, and however you define it, the actions taken by China over the past 12 years have destroyed the *status quo*. The international communities' acceptance of the illusion of the *status quo* has allowed China to escalate its military spending, codified implicit threats of war

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<sup>4</sup> Beijing's August 30, 1993, white paper on The Taiwan Question and the Reunification of China.

<sup>5</sup> China State Council, Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office, “The One-China Principal and the Taiwan Issue,” February 21, 2000.

against Taiwan, and consolidated its economic power. Instead of creating stability and advancing a peaceful resolution, China has upset the balance of power in the region.

A China that dwarfs other countries in the region creates political instability and uncertainty. This situation is especially worrisome since China continues to grow stronger at the expense of its neighbors, such as ASEAN nations, Japan and Taiwan. Ultimately, a China too dominant economically will lead to a China too dominant politically and militarily as well.

### Taiwan's Current Reality

Meanwhile Taiwan has followed a very different path. Without international support or recognition the country has emerged as the only indigenous democracy in Asia. Following a path of peaceful transition, Taiwan is a model for emerging democracies.

- In 1987, the totalitarian regimen of Chiang Kai-shek which claimed that there is only one China and that Taiwan is a part of China was dissolved and martial law was lifted.
- The people of Taiwan elected, for the first time, their representatives to parliament in 1992.
- In 1996, Taiwan held its first nationwide Presidential election.
- The year 2000 saw the democratic transfer of power from the KMT to the DPP.
- Currently, Taiwan is the 16th largest economy in the world, enjoys unrestricted freedom of speech and press and the people of Taiwan are free to choose their own government.

### Changing World Views

It is clear that the Cold-War policies of the past no longer apply to today's realities. Therefore, democracies of the world need to define a new strategic reality in dealing with both Taiwan and China. This process is beginning to occur.

- In June of 2004, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, created by Congress to monitor China/Taiwan/U.S. relations, issued a report calling for a reassessment of the one-China policy, either to abandon it all together or refine it to exclude Taiwan from China because it does not take into account the realities.
- In February 2005, a resolution was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives that expresses the sense of Congress that: (1) the President should abandon the "One China Policy" in favor of a "One China, One Taiwan Policy" that recognizes the Republic of China on Taiwan as a sovereign government; (2) the President should begin the process of resuming normal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan; and (3) the Republic of China on Taiwan should be permitted to participate as a full member in international organizations for which statehood is a membership requirement.
- John Tkacik a Senior Research Fellow in Asian Studies at the Washington, D.C. based Heritage Foundation proposed in April 2005 that the status-quo that is central to America's one-China policy is undefined and internally contradictory and recommended that the Administration define its position.
- Dr. Paul Monk, former head of the China division in Australia's Defense Intelligence Organization called for a radical rethink of Australia and the West's policy on China. In his book, *Thunder from the Silent Zone*, he warns that the Australian and United States foreign policy approach to China's claims of sovereignty over Taiwan are inherently dangerous and risk provoking a bloody cross-straits conflict.

- In November 2005 during a trip to Japan, President Bush praised Taiwan's democracy and called for China to emulate it. "By embracing freedom at all levels, Taiwan has delivered prosperity to its people and created a free and democratic Chinese society," Bush said. Pointing to Taiwan -- as well as South Korea -- Bush said political freedoms are the inevitable product of the kind of economic liberalization China has begun pursuing.

### Conclusions

Maintaining the "*status-quo*", maintains the illusion that the one-China principal is a valid policy that accurately reflects the realities in the region. The reality is -- no country on earth treats Taiwan as though it were a part of China. The international community deals with Taiwan economically, militarily, strategically, politically, commercially, and in every other way as separate from China. The international community needs to stand united in supporting and defending Taiwan's democracy and should not be bound by the "so-called" one-China policy when dealing with Taiwan. Humoring China on the Taiwan issue does not best serve the international community and only encourages Beijing's totalitarian regime in its military, economic and political encroachment.

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The Formosa Foundation is a non-profit organization based in Los Angeles, California, whose mission is to promote democracy and the right to self-determination of the Taiwanese people.