

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

A. Conclusion

After the end of Cold War, the United States had become the sole superpower with military, political, and economic dominance. However, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 created instability of the US's predominant status. The twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which were destroyed for the first time by non-state actors, were symbols of US financial, political, and military power. The terrorist attacks caused a dramatic change in US foreign policy. The new objective of US global strategy as well as foreign policy was the destruction of terrorism, specifically starting the "war on terror." Consequently, the Bush administration emphasized a more security-oriented agenda and sought for a multilateral approach to combat terrorism. The changing of US strategy affected almost the whole world including the East Asia region.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the changes of US foreign policy towards East Asia under the Bush administration. The new major international challenges are seen through the changes in US foreign policy towards Taiwan, especially the long-term relationship between the US and Taiwan, and the large amount of American interest on Taiwan has become a strategic signal of the principle of US strategy in Asia. The research questions were raised to investigate the changing of American foreign policy

and to analyze factors influencing the formulation of foreign policy under the Bush administration.

The first question is regarding the characteristics of US policy towards Taiwan under the George W. Bush administration during both the first and second terms. The second question focuses on the major objective of US policy towards Taiwan while the third and the fourth questions emphasize influential factors, both domestic and international, affecting the formulation of US policy towards Taiwan under the Bush's presidency, especially the impact of the US-China relations on shaping US Taiwan policy.

To answer the first question, President George W. Bush initially took office with the policy of 'strategic clarity' in favor of Taiwan's defense. The indications of the greatly supportive policy towards Taiwan are: the approval of a major sale of weapons, including diesel submarines which had been repeatedly denied from the previous US governments in concern of China's reaction; the statement of President Bush that the US would do whatever it took to defend Taiwan, affirming the US commitment to defend Taiwan; as well as the encouragement of the visits from Taiwan's high-ranking officials to the United States. These actions of the government were perceived as the strongest sign of increasing US support for Taiwan in early Bush's first term.

However, September 11th caused dramatic change in the US policy towards Taiwan. The Bush administration had moved away from the strategic clarity to be ambiguous on Taiwan's defense. The "dual deterrence" approach in which the US warned Taiwan of the consequences of moving towards independence, at the same time

as continuing to issue warnings deterring China from making use of military force, had been applied in order to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

The shift of the Bush administration's policy occurred after the 9/11 incident and continued to the end of Bush's second term could be seen by: President Bush's statement that the US opposed any unilateral actions to change the status quo, especially by Taiwan's leader, in response to President Chen Shui-bian's plan to hold referendums concerning constitutional reform; the refusal of Chen's request to land in New York City to refuel on his way to Central America, while allowing Ma Ying-jeou—the leader of the opposition Kuomintang Party who had quite better relations with China—to make public speeches during his trip to the United States; the US's block on Taiwan's bid for the UN under the name "Taiwan;" and the freeze of US arms transfers to Taiwan in 2008. Importantly, for US-Taiwan relations, arms sales were interpreted as more political symbolism of US support for Taiwan rather than US military service. These actions reflected the new trend of US Taiwan policy which was conducted to serve the US strategic interest which leads to the answer of the second question.

To answer the second research question, the framework of national interest was very helpful to analyze the main objective of US Taiwan policy under the Bush administration that faced new international challenges. Taiwan used to be considered important to the US national interest in many aspects, including economic, strategic and political values. Specifically, the strategic interest on Taiwan has been crucial as a means to contain the rise of China during the Cold War. Moreover, Taiwan's transition from a one-party authoritarian state under martial law to a vibrant democracy with democratic

political pluralism created a positive basis for American support. Nevertheless, the new US strategy after September 11, 2001 increased China's leverage and forced the US to adjust its policy to accommodate China in exchange of Chinese cooperation on the war on terror and also on nuclear proliferations problems. The US then had to restrain Taiwan's steps towards greater independence initiated by President Chen Shui-bian as the US did not want the Taiwan issue to become a problem in its relations with China. Moreover, the Bush administration did not want to increase tensions in the Taiwan Strait, in which the US involvement would be inevitable, while engaging the war against terrorism. Consequently, the US foreign policy towards Taiwan, and also cross-Strait relations, after the attacks of terrorism became aimed at maintaining the status quo, with emphasis on restraining Taiwan's provocation towards greater independence.

Even though the Bush administration had to satisfy China in exchange of Chinese cooperation, it did not entirely leave Taiwan to be coerced by Chinese military. With its hand full fighting the war on terrorism, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US just wanted to keep Taiwan from creating another, unnecessary, tension in Asia by reiterating that the US opposed any unilateral actions to change the status quo and it was in the US interest to preserve peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. This trend of US policy began after the attacks of terrorism and continued throughout the Bush's presidency.

To answer the third question, the linkage approach was applied to analyze the influential factors affecting the formulation of US Taiwan policy under the Bush administration. In general, the US Taiwan policy has illustrated tensions between the executive branch: the White House; the National Security Council (NSC); the National

Economic Council (NEC); and the bureaucracy—which are officially committed to the “One China” principle and often seek non-confrontational relations with China, and the legislative branch: Congress—which is more responsive to Taiwan’s lobbying efforts and always pushing to increase support for Taiwan.

However, under the eight years of the Bush’s presidency, there was a significant adjustment of US policy towards Taiwan influenced by a changing international environment, especially the attacks of September 11 which directly affected US security interests. As President George W. Bush—who began his first and second administrations with a majority of his party, the Republicans, in both the House and Senate—came into office in 2001 with a position of pro-Taiwan, seeing China as an actual threat to American interests, the foreign policies favoring Taiwan increased by a large amount. The reason behind the greater support for Taiwan came from President Bush’s own perception. The President, and also his top’s advisers, had shared common values with many members of Congress in holding up the democratic values, human rights, free and just society, as well as military supremacy, these values were derived from the neo-conservative ideology. The influence of neo-cons on American foreign policy was obvious through the US arms sales to Taiwan, which neo-cons supporters considered the arms sales a key to keep Taiwan free from Chinese coercion. The US Taiwan policy before the attacks of September 11, 2001 seemed to be dominated by the US domestic dynamic in which the President took control of the entire executive branch and the legislative branch gave the strong support for the administration policy. Still, it could not be denied that one reason of the pro-Taiwan policy of the Bush’s administration was to

deter the rise of China's power, especially after China's achievement of military modernization.

Nonetheless, the new international challenges forced the US to diverge from unilateralism to multilateralism. The 9/11 incident affected the whole US global strategy including US foreign policy towards Taiwan. The Bush administration needed cooperation with China, in sharing intelligence and in coordinating the interception of suspicious shipments to or from rogue states in particular, a key to achieve its main strategic goal—winning the war on terror. Therefore, despite being concerned about the threat of China to US dominance, the US had to adjust its policy towards Taiwan from greatly supportive to deterring Taiwan's provocative action to break the status quo. Subsequently, the administration began to minimize congressional actions against China while expanding authority for the President in shaping foreign policy in favor of China. It was clear that international environment had greatly influenced the US Taiwan policy under the Bush administration, especially the wake of September 11 that caused a dramatic change in the US global strategy and increased China's leverage on shaping foreign policy towards Taiwan.

To answer the fourth question, US-China relations were perhaps the most influential external factor in the formulation of US Taiwan policy. The US Taiwan policy reflected the US-China relationship and also the US-China relationship could affect the US Taiwan policy. The implementation of a confrontational approach towards China could be confirmed by the US's supportive policy towards Taiwan, especially through arms sales policies. The sales of high profile US weapons systems have been viewed as

critical indicators of greater US support for Taiwan, in contrast they have also reflected the US hostility towards China. Under the Bush administration, the approval of a major sale of advanced weapons to Taiwan in April 2001 was a result of the US hostility towards China highlighting policymakers' concerns of the Chinese threat. Consequently, the freeze of US arms deliveries to Taiwan in 2008 was also an effect of the US's strategic partnership with China. The influence of China on US Taiwan policy could also be seen as the US's block of Taiwan bid for the UN under the name Taiwan. The important reasons of the US's restraint on Taiwan's provocations towards independence were derived from the importance of China in the US strategic calculation on the war against terror and also the development of the US-China cordial relationship under the Bush administration.

Although the Bush administration still expressed its concerns over China's economic growth, military modernization and international influence, these concerns were overshadowed by the US's efforts to gain supports from China in countering terrorism and in dealing with North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs. Therefore, the Bush administration sought to restrain Taiwan's movement towards independence and to require Taiwan to maintain the status quo, in which the US believed that maintaining status quo would best serve the US national interests. Besides keeping peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the US could enjoy constructive relations with China that became imperative to the US new global strategy after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Moreover, it could be assumed that any changes in the Bush administration's Taiwan policy reflected the ups and downs in US-China relations. While the US was developing

cordial relations with China, it was limiting its supportive policy to Taiwan to the degree that would not endanger the US-China relations.

According to the analysis of the US foreign policy towards Taiwan under the Bush's presidency, the significant outcomes were as follows: the US foreign policy towards Taiwan under the Bush administration had been the strategic clarity in favor of Taiwan's defense and adjusted to a strategic ambiguity after the attacks of September 11, 2001; the main objective of US Taiwan policy was to preserve American strategic interest in the Asia-Pacific region as well as in Taiwan through maintaining the cross-Strait 'status quo;' the formulation of US policy towards Taiwan was influenced by external factors rather than internal factors, especially the US-China relations; and finally, the development of the US-China cordial relationship derived from the importance of China in the US strategic calculation on the war against terror made the Bush administration restrain Taiwan from challenging the status quo. As a result, the hypotheses of this thesis were verified according to the several research findings.

B. Prospect

After the Bush presidency, Democratic Senator Barack Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States on November 4, 2008 and sworn in on January 20, 2009. It has been argued that the Obama administration would follow its predecessor on Taiwan policy and would be even more in favor of China than the Bush administration. Although a call for change was a hallmark of Obama's presidential campaign, the US-

China ties, developing into one of the most important bilateral relations in the world, has been marked by continuity. Engagement rather than confrontation has been the approach guiding Washington in developing positive, cooperative and comprehensive ties with Beijing. The first reason has come from an economic issue that the Obama administration has presided over the longest post-World War II economic recession.¹ Dealing with growing unemployment, and massive deficit spending, the administration needs to closely coordinate its economic recovery policy with other major international powers, particularly China. As consequence, China was generally cooperative at the G20 financial summit in Washington in November 2008. The US also asked China, along with other nations, to buy more government debt to finance its stimulus package and other crisis-related spending. At present, China has loaned a huge amount of money to the United States; it surpassed Japan as the largest foreign holder of US Treasury debt, holding of nearly US\$1 trillion².

The Obama administration has underlined common interests more than differences in its policy. In dealing with China, economic stimulus, clean energy, climate change, not human rights and currency manipulation, are now on top Washington's policy agenda. Beside these concerns, Beijing and Washington also share major common interests in dealing with issues ranging from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to growing international maritime piracy. China and the US have cooperated

¹ Jing-dong Yuan, "Obama's China Policy Takes Shape," *Asia Times Online*, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/KF09Ad01.html> (accessed July 10, 2009).

² Andrew Batson and Andrew Browne, "US Insists China Fears over Debts Unfounded," *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123698956400826279.html> (accessed July 10, 2009).

to address the North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues and increasingly the Obama administration is requesting Chinese assistance for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan³.

Nonetheless, cooperation between the US and China would not come at Taiwan's expense. This means the US Taiwan policy would remain ambiguous. Washington would continue to deter the Chinese use of force against Taiwan as long as Taiwan does not declare independence from China. As the US-Taiwan relations were irritated by President Chen Shui-bian's unpredictable political style, the new president of Taiwan Ma Ying-jeou would allow the US to repair US-Taiwan ties. Since President Ma's top agenda has been to improve relations with the central government in Beijing and Beijing is more willing to deal with Ma than Chen Shui-bian, the tendency of reconciliation between China and Taiwan would also allow the Obama administration to improve US relations with Taiwan without undermining its relations with China. According to Bonnie Glaser, Senior Associate at the Center for Strategic International Studies, President Ma has absolutely no intention to continue the confrontational approach adopted by the administration of Chen Shui-bian, rather, he is determined to end the cross-strait hostility by promoting closer trade ties and other forms of interaction between both sides. Meanwhile, Ma is also dedicated to preserving Taiwan's sovereignty and securing more international space from Beijing through peaceful negotiation in which these initiatives

³ Yuan.

help reduce the immediate sense of military threat from Beijing⁴.

Since President Hu Jintao has made the policy which emphasizes on preventing Taiwan's independence rather than achieving unification a few years ago, and Taiwan under the Ma Ying-jeou administration has pursued non-provocative policy on cross-Strait relations, the US under the Obama administration could play a more comfortable role in supporting China and Taiwan to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait in order to preserve American interests. In spite of that, there is an argument that any improvements in cross-Strait relations are likely to support short-term US goals, not the long term, especially when Taiwan's economic interests and culture identity are increasingly intertwined with China. However, as Chinese cooperation is needed on pressing global challenges, the US would be willing to strengthen ties with Taiwan as long as it does not become a problem in US-China relations. Hence, limitation of the US supportive policy on Taiwan would be that strong US ties with Taiwan only for peace and stability, not provocation.

Finally, it is remarkable to notify that though President Ma has not yet accommodate the opposition Democratic Progressive Party's attacks on his indulgent cross-Strait policy because of Taiwan's struggling economy, if Ma and his ruling Kuomintang appear to face electoral trouble—the situation could change. The assumption of the Obama administration's Taiwan and cross-Strait policy would be: as long as President Ma has no intention to challenge the status quo, the US-Taiwan-China triangle

⁴ Bonnie Glaser, Michael Swaine and Douglas H. Paal, "Taiwan's New Ma Administration: A Look Ahead," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 12, 2008, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=1129&prog=zgp&proj=znpp> (accessed May 18, 2009).

relationship could be improved; the US would remain reluctant to confront China over the Taiwan issue, therefore it would oppose any unilateral change in the status quo by either side of the Taiwan Strait, the same fundamental policy as the Bush administration.