



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 15, 2016

The Reaction in Taipei and Beijing to Trump's Openness to Taiwan

President-elect Donald Trump's willingness to accept a congratulatory phone call on December 2 from the Republic of China's (ROC) President Tsai Ing-wen and his subsequent statement on *Fox News Sunday* on December 11, that he doesn't know why the United States has to be bound by a "one China" policy, generated negative comments from Chinese communists on the mainland and mixed reactions among leaders of the ROC on Taiwan.



Following Trump's conversation with Tsai, the People's Republic's (PRC) foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang issued a statement asserting that "there is only one China in the world." And after Trump's statement disclaiming that the United States necessarily had to continue to support a "one China" policy, the PRC government stated that cooperation with the United States "would be out of the question" if Trump doesn't continue such a policy.

It might be expected that both of Trump's actions would be received with encouragement on Taiwan. While that assessment would be partially correct, Taiwanese optimism is undoubtedly muted by the poor treatment (ranging from abandonment to outright betrayal) the ROC government has experienced over the past 67 years from several U.S. administrations, going back to President Harry Truman.

The United States has not maintained diplomatic relations with the Republic of China since January 1, 1979, when we switched diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC on the mainland. However, the United States still maintains unofficial diplomatic relations with Taiwan through the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office.

A December 15 *New York Times* report focused on the reaction to Trump's China-related activities expressed by Lin Fei-fan, the leader of Taiwan's Sunflower Student Movement. That movement began as a protest movement formed by a coalition of students and civic groups in 2014 to protest the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) by the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party in the ROC legislature. The Sunflower protesters believed the trade pact with the PRC would hurt Taiwan's economy and leave it vulnerable to political pressure from Beijing, and they occupied the nation's legislature to protest the trade deal.

The *Times* noted that Trump's recent statements indicating that he is willing to reconsider the decades-long American policy that favors China at the expense of Taiwan has encouraged Lin and many others on Taiwan who share his mindset. However, notes the report, Lin and others on Taiwan are concerned about what Trump's China policy will be and what role Taiwan will play in the dealmaker's negotiations with communist China. Trump indicated during his interview with *Fox News Sunday* that he regards the "one China" policy as a potential bargaining chip in striking a trade deal with China, saying: "I don't know why we have to be bound by a One China policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade."



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“Many people in Taiwan worry that once Trump takes office, he’ll make a U-turn,” Lin said. “We are suspicious of his motivations.”

The *Times* reported that Lin said Trump had opened a potential path for Taiwan to gain the international recognition that he and others have been fighting to achieve for a long time.

However, Lin also indicated that he regards Trump as perhaps an unreliable ally. “We are not naïve,” Lin said. “We don’t believe that the election of a new U.S. president will necessarily bring about huge changes. But if there’s an opportunity, we will definitely not give it up.”

The *Times* report also quoted a statement from Huang Kuo-chang, chairman of the New Power Party, a young political party that emerged from the Sunflower Student Movement in 2015, who hoped to build bridges with the United States. “We need to talk to the American people so they can have a deeper understanding of Taiwan. We want to tell them that we are their true ally and that we share many common values,” said Huang.

Hsu Tse-mei, a retired bank manager in Taipei, expressed concern about how the ascendancy of Trump to the American presidency will impact the future of his country. “He’s an uncontrollable force,” he was quoted as saying by the *Times*. “We’re caught between two powerful countries, China and the United States, and we’re at the mercy of Trump.”

International political analysts have also attempted to predict how Trump’s statement regarding his lack of commitment to the “one China” policy might impact the PRC’s foreign policy. PRC President Xi Jinping has taken a strong position against independence for Taiwan and concessions he might make in that area would not only cause him to lose face, but also erode his standing within China’s Communist Party and among the Chinese public.

The *Times* cited analysts who said it would be politically difficult for Xi to offer concessions on trade or security issues after Trump’s statements questioning the “one China” policy, since Beijing has long maintained that that policy is nonnegotiable. To concede that point now would be regarded both in China and abroad as an indication that China has backed down — a sign of weakness it would be unwilling to present to the world.

In an [article posted by *The New American*](#) on December 14, conservative author Patrick Buchanan speculated about what message Trump was sending to Xi by accepting the phone call from Tsai. He summarized the very bad deal that the United States has been getting in its relations with China since the 1990s, noting that “Republicans, acting on behalf of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable, voted annually to grant Most Favored Nation trade status for China. They then voted to make it permanent and escort China into the WTO.”

Asking what China got out of the new U.S. policy, Buchanan answered: “Vast investment and \$4 trillion in trade surpluses at America’s expense over 25 years.”

Buchanan continued:

During these same decades, some of us were asking insistently what we were getting in return.

Thus Trump’s phone call [with Tsai] seemed the right signal to Beijing — while we recognize one China, we have millions of friends on Taiwan in whose future as a free people we retain an interest....

Across Asia, every capital is waiting to see how Xi Jinping responds, for a matter of face would seem to be involved.



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The ongoing dispute over whether there is “one China” or two, with one based in Beijing and the other in Taipei, is the unfortunate legacy of U.S. foreign policy back in 1949, when, during the civil war being waged in mainland China, the United States pulled the rug out from under the forces led by the anti-communist Chiang Kai-shek, allowing the communists under Mao Tse-tung to gain control of the entire mainland. This action was summarized, in part in the following excerpt from a [2001 article](#) published by *The New American*:

But there were other significant steps along the way that insured Chiang’s defeat and the loss of China. Those steps included the cease-fires forced upon Chiang when he was making military progress, our insistence that Chiang form a coalition government with the Communists, and our 10-month embargo on the sale or shipment of arms to Chiang. When the embargo was fastened upon Chiang, General George Marshall boasted: “As Chief of Staff I armed 39 anti-Communist divisions; now with a stroke of the pen I disarm them.”

Following their military defeat on the mainland, the nationalists under Chiang fled to Formosa (Taiwan), where their successors have governed ever since.

For some time after the nationalists under Chiang fled to Taiwan, they enjoyed a modicum of respect and support from the United States and other Western nations. But a series of further U.S. betrayals, culminating in the 1979 change in U.S. diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC on the mainland ensued.

As some on Taiwan fear, Trump is largely an unknown factor. He may represent an improvement in how the United States has treated Taiwan in recent decades, or he may follow the status quo. But it would be extremely difficult for even the best intentioned of American presidents to undo the damage done by his predecessors, going back to Harry Truman.

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