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CLINTON STATEMENT UNDERMINES TAIWAN

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President Bill Clinton set off a political firestorm in Taiwan and the United States when he chose to state what are known as the “three no’s” as official U.S. policy toward Taiwan. In what his advisers describe as a “low-key” meeting with Shanghai intellectuals on June 30, President Clinton said,

I had a chance to reiterate our Taiwan policy, which is that we don’t support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan—one China. And we don’t believe that Taiwan should be a member of any organization for which statehood is a requirement.

These “three no’s” have always been the policy of mainland China’s government, but U.S. policy-makers until now have carefully avoided making them U.S. policy.

Clinton Administration officials claim the President merely restated a 25-year-old policy; President Clinton himself told a questioner in Hong Kong that he did not change the U.S. position on Taiwan. The fact is that the President *did* change U.S. policy toward Taiwan. His statement in Shanghai departed from the carefully nuanced language that has allowed the United States to conduct relations with both sides of the Taiwan Strait in a manner that promotes peace and prosperity. The words President Clinton chose to use in Shanghai—words used by no previous President—have put the people of Taiwan at a severe disadvantage in their 50-year struggle with the communist government of mainland China.

How did he do this?

The United States has not taken, and should not take, a policy position on the outcome of the cross-Strait standoff. It neither endorses nor opposes Taiwan’s independence or reunification; it insists only that any eventual resolution of this conflict come through peaceful means and with the consent of the people of Taiwan. The President’s stated, or at least implied, opposition to independence for Taiwan prejudices cross-Strait negotiations. China has held the threat of military force as leverage in negotiations while Taiwan held the threat of a formal declaration of independence. Under President Clinton’s new policy, Taiwan is left at the negotiating table with no leverage and a gun to its head.

President Clinton’s statement against Taiwan’s participation in international organizations makes the United States an accomplice in China’s campaign to squeeze Taiwan into submission by isolating the island internationally. Nothing in the existing U.S.–China joint communiqués suggests or obliges the United States to oppose Taiwan’s membership in any international organization.

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The President and his advisers apparently have misread diplomatic history and misunderstood the careful way in which U.S. policy toward Taiwan was handled in the process of normalizing relations with China.

To pave the way toward the normalization of U.S.–China relations, the drafters of the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué found it necessary to remove a primary obstacle: the irreconcilable status of Taiwan. In this lies the origin of the so-called one China policy, which remains a source of controversy in China, Taiwan, and the United States. China stated its firm opposition to “any activities which aim at the creation of one China, one Taiwan.” The United States declared that it

acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.

In the 1979 Normalization Communiqué, President Jimmy Carter added that the United States

recognizes the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. Within this context, the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan.

The Normalization Communiqué left undefined the nature and mechanism by which these “unofficial relations” would be maintained. Members of both parties in Congress were angered that the Carter Administration had failed to consult with them on the terms of normalization. Congress quickly passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA, P.L. 96–8), which defined in greater detail the manner in which the United States would conduct relations with Taiwan and the way in which the President would consult with Congress on how best to provide for the defense needs of that long-time strate-

gically. The TRA further states that “nothing in this Act may be construed as a basis for supporting the exclusion or expulsion of Taiwan from continued membership in any international financial institution or any other international organization.” Notwithstanding this clear statement of policy in U.S. law, the United States failed to prevent Taiwan’s expulsion from international organizations like the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund.

President Clinton told students at Beijing University that

The best moments in our history have come when we protected the freedom of people who held unpopular opinion, or extended rights enjoyed by the many to the few who had previously been denied them, making, therefore, the promise of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution more than faded words on old parchment.

The President’s new Taiwan policy fails to meet his own standard. It fails to protect the freedom of people in Taiwan to debate or advocate opinions about independence (regardless of whether it is popular), and the Clinton Administration’s policy of international isolation denies the people of Taiwan the rights of participation “enjoyed by the many.”

To correct the flaws in his Shanghai statement, President Clinton should restate the long-standing U.S. Taiwan policy—not his revision of it in Shanghai. Consistent with the mandates of the TRA, Congress should continue to monitor the continuing relationship between the United States and Taiwan and take appropriate steps to scrutinize and correct the Clinton Administration’s Taiwan policy. The President must recognize the fact that Taiwan is a democracy—and that China is not. China seeks to impose its will by threat of military force—Taiwan does not. In a conflict between freedom and democracy versus authoritarian military force, only the side of freedom and democracy can be considered the right side of history.

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