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## BETTER U.S. TREATMENT OF TAIWAN

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Taiwan, long a special case when it comes to U.S. foreign policy, deserves better treatment at the hands of the Clinton Administration. Though its government is not officially recognized by the United States, a far-reaching U.S. law—the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act—calls for maintaining extensive legal, commercial, and defense relations with the people of Taiwan. Under these unique circumstances, Taipei has made the most of “unofficial” relations with Washington and a very positive contribution to the advancement of U.S. interests in Asia.

Taiwan’s new president, Chen Shui-bian, made a significant effort to accommodate the United States and to reach out to Beijing after his election. He proclaimed that he would not declare independence unless Taiwan were attacked, and he called for normalization of economic relations. He endorsed Beijing’s membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), boosting the likelihood of its receiving permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status from the U.S. Congress, and abided by strict State Department guidelines while visiting the United States.

On August 13, President Chen arrived in Los Angeles for a one-night stopover on his way to the Dominican Republic. In exchange for his transit visa, the State Department “requested” that Chen not engage in any public activity or meet with any public officials during his stay. Chen was even pressured into canceling a private meeting at a private home simply because some Members of Congress

planned to attend. Although the State Department said that the restrictions on Chen’s activity were consistent with the unofficial nature of U.S.–Taiwan relations and the private nature of his transit, they were a clear example of the Administration’s willingness to offend American ideals to accommodate China’s sensitivities.

For all the people of Taiwan have done to advance U.S. interests, it is time not only to challenge the legal and diplomatic basis for such restrictions, but for the Administration to treat Taiwan’s leaders in a manner consistent with that nation’s level of economic and political success.

**Poor Treatment of Taiwan.** The foundation for normal diplomatic relations with China lies in three Sino–U.S. joint communiqués that were issued in a different time and under dramatically different circumstances. Tense Cold War competition, U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, and martial law on Taiwan led U.S. officials to make accommodations and concessions to China in those documents that today seem unnecessary or counterproductive. Chief among China’s outdated notions was its desire to limit U.S. contact with Taiwan’s leaders and to isolate Taiwan from the world.

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Tough treatment of Taiwan as part of America's broader China policy is based on a particular interpretation of two policy statements in the joint communiqués. In the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, the United States "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." This is the origin of the so-called one-China policy, further refined in the 1979 Normalization Communiqué when the United States recognized "the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China" and vowed within this context to maintain only "unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan."

On the basis of these diplomatic statements, some within the U.S. government have circulated internal guidelines that severely restrict contact with Taiwan officials in the United States as well as travel to the United States by Taiwan's top leaders. These internal guidelines have led U.S. officials to oppose Taiwan's membership in most international organizations. The most formal articulation of these guidelines is the Administration's 1994 Taiwan policy review. Such constraints undermine Taiwan's standing in negotiations with Beijing and its ability to participate meaningfully in international organizations—an explicit goal of the 1994 review.

With the Cold War over, democracy thriving on Taiwan, and China's militarization of the Taiwan Strait, it is doubtful that a majority of Americans or their elected officials agree with the weight Washington currently gives to Beijing's opinion in the conduct of U.S. diplomacy, or with the tough treatment accorded Taiwan.

**Giving Taiwan Its Due.** To properly acknowledge President Chen's cooperative efforts and to reward Taiwan for its vibrant democracy, the United States should:

- **See that China and Taiwan together join the WTO.** With President Chen's endorsement of PNTR, the Senate should not find it difficult to support permanent extension of China's normal

trade status. Washington should seek the WTO accession of both China and Taiwan and should ensure that Beijing lives up to its accession commitments and does not stand in the way of Taiwan's simultaneous accession. Successful integration of both countries should enhance cross-Strait relations and be a boon to American interests.

- **Support Taiwan's participation in international organizations.** Membership in international bodies should not be viewed as part of a tit-for-tat struggle with Beijing. Handled wisely, support for Taiwan's international participation can lead to greater confidence in cross-Strait relations while allowing Taiwan to invest more of its talents and resources to the benefit of China and the world.
- **Enshrine "the assent of the Taiwan people" as a key tenet of U.S. policy.** On March 8, President Clinton declared that "the issues between Beijing and Taipei must be resolved peacefully and with the assent of the people of Taiwan." This important acknowledgement of Taiwan's democratic success should remain a key pillar of U.S. policy.
- **Remove onerous restrictions on activities of Taiwan officials in the United States.** If Hong Kong's Martin Lee, Tibet's Dalai Lama, Palestine's Yasser Arafat, and Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams can meet with the President in the White House, then surely Taiwan's democratically elected president should be allowed to do more than stay in his hotel while visiting the United States.

Such steps will require a change in thinking in Washington. Fortunately, consideration of PNTR in Congress offers the best opportunity in a long time to take steps to improve U.S.-Taiwan relations.

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