Changes and the Influences of the American Taiwan-related Policies under the Global Epidemic Situation

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Abstract: Taiwan-related issues is the core issue in the Sino-American relations and the unification of China’s territory is unchallenged. However, during the COVID-19 global epidemic period, the US makes some changes on its Taiwan-related policies and wants to play ‘Taiwan card’ to put pressure on China. This article will talk about some of the changes the US makes during this period. The reasons of these changes and the influences caused by them will be discussed as well.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the corona-virus in December 2019 has become a global issue not only crushes the public health system but also triggers many international political tensions. China was affected by this epidemic and it suddenly became a ‘Black Swan’ issue in China’s foreign affairs especially towards the Sino-American relations.

The Sino-American relation is going through its icy period after the normalization of the bilateral relationship between these two countries before the outbreak of corona-virus. This kind of unprecedented international relations between China and the US cause many conflicts in various fields such as politics, economics and civil communications. Among these conflicts, the game about Taiwan issue attracting many attentions around the world. Taiwan issue is becoming a more and more vital part in the Sino-American relations.

Some of nowadays researches are mainly focus on the specific new policies and ideologies made by the Trump administration and the potential influence brought by these new ideas. The influence caused by the new policies is also analyzed by these scholars.[1] Some researchers focus on the analysis of the current cross-strait situation. This article will talk about the global political situation after the outbreak of corona-virus. Changes and the reasons of these changes about the Taiwan-related policies made by the Trump administration under the situation will be talked as a significant part of this article. Influence towards relations across the Taiwan Straits, Sino-American relations and regional security issues caused by these changes is another part of the discussion in this article.
2. International situation after the outbreak of COVID-19

The outbreak of COVID-19 brings negative influence on the International situation. COVID-19 damages international financial system, declines the influence of International organizations and makes the international situation more unstable.

COVID-19 crashes the International financial market largely and brings systematic damage to different countries and regions. In June 2020, IMF has released the latest World Economic Outbook, it assumes the growth rate of global GDP will be -4.9% and it will the lowest level of global economy since the Great Depression. The economic growth rate of the US is -8.0%, for the Euro-zone is -10.2% and for China, the number is 1.0%. [2] The actual situation may be worse than the assumption because the epidemic is still raging around many places around the world.

The situation of regional International organization like Europe Union is in a chaos and shows its weakness in this epidemic. Members of Europe Union do not obey the suggestions of the EU, they choose to take ‘Me First’ rule rather than ‘We first’ rule. Some countries close the borders, some countries grab other countries medical resources for their own security. These situations rarely happened in the history of Europe Union.[3]

Under the epidemic situation, the trend of "rising in the east and falling in the west" will be further strengthened. Not only the United States, the mainstream western developed countries have paid a heavy price for their ignorance and contempt in the early days of the epidemic. However, some non-Western countries have presented good results in prevention and controlling of the epidemic like South Korea and Singapore, the western model has been questioned.

COVID-19 increases the uncertainties of international relations among powerful countries especially for the Sino-American relations. Taiwan-related issues are the most uncertain issue between China and the US.[4] Taiwan is becoming more and more important in the game between China and the US with the “Trade War” tension rising. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the US is still trying to put pressure on China not only in economic ways but also in political ways. The changes of American Taiwan-related policy can be seen as a kind of political pressure that the US put on China to compete China on the International political stage. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and keeping the unity of territory is the core interest of China. Under the global epidemic situation, Trump administration’ attempts on changing of Taiwan-related policies will make the Sino-American relation worse.

3. Changes of the American Taiwan-related policies under the global epidemic situation

After Trump was elected as the president of America, the US’s Taiwan-related policies have changed a lot and the Sino-American relation is undergoing a ‘cold period’. There are two main changes happening since the establishment of Trump administration.

First is the ‘US-Taiwan relation’ is rising and becoming more and more important in American Asia-Pacific strategy especially under nowadays situation. Under such a complicated global situation as above talked, Taiwan-related issues become a key point to the Asia-Pacific security especially for Sino-American relation which is the most important international relation in this region.

Since the normalization of Sino-American relationship, Taiwan-related issue is always a vital topic of the conversation between China and the US. Taiwan-related issue is the core interest of China, Taiwan-related policies have great influence on the situation of Sino-American relations.

The long term of the idealism in the American China-related polices, the US prefers affect China rather than compete with China. American policies on Taiwan has not spilled over into the categories of idealism and realism, although it has been divided into "abandoning Taiwan," "Allies" and "status quo".[5] After Obama was re-elected in 2012, he formally proposed the Asia-Pacific strategic as "Re-balancing ", and Taiwan's status in the Asia-Pacific layout of the United States seemed to rise again.
In order to “prevent” the rise of China, the Idealism and realism in the Taiwan-related relations of the United States further met. Ideologically, the United States needs Taiwan to exert the so-called "beacon effect of democracy" to influence Mainland China. From the logic of realism (strategic interests), the United States needs Taiwan to help it realize and consolidate its Asia-Pacific and global interests.

The frustration caused by the failure of the United States' attempt to engage with China and the anxiety about its own hegemonic affairs caused the United States to turn its strategy towards China to be tough and adopt aggressive tactics towards China, which are projected onto the Taiwan-related issue.

The US has offered a large amount of medical supplies to Taiwan after the outbreak of COVID-19, making the bond between the US and Taiwan more solid. The United States continues to challenge the One-China principle of the Chinese government by comprehensively deepening its substantive relationship with Taiwan, including signing of ‘Taiwan Travel Act’ [6] and Alex Azar’s visiting of Taiwan[7]. The ‘American -Taiwan’ relation seem to be mentioned at a level that never be put on before Trump took the office.

Secondly, the frequency of the US uses Taiwan-related policies as a bargaining chip to against China is much higher than before. Taiwan-related policy has always been a vital part of US foreign policies.

Since Trump came into power, US government broke its diplomatic practices between China and US lasting for years by issuing acts regardless of One China Policy. It has played the Taiwan Card to its extreme. There are three ways that the Trump administration raises the level of Taiwan-related policies in its foreign policy. First is the Trump administration increases the rank of officers who make visiting to Taiwan. After Trump was elected, he spoke with Tsai Ing-wen through telephone and became the first president-elect in American history makes a phone call to leader of Taiwan. The visiting of Alex Azar, who is the minister of Public Health of America, is the highest rank of American officer that makes a visit to Taiwan. These changes show that the Trump administration keeps trying to test the bottom-line of China’s core interest.

Second is the number of Taiwan-related bills is rising. The signing of ‘Taiwan Travel Act’ and ‘Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018’[8] can be seen as a signal of the trend in the Congress on Taiwan-related issues that the US will not give up its support to Taiwan.

Lastly, the US increases its investment on propaganda of Taiwan-related issues. Especially since the new century, the United States government increased it influence through the American institute in Taiwan on many fields of civil society in Taiwan, including the mass media, sports, school education at all levels, to further consolidate the relationship with Taiwan in culture, education and personnel exchanges and regard it as an important content of the development of US-Taiwan relations.[9]

All of these movements represent the idea that the Trump administration wants to contain the rise of China by playing the ‘Taiwan card’.

4. The reasons of changes of the American Taiwan-related policies under the global epidemic situation

China is America’s first imaginary enemy from NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020 of the US.[10] The changes of the American Taiwan-related polices is not all because of President Trump’s personal mind, there are three main reasons behind the current situation between China and the US.

First reason comes from the inner American political system. More and more politicians of the US think China is becoming the first country of US ‘a comprehensive, global strategic competitor.’ This
A consensus has been mentioned by both parties several times in recent years. There are two explanations for this situation.

Firstly, since the normalization of the Sino-US relationship, ‘engagement’ strategy has always been accepted by the US towards China. However, after decades of ‘engagement’, the failure of this certain strategy is very obvious.[11] For a long time, the United States has made ‘peaceful evolution’ in China which is an important part of its China strategy.[12]

Engagement has been the main aim of U.S. strategy toward China since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. American attempts to put China's into the international system dominated by itself gradually, to shape, influence and change China’s domestic and foreign policies and the system preferences, but the results are far away from the United States exception. Using economic factors to achieve political goals also felt roughly, so the United States must give up its hope to China and re-evaluate its China policy. You could say, “This article describes the disappointment of America.” The failure of the US to engage with China has led to great disappointment and frustration. This is an important reason for the US to reevaluate its strategy towards China.

Secondly, ‘blame China’ is becoming a normal strategy of Trump administration to transfer the consequences caused by American domestic contradiction. From the stats of the Department of Labor of the US, the number of Insured Employment is about 22830000 which is the highest number since 1930s.[13] Besides the economic troubles, an unstable society is a more serious problem for the US government. ‘Black live matters’ movement is booming all around the United States, the racial issue need to be solved immediately. However, because of the outbreak of COVID-19 and incompetent behaviors of the US government, these issues cannot be solved in a foreseeable future. ‘Blame China’ can be an effective strategy to relieve the domestic pressure for the Trump administration and Taiwan-related issue is a good “breakthrough” to make this strategy working.

Second reason comes from the tension between China and the US. There is nothing more important than Taiwan-related issue in the Sino-US relations. Taiwan-related issue is the core interest of China so the Chinese government will not let any country damage its interest around the Taiwan Strait. China-US relationship has been through a comprehensive low period since Trump took the office. China and the US are now standing in front of a ‘crossroad’ of their bilateral relations. The trade war against China, which began in 2018, is one of the manifestations. Although the two sides signed the first-phase “Cease-fire Agreement” at the end of 2019, there is still a long way to go before a trade truce between the two countries can be achieved. In the world pattern without anarchy, the intention of one country to judge another country is often analyzed according to the strength of the actual force.[14] In the situation of increasing comprehensive strength, the United States has identified China as a "strategic competitor." In some scholars’ views, the outbreak of COVID-19 should be an opportunities to strengthen cooperation between China and the United States. Zhufeng said: 'The normalization of Sino-US relations has been through 41 years, corporations and disagreements both exist in this period. China-US relations have come to a new and important juncture. The epidemic should not be used as a reason for confrontation, but as an opportunity to strengthen this cooperation.’[15] But the performance of the U.S. government since the outbreak of the epidemic shows that the US does not want to turn this opportunity into reality. At the beginning of the epidemic, the Trump administration named novel Corona-virus "China virus". Chinese side had to respond with words, which turns the potential bilateral cooperation into a zero-sum game. The US government and some American media use the propaganda as a weapon to slander the achievements of China’s efforts in the battle with COVID-19. The US also intensifies the military pressure on China by taking strategic patrols and joint exercise in the Taiwan Strait.

All of these tensions become the second reason that the US government changes its Taiwan-related policies.
Last reason is the changes of the relation between the two sides of Taiwan Strait. Trans-strait relation has a great influence on American Taiwan-related policies. The US is more willing to play the ‘Taiwan’ card when the tension between the Taiwan Strait getting more and more nervous. There are two main political trends in Taiwan that can further hurt the trans-strait relation and give the US a chance to interfere in China’s domestic affairs. First is the Taiwan authorities will continue lead by Democratic Progressive Party in several years. The ruling status of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was slightly damaged by the "nine-in-one" election defeat, it is still the dominant force in Taiwan's political affairs in the future. Ms Tsai is still the DPP's real leader. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will remain the ruling party in Taiwan for the next few years, and will remain the largest party in the "legislative" body of Taiwan by holding the machinery of "central" power. Therefore, the DPP basically controls the course of Taiwan's political development in the next few years. Its confrontational attitude towards the mainland will also intensify.

Another trend is Taiwan's political environment has worsened and populism has risen. The so-called "poor-quality of political culture" and "bad-quality of party competition" mean that there is only struggle but no cooperation, which shows that the deepening of Democracy in Taiwan is still very limited, because "mature party politics is both competition and cooperation". "The political and social climate in Taiwan will be worse with the power of populism becoming stronger. When all sorts of antics in politics go astray, Tsai ing-wen says, “systematic failure”. In fact, "among the systematic collective failures, the most serious one is the failure of democracy". "The failure of democracy has caused great difficulties in Taiwan, including the dilemma of the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, the economic dilemma, the political dilemma and so on. All of these dilemmas make the trans-strait relation more and more rivalry and complicated.

5. Influences caused by the changes of American Taiwan-related policies

As the reasons talked above, the US has changed its attitude on the Taiwan-related policies. These changes bring three main influences that will be discussed in this article. First influence is about the tension over the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan-related issue is always the core interest of Chinese interests. To build a peaceful and developing trans-strait relation is always the aim of China’s Taiwan-related policy. Relation across the Taiwan Strait has been through a peaceful period when Ma Ying-jeou was the leader of Taiwan. However, this relation is being through its hard time since the Democratic Development Party took the office. The changes made by the American government will make the relation across the Taiwan Strait worse and cause more conflicts between Mainland and Taiwan.

Second influence is about the Sino-American relationship. China seeks to build a new model of major-country relations while the US wants to compete with the rising China. Taiwan-related issue has become the most important topic in the Sino-American relationship. With the rising of frequency that the US plays ‘Taiwan card’, the core interest of China will be damaged. This situation will cause the tension between China and the US more and more obvious. Since Trump took the office, many political conventions between China and the US has been broken, competitions among many fields are going through and the Sino-American relation is under a ‘cold period’. Changes that the US government made can only take the Sino-American relation into a higher level of competition rather than calm the situation down. China will not let any other country involve in its domestic politics and damage its core interest.

Third influence is about the international politics. As president Xi mentioned, ‘the world is undergoing changes unseen in a century’. By the meaning of changes, there can be many unstable factors in nowadays international relations. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the unstable situation of the international relation is becoming more and more nervous. Taiwan Strait has always been seen as an important area in Asia-Pacific region. A peaceful and stable Strait can offer the region not only economic benefits, but also a steady political environment. However, because of the changes that the
Trump administration made on its Taiwan-related policies, the situation of this area is more and more unpredictable. Many unsteady factors are happening as well. Many other countries beside China and the US will be effected because of the tension and the international economy will be influenced as well.

6. Conclusions

The world is going through a great changing period that never happened in a century, Sino-American relations is a vital part among international relations during this period. Taiwan-related issues is the core issue in the Sino-American relations and the unification of China’s territory is unchallenged. The changes of American Taiwan-related policies and the influences brought by the changes will lead the relationship between China and the US to a more competitive situation. China wants to build a new model of major power relations and is willing to corporate with other countries in not only the battle with COVID-19 but also other domains. With the result of presidential election coming out, American Taiwan-related policies may have some new changes but the trend of the changes is likely following the previous logic. To deal with the influences caused by the changes, China should be rational and keep insisting the major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics to foster a new type of International relations.

References