

# Taiwanese Visit Adds To U.S.-China Tensions

by William Jones

In an unprecedented move by the Bush Administration, the Defense Minister of Taiwan, Tang Yiau-ming, received a visa to attend a U.S.-Taiwan Business Council convention in early March in St. Petersburg, Florida, sponsored by some major U.S. defense firms. The Council, founded in 1976, is chaired by former Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci. Carlucci is also the head of the Carlyle Group, whose main purpose is to mediate major defense contracts. With regard to the Florida meeting, which was off-limits to the press, Carlucci noted that “many billions of dollars” worth of defense contracts over the next decade are currently under discussion.

Tang’s visit was the highest-level by any Taiwanese official in 22 years, and signifies a concerted effort by the “Wolfowitz cabal”—the Clash of Civilization advocates around Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle—to shift U.S. policy away from the “One China” policy in place since the United States established relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1972. The “One China” policy has been reaffirmed by three communiqués issued by three U.S. administrations.

While the Bush Administration has given assurance to Chinese representatives that there has been no change in this commitment to a “One China” policy, the Wolfowitz cabal, intent on launching general war in the Middle East, is pushing to adopt more openly confrontationist policies with the People’s Republic of China.

Their role in this operation, was underlined by the fact that Wolfowitz was himself the point-man. Wolfowitz addressed the St. Petersburg conference and held a private meeting with Defense Minister Tang on March 11, which lasted almost two hours. While U.S. officials said that the meeting did not deal with the controversial arms sales to Taiwan, Wolfowitz indicated that the prime topic was Taiwan “security.” Tang met as well with Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Affairs James Kelly, who also spoke at the St. Petersburg conference. The significance of this shift in U.S. policy has not been lost on Chinese leaders.

## Chinese Protests

The Chinese reaction was swift and direct. “The Chinese government and people express strong dissatisfaction and indignation over the U.S. side allowing Tang Yiau-ming to visit

and arranging high-ranking officials to meet him,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said on March 14. When China’s Ambassador to the United States, Yang Jiechi, raised the issue with U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman, Grossman argued that the move did not violate U.S. policy, because Tang was attending a private conference.

Such feeble excuses did not assuage China’s opposition. Washington should “cease interfering in China’s internal affairs by using Taiwan issues and undermining bilateral ties,” said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue on March 26. “To secure a healthy and smooth development of bilateral ties, the U.S. side should properly handle this question.”

During meetings in Beijing with U.S. Senators Daniel Inouye (D-Hi.) and Ted Stevens (R-Ak.) on that same day, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji also broached the Taiwanese visit. “The Chinese government and people feel nothing but strong indignation over the action and firmly oppose the carrying out of any similar acts,” Zhu said.

In an obvious reaction to the shift in U.S. policy, Beijing announced on March 18 that Chinese naval vessels, which will be making a world tour next year, will not stop at U.S. ports. Such “port visits,” which have been a regular part of the U.S.-Chinese military exchanges, were stopped in 1999 after the bombing by NATO forces of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, but revived in 2000. Chinese naval vessels visited U.S. ports both in 2000 and 2001.

On March 8, the Chinese government had denied a U.S. request for a Hong Kong port visit by the *USS Curtis Wilbur*, a guided-missile destroyer with the U.S. Seventh Fleet. Using the same formulation expressed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld when he was asked about U.S. policy on military exchanges with China, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang told reporters that future visits will be decided on a “case-by-case basis.”

Although the two visits by President George Bush to China—one in connection with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shanghai last year, followed by an official state visit in February—had raised optimism among Chinese leaders that the Bush Administration was well-intentioned in its China policy, the explicit inclusion of China in the recent Nuclear Posture Review among states against which the United States might use its nuclear weapons, and the visit of the Taiwanese defense minister, have soured the enthusiasm considerably. According to a Xinhua news agency release, the Tang visit has “blown a gust of strange, chilly winds into Sino-U.S. relations.”

The Chinese have announced that the U.S. visit of Vice Premier Hu Jintao, the likely successor to Chinese President Jiang Zemin, will go forward at the end of April; but as long as the Perle-Wolfowitz firebrands at the Defense Department are calling the shots on China policy, the U.S.-China relationship is in for some rough sailing.