

For US, Taiwan matters no more than Afghanistan

By Wang Yunfei

The US' hasty and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan has triggered discussions over whether Washington would abandon its commitment to the island of Taiwan.

Earlier, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, "When it comes to Taiwan, it is a fundamentally different question in a different context," and the US' "commitment" to Taiwan remains "as strong as it's ever been." Taiwan's regional leader Tsai Ing-wen also declared that the island's only option is to make itself stronger, more united and more determined to defend itself.

The rapid defeat of the US-backed Afghan forces was beyond the expectation of Washington. But regarding the island of Taiwan, Washington does not have a high assessment of the combat ability or will of the island to fight. It does not believe in Taiwan's ability to safeguard itself either. The US has observed Taiwan's military drills. In the eyes of the

US, Taiwan's drills were merely shows and not about actual combat abilities.

The US commitment to Taiwan mainly hangs on the Taiwan Relations Act, the Six Assurances, and some verbal promises from a few US politicians. None of the legal documents commits the US to defending the island of Taiwan in a military clash. Some believe Taiwan needs to defend itself in order to inspire the US to commit. This reflects the dilemma of Taiwan island and the US.

On the one hand, Washington does not want to make an explicit commitment to Taiwan, because it will make Taiwan think that it does not need to defend itself and it could simply rely on the US. But if Taiwan relies too much on the US, it shows Taiwan's lack of the ability to defend itself, which Taiwan is unwilling to admit. The absence of a clear US commitment to Taiwan signals the low trust between the two sides.

The Chinese mainland has kept enhancing its combat ability and its preparedness for war. It has the unwavering

determination to safeguard its sovereignty.

But for Taiwan's military forces, a difficult question for them is: For whom do they fight? Are they fighting for Taiwan secessionists or for a certain, far-away country? The "Constitution" of Taiwan island does not demand they fight for secession, or for the US.

The island of Taiwan is fully aware that the fall of the Kabul regime shows that Washington cannot be trusted. When the US cut "diplomatic" ties with the island of Taiwan in 1979, such abandonment was much more serious than what happened with Afghanistan right now. As the international landscape changes, Washington has turned again to Taiwan, using the island as a ready card to contain China.

Some in Taiwan mistakenly believe the island's strategic status is important. It is worth pointing out that Afghanistan's strategic importance is no less than that of Taiwan. Taiwan is only one card in the eyes of the US. But Afghani-

stan was one card for multiple usages.

The situation in Afghanistan can affect China to its east, Russia to its north, and the Middle East to its west. After 20 years of struggling in Afghanistan, the US has not achieved its intended goals – it has failed to contain either China or Russia, and its clout in the Middle East is declining.

Therefore, after careful calculation, the US believed it was not a cost-effective deal, so it had made hastened retreat from Afghanistan.

Similarly, the US will probably make a strategic decision to Taiwan that only suits its own interests, particularly when Taiwan's strategic value wanes while the US finds it too hard to decouple with China due to economic and trade relations. After all, the US uses the island of Taiwan only as long as it can affect China's development.

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The US has the moral responsibility over the flood of refugees in Afghanistan

By Ding Long

The most turbulent place in Afghanistan since the fall of the Afghan government has been not in Kabul the capital city but at the Kabul international airport.

For days, it has witnessed a déjà vu "Saigon moment," with the flood of Afghans desperate, even dying, to get out of their country through this one and only exit. Images of young Afghans hanging from the landing gear of an American transport plane falling like a broken kite, and a crying baby being handed to American troops over a barbed-wire fence are heart-wrenching. The tragic story of life and death is staged there every day, implying the growing tide of Afghan refugees after the sudden change of the situation in Afghanistan.

The problem of Afghan refugees is not a new one. Around 5 million people have fled the war-shattered country. At present, there are roughly three kinds of Afghan refugees. The first group includes refugees directly caused by war. The second group consists of those who fear being liquidated by the new government, including interpreters and support personnel once employed by the US military, as well as former government officials. The economic refugees who want to leave Afghanistan driven by poverty constitute the third group.

The new refugee crisis is directly linked to the political upheaval triggered by the hasty withdrawal of the US military.



Illustration: Chen Xia/Globe Times

The collapse of the Afghan regime and the looming rise of a Taliban government have sparked fear among some Afghan people. After all, in the past the Taliban represented a large cultural gap with residents of big cities such as Kabul. As an armed wing, the Taliban achieved little in national governance, economic construction and diplomacy. This is why some people don't welcome the Taliban and want to flee Afghanistan at all costs, reflecting the profound nation-building crisis in Afghanistan.

The US military occupation has exacerbated the economic difficulties in Afghanistan and foreshadowed the refugee crisis. The past 20 years have been Afghanistan's "lost decades." The US has been a destroyer instead of a builder. They occupied the country, not to rebuild it, but purely for

hegemony and geopolitical ambitions. The US occupation did nothing to help Afghanistan with infrastructure, agriculture and industry, but increased its economic dependence, fostering a dysfunctional economy reliant on external aid and rife with clientelism, nepotism and corruption.

In the past 20 years, Afghanistan's economy has barely developed. Most of the national economy and fiscal revenue comes from foreign aid and services industry brought by NATO's military presence. The withdrawal of US troops and a corresponding cut in aid would put the Afghan economy in risk of collapse.

Therefore, the key to resolve the Afghan refugee issue lies in the smooth political transition and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan. It is a

pressing matter at the moment to form an inclusive government and initiate the national reconstruction. At the same time, it is equally important for the international community to help in a timely manner.

Regrettably, in the face of the looming tide of Afghan refugees, the US and the West began to shirk their responsibilities and attempt to make other countries scapegoats. Data from the US State Department shows that the US has accepted fewer than 500 refugees from Afghanistan this year. Fearing a repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis from Syria, European countries have also been hesitant to accept Afghan refugees.

Even more ludicrously, some politicians have begun to urge for shared international responsibility, calling on Afghanistan's neighboring coun-

tries to open their borders. It should be made clear that even though aid to Afghanistan is a shared responsibility of the international community, such responsibilities are conditional: Whoever caused the trouble is responsible to solve it.

The US and the West created the chaos in Afghanistan and are directly responsible for it. They cannot simply walk away and leave the mess to the Afghan people and its neighbors. This will make it difficult for Afghanistan to become self-reliant in the indefinite future and will also put a heavy burden on regional security and development.

After decades of foreign occupation, Afghanistan is back in the hands of the Afghan people. This war-torn country has come to a historical turning point. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is of great significance.

In keeping with the trend of the times, major political forces in Afghanistan should lead the political transformation and economic reconstruction of the country. The international community should be more patient and show more support to the Afghan people to cope with the multiple challenges they have to face.

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