



PacNet 51 Survey

Aloha! Thanks for your feedback on the “Did Bush go too far?” survey. We received over 100 responses, with 62 percent saying that Bush’s comments regarding Chen Shui-bian’s “comments and actions” were appropriate, 25 percent saying that the president went too far, and 13 percent saying he should have gone further in his criticism of the Taiwanese president’s actions.

A breakdown of the vote by nationality is provided below, as are selected quotes (there were too many to reprint them all, so we apologize if your comments were not repeated). Of note, only 33 percent of Taiwanese (from a small sample) thought Bush had gone too far. The only group that, on balance, felt he had gone too far was the “other” category, which included remarks from throughout Europe, Japan, Korea, Russia, India, and down under (among others). Not surprisingly, our small sample of PRC respondents mostly felt that President Bush did not go far enough.

Many who thought the remarks were appropriate still expressed concern over the venue (in front of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao) or the mixed signals from the U.S. that emboldened Taipei. Conversely, many who felt President Bush went too far seemed at least as concerned with the venue as they were with his words.

| <u>Nationality</u> | <u>Too Far</u> | <u>Appropriate</u> | <u>Not Strong Enough</u> |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| U.S. | 15 | 57 | 8 |
| Taiwan | 4 | 7 | 1 |
| PRC | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Other | 10 | 8 | 2 |
| Total | 29 | 73 | 15 |

Bush’s comments were appropriate:

– The previous policy of strategic ambiguity was far from perfect but it kept both sides guessing, and as long as the U.S. was passing private messages of sufficient clarity, it kept both side away from extreme positions. Bush’s policy of strategic directness can be misinterpreted as both sides miss the caveats. The U.S. does not understand well the “Cross Straits Opera.” We get played like a fiddle by both sides and the Taiwans are real virtuosos.

– As the junior partner in a de facto alliance with the U.S., Taiwan’s leaders have an obligation to take into account U.S. interests as they craft their initiatives and consult in advance with U.S. officials. Democracy is important but so is security, for which Taiwan is fundamentally dependent on the U.S.

– The ambiguous status quo across the Strait is the best possible outcome from the perspective of American interests. Chen Shui-bian’s referendum initiative serves no useful purpose. But the public reproach wouldn’t have been necessary if the administration had not been playing such a clumsy game in the months leading up. Wen’s Cheshire cat smile made Bush look like he would do anything to keep China cooperative right now, and that China has us where it wants us. Once again, the Iraq tail is wagging the foreign policy dog.

– This is one of those occasions when Bush’s reputation for straight speaking serves him well. While the words were blunt, they were sensible and seemed only to reflect the realities of the situation. Style can count for a lot, and in this instance it helped the president.

– The Taiwanese president is engaging in provocative behavior in an effort to salvage his faltering re-election campaign. No other president has been as supportive of Taiwan as President Bush. It is outrageous for the “anti-China lobby” to claim otherwise. The referendum is just a gimmick to garner electoral support by provoking the PRC. Why doesn’t Chen do something to fix the Taiwanese economy rather than start a cross-strait conflict to get re-elected?

– It should come as no surprise that President Bush chose to publicly express his displeasure with Chen’s antics. American interests would have been better served, however, if Bush had publicly added that China’s military buildup against Taiwan is an unconstructive way of dealing with the differences between the two sides of the Strait and use of force by China would under no circumstances be tolerated.

– We are far from “appeasing” China, and that term would only apply if we “washed our hands” of Taiwan and announced that we would not react to China’s use of force.

– Chen’s behavior, if not checked, will jeopardize the U.S. anti-terror campaign and efforts to solve the Korean nuclear crisis. Therefore, a stern warning for Chen to stop this type of risky political tricks is warranted.

– U.S. needs to maintain a nuance of strategic ambiguity. Taiwanese political legitimacy should come from domestic successes, not manipulation of on-going security concerns.

– Chen Shui-bian had better realize that he is dealing with a much smarter gang in Beijing, and that he won’t get a government in Washington more sympathetic to Taiwan than the one he has now.

– It was a well-deserved put-down for Chen, but earlier would have been even better.

Bush went too far in his criticism:

– Chen is doing less to threaten the status quo than is China through its missile build-up and constant efforts to reduce Taiwan’s international space.

– President Bush should have made balanced remarks on the cross-Strait issue as he always did. After all, it is China that is saber-rattling. China’s daunting military threat is certainly not in keeping with the widely accepted principle of solving the cross-Strait issue by peaceful means. If President Bush has to take a stand on Taiwan’s referendum, he also ought to remember to balance his position by calling on China to withdraw its missiles from its coastal provinces. Better still if he would reiterate that the U.S. won’t acquiesce to any Chinese military action against Taiwan. Perhaps more constructively, President Bush can play an active role in encouraging both sides to shelve their different views and engage in exchanges and cooperation on equal footing.

– Poor diplomacy; message of caution, if deemed appropriate, should have been provided outside public domain; we cannot applaud democratic achievements made in Taiwan, yet condemn expressions of self-determination; cautions should be addressed to both sides equally.

– Bush should have said, “The future of Taiwan should be decided by the Taiwan people. If the majority of the Taiwan people want independence, their will should be honored.”

– Misperceptions of Taiwan’s political momentum exist in Washington. More communication between Washington and Taipei is needed. Even though I support China’s legitimate claims to Taiwan, I think Bush’s rebuke was too harshly worded. In general, the administration seems to have bungled the whole Taiwan issue from the get-go. If I were Chinese or Taiwanese, I would wonder which side the White House will flip-flop to next.

– If President Bush made the same comment not in the company of Premier Wen, the impact could have been different, and yet the message would have been sent out as intended by Mr. Bush.

– President Bush shows again the hypocrisy of his foreign policy, which defends the use of virtually unilateral U.S. military action in the name of bringing democracy to oppressed peoples, while condemning the efforts of the people of Taiwan to exercise freely the democratic rights they already have.

– The U.S. should not sell morality, soul, and values to China exclusively, just because China may become the biggest consumers’ market in the next decades. Not everything goes simply by economics.

– This is the time for Bush to play a quiet diplomatic behind-the-scenes role, suggesting to Chen that he is pushing too much. But doing this publicly just makes the U.S. look terribly hypocritical in not recognizing and endorsing Taiwanese democracy while simultaneously making a blatant concession to China for lining up behind the U.S. on Bush’s black and

white “war on terror.” Bush has no sense of the diplomatic grey areas and this statement shows that.

– Bush should have said “Mr. Hu, tear down those missiles.” Who the hell suggested he whack Taiwan without making an equally (preferably MORE) indignant snap at the ChiComs?

Bush did not go far enough in criticizing Chen:

– In both East Asia and the Middle East, the U.S. cannot be held captive to our allies when they threaten our national interests. We should take steps with Taiwan (and Israel) to avoid the chaos that would result from misguided actions by our allies.

– Bush was sufficiently general for Chen to be able to ignore the message – at least on the surface. Bush needed to control his own people from passing interpretive messages to Chen that offset what he said.

– President Bush’s comments were not strong enough to prevent Chen Shui-bian from provoking mainland China by holding a defensive referendum in March. When Chen continues to take provocative actions against China in order to “change the status quo,” the Bush administration still opposes any unilateral decision by China to maintain the status quo. Bush’s policy is dangerous because of Taipei’s possible misunderstanding of the U.S. bottom line and China’s military determination.

– Given the ever stronger and dangerous independence momentum that has been fanned by Chen Shui-bian and Lee Deng-hui in Taiwan, it is time for Washington to rethink its Taiwan policy, which is considered very pro-Taiwan and partially responsible for the current developments. Pragmatic politics should prevail. Taiwan, no matter how important it is, should be kept in the right place of the larger picture.

– I am resigned that Taiwan and China will eventually be separate, independent, and sovereign nation-states. However, Chen Shui-bian, the DPP, and Taiwan must realize and understand that they do not have a blanket, unlimited, and unconditional commitment from the U.S.

Ambivalent:

– I feel very strongly both ways – it was the right message but the wrong way to send it. A very quiet Armitage and or Wolfowitz (vice Moriarity) trip would have had real impact. Also, adopting PRC language with respect to Chen suggests that President Bush is so hooked on the war on terrorism that he’ll say just about anything – even dissing a democratically elected leader in front on an autocrat. Guess I’m now waiting for “the Taiwan authorities” to find its way into administration rhetoric. So it goes... “confused and disheartened.”

**Warmest Holiday Greetings from all of us at
the Pacific Forum CSIS!**