

## Taiwanese democracy, Stalin-style

Written by Joseph Wu 吳介顯

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Since ITS first democratic presidential election in 1996, Taiwan has been praised by the international community as a “beacon of democracy to be emulated by other Asian countries.”

Those were the words used by the White House in March 2008 to congratulate the Taiwanese people for having another open, fair and free presidential election. As Taiwan’s representative in Washington, I was very proud to hear those words, even though I sadly had to leave that government position because my party had lost the election.

In the past few years, even though many people in and outside Taiwan continue to question the motivations and practices of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government in employing judicial means to pursue opposition leaders and worry about the downgrading of the freedom of the press, a strong belief stays alive that Taiwan will remain democratic because any government could always be replaced in the next democratic election.

Nevertheless, this strong belief has to be based on the principle that the players faithfully follow the democratic rules of the game. The KMT government’s recent accusations leveled against Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who is also a presidential candidate perhaps popular enough to unseat incumbent President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), over the Yu Chang Biologics Co investment case and the subsequent judicial action are threatening to destroy Taiwan’s democracy.

It is unheard of, and certainly inconceivable, for any government in a mature democracy to utilize judicial power to hunt down an opposition candidate at the very last stage of a presidential election. It is obviously anti-democratic if this happens, particularly when the accusations were nothing but fabrications and the key document used to level the accusations was found to be blatantly fraudulent.

In any established democracy, when a government is caught red-handed in such a major embarrassment, the key officials would either be impeached or forced to resign. Not in Taiwan, however — Taiwan’s democracy is still young and remnants of past authoritarianism are still alive and under cover in government institutions.

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They have pursued opposition leaders through judicial means and have caused psychological trauma to many of those found innocent after lengthy tortures by trial. They have pressured a reputable journal not to conduct election and political surveys. They also coordinate major media outlets in their highly intensive smear campaigns against the opposition. If one watches KMT-leaning evening TV talk shows and listens to the words the commentators use, one could easily mistake them for Red Guards at the height of the People's Republic of China's Cultural Revolution. Taiwanese tolerate this, because we believe in tolerance and diversity.

The KMT under former president Chiang Kai-shek (蔣經國) and the Chinese Communist Party were joked about by democracy activists as being the twin sons of Joseph Stalin. Fortunately, that time has passed and since 1996, Taiwanese have exercised their power to select their national leader.

However, if Ma is able to successfully use judicial means to hunt down the DPP's presidential candidate, Taiwan would certainly slide backward into its authoritarian past. Ma would go down in history as the true heir to Chiang, the dictator that ruled Taiwan the Stalinist way.

Just a few days ago, international supporters of Taiwanese democracy joined hands to establish the International Committee for Fair Elections in Taiwan. The purpose of the organization is to ensure a fair and free presidential election next month. I am very certain that the international observers would be shocked to learn that the KMT has been entertaining the idea of implicating and entangling its main competitor in the presidential race by judicial means through a badly-weaved fabrication.

About two weeks ago, the US House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairperson Ileana Ros-Lehtinen declared that she would ensure no backsliding of Taiwan's democracy, so that it could continue to be a beacon shining its bright light across the Taiwan Strait onto the imprisoned people under communist rule. What is utterly unfortunate is that the KMT government snubbed her declaration by its Red Guard-style smear campaign and judicial actions against the key opposition presidential candidate.

Taiwan has gone through two rounds of peaceful transfer of power after 1996. According to Samuel Huntington, Taiwan should have consolidated its democracy. However, if the incumbent president chooses to do things like what have been done in the past few days as an option to salvage his re-election, it is doubtful whether the country could remain democratic.

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Taiwanese should feel ashamed if democracy watchers from around the world expect an admirable liberal democracy in Taiwan, only to find a Stalinist USSR when they arrive here after the elections.

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