

## Tsai must defend nation's integrity

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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Military might and diplomatic influence are two important political tools through which a nation demonstrates its power within the international system and shows its determination to safeguard its interests.

It is sad to see Taiwan's weakness in those two fields as demonstrated by the President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) administration's reaction to recent developments in the Taiwan Strait.

Beijing on Thursday last week unilaterally announced that it was opening the M503 and other connecting routes to northbound commercial flights.

Given that M503 runs almost parallel to the median line of the Strait and is only 7.8km from it, Beijing no doubt has a military and strategic agenda that serves its political objectives.

China's one-sided action not only contravenes the 2015 cross-strait agreement that opened the M503 route to southbound commercial traffic, but blatantly changes the "status quo" in the Strait.

One day after the announcement, the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning, accompanied by other warships, sailed southwest along the Strait's median line and left Taiwan's air defense identification zone later that evening.

While China's saber-rattling at Taiwan is nothing new, the latest move, in addition to the increased frequency of Chinese military aircraft circling Taiwan's international airspace, suggests that Beijing is taking advantage of what it perceives as a weak Tsai government.

The Tsai government's responses to various acts of harassment from China tells not only Taiwanese but also Beijing that it is at its wits' end.

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Tsai has since Friday convened two national security meetings and Mainland Affairs Council Minister Katharine Chang (張善政) has lodged a protest against China over the route's opening.

Tsai also tweeted that "Recent unilateral actions by #China — including M503 flight route & increased military exercises — are destabilizing & should be avoided. #Taiwan will continue to safeguard the status quo. We call on all parties to do the same."

However, such reactions have no deterrent effect and most of the international community remain unaware of China's bullying of Taiwan.

The government should hold international news conferences and make the severity of the situation known to the world. It should voice the nation's concerns and warn the international community of the threat China poses to peace and stability in the Strait.

If the government remains quiet, how can it expect other nations to support Taiwan?

At a news conference on Dec. 29, Tsai spoke of her determination "to foster an indigenous defense industry and defend Taiwan's democracy," adding that her administration would make reasonable annual increases in military spending.

While Tsai's words were encouraging, budget figures tell a different story. The Executive Yuan has reduced the Ministry of National Defense's budget for fiscal 2018 from NT\$3.9 billion to NT\$3.27 billion (US\$132.1 million to US\$110.8 million), comprising 1.84 percent of GDP, down from the previous year's 1.86 percent and lower than the budget allocated during former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration.

American Institute in Taiwan Chairman James Moriarty in October last year urged Tsai to heed US concerns about Taiwan's defense budget.

While Taiwan should avoid an unnecessary arms race, an adequate and reasonable defense

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budget is called for, as it tells the public, as well as the world, that Taiwan is taking its defense seriously.

Tsai can speak softly if she wants to, but as the head of state, she must demonstrate a tough attitude that asserts the nation's integrity — acting weak will only encourage China to continue its harassment of Taiwan.

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