

Beijing's incremental moves must be countered

Written by Chen Chia-lin 陳嘉麟

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The Chinese government on Jan. 4 announced that it was activating northbound flights along route M503, which runs the length of the Taiwan Strait near the median line and had previously only carried southbound traffic. The unilateral decision was intended to put pressure on Taiwan and test its reaction.

The Chinese government has done similar things in relation to Japan, South Korea, India and the South China Sea. In addition to responding to the M503 affair from the military, defense and national security angles, Taiwan also needs to analyze it with regard to other, seemingly unconnected, aspects of China's Taiwan policies to get an overall outline of China's strategic plans.

Taiwanese must pay special attention to how any Chinese measure regarding Taiwan — be it threats and pressure, or favors and benefits — cannot be talked about in terms of one particular incident.

China is still an authoritarian state and all its Taiwan-related policies are deployed in a unified and systematic manner, forming a set of policies that complement and support one another. They all have the same final purpose: to annex Taiwan.

For example, China has arrested and imprisoned Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), but it offers Taiwanese the benefits of its cross-strait youth enterprise bases. It represses Taiwan in the international community, but shows it goodwill in its Belt and Road Initiative.

Whether positive or negative, all these policies are intended to lend impetus to China-friendly forces in Taiwan and weaken anti-China forces in an attempt to change Taiwan's growing social structure of "natural independence."

China's flight route decision and other moves, such as frequently dispatching military aircraft and warships to fly or sail around Taiwan, are designed to step on Taiwan's red lines and test its reactions. This is a typical strategy of closing in step by step, with the purpose of numbing the vigilance of Taiwanese.

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The 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October last year marked a watershed for China's policies regarding Taiwan. From then on, the Chinese government's great strategic principle for annexing Taiwan has been a parallel strategy of offering incentives while attacking opponents to divide Taiwan from the inside.

Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) made this clear in his speech at the congress. Beijing has set the tone for its interactions with Taipei, adopting a strategy of closing the window for dialogue and taking unilateral actions.

Meanwhile, China's "united front" strategy is one of divide and conquer, dropping the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in favor of alliances with Taiwanese civic groups and individuals. Its overall rhythm is one of treading on Taiwan's red lines, closing in step by step, changing the "status quo" and eventually looking for an opportunity to annex Taiwan.

To sum up, Taiwanese need to take a clear and accurate view of everything China does in relation to Taiwan. When seen in isolation, individual incidents might seem like nothing to worry about, but when put together, they form an even more formidable threat than that of a military invasion.

China has already managed to shift the "status quo" by all manner of means, both hard and soft.

The government needs to wake up from its passive attitude and formulate a comprehensive and active strategy to counter China's moves.

Only by doing so will it be able to guarantee Taiwan's long-term peace and security, and uphold its national sovereignty.

Chen Chia-lin holds a doctorate in law and is director of the Taiwan Solidarity Union's policy department.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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