

What comes next for angry Tsai?

Written by Huang Tien-lin 黃天麟
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President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is angry. Despite her policy of maintaining the “status quo,” China has poached four of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies since she became president, pushing her to say: “China’s efforts to undermine our national sovereignty are already challenging Taiwanese society’s bottom line. This we will no longer tolerate.”

These are brave words indeed, but the question is: “What is next?”

A limp-wristed reaction would not arouse the public’s resolve. The first thing that can and should be done is to boldly refute China’s actions that aim to place Taiwan within “one China.”

The government should drop the notion that “the Republic of China [ROC] is a sovereign, independent nation,” and change it to “Taiwan is a sovereign, independent nation.”

This would clearly tell the international community that Taiwan has never been part of China, as, indeed, it never has been, for the following reasons:

First, since 1971, when UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 was adopted and replaced the ROC with the People’s Republic of China, for Taiwan to keep claiming the title “ROC” amounts to walking into a trap.

For example, China has sent letters to international airlines, demanding that they do not list Taiwan as a nation on their Web sites.

If Taiwan is the ROC, as the Taiwanese authorities keep saying, it means that Taiwan belongs to China, and China is not wrong to say so.

Second, Taiwan has historically and legally never been part of China.

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Going back 400 years, it belonged to Aborigines. From 1624 to 1661, it was ruled by the Netherlands. The Manchu Qing Empire, which was established in 1636, overthrew the Han Chinese Ming Dynasty in 1644. In 1683, Qing troops conquered Taiwan and turned it into a colony of the Qing Empire.

In the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 to 1895, the Qing Empire was defeated and ceded Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to Japan.

Japan, in turn, was defeated in World War II and surrendered in 1945. Following its defeat, Japan renounced any claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, Penghu and islands in the South Pacific, but it did not cede them to any specific nation.

Under the Qing Dynasty, China was just a colony of the Qing. That means that Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Dynasty, not China. The Republic of China was not founded until 1912.

At the end of World War II, the supreme commander of the Allied forces, US General Douglas MacArthur, ordered the ROC to go to Taiwan to accept the surrender of the Japanese armed forces stationed there.

Following the signing of the 1952 Treaty of Peace with Japan, also known as the Treaty of San Francisco, the ROC should have withdrawn from Taiwan, just as it did from Vietnam in 1946, and as the Soviet army pulled out of Manchuria in 1946 and northern Korea in 1948.

However, the ROC found excuses and refused to withdraw from Taiwan.

This background gave rise to the complicated nature of the Taiwan question, but whichever way people look at it, the historical fact is that China has never had sovereignty over Taiwan.

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These arguments are fairly close to the US' "one China" policy.

Third, the leaders of the three nations that released the controversial Cairo Declaration of 1943 — the US, the UK and the ROC — did not sign it. It was only a declaration, not a treaty.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should amend or remove all arguments based on the Cairo Declaration and the ROC. This is the first job that the government should do after Tsai's remark that "this we will no longer tolerate."

If this is not done, it would amount to confirming that Taiwan is a part of China, in which case what reason can be given for calling on the International Air Transport Association and airlines to show "moral courage" in response to Chinese demands?

Fourth, on April 27, two days after the Civil Aviation Administration of China sent its demands to the airlines, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders called China's behavior "Orwellian nonsense."

If the US government and US public opinion can go so far, why does Taiwan feel compelled to hold back?

Fifth, the reason the Democratic Progressive Party administration upholds the "ROC" and promises to respect the ROC Constitution is that it is forced to do so by China's arrogant and unreasonable "sharp power." The Tsai administration is only making concessions necessary to maintain peace.

However, Taiwanese are sovereign and the popular will is higher than the Constitution. When the president makes declarations, the content of those declarations should place the will of Taiwanese above the Constitution. Only that approach can enable Taiwan to eventually become a normal nation.

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