

Vote to protect nation's democracy

Written by Chang Yeh-sen, Li Chuan-hsin, Liao I-en, Weng Ming-chang,
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Today the nation goes to the polls as voters will be casting ballots not just for the nine-in-one local elections, but also in a record number of 10 referendums. However, the elections are unique for another reason: China's nefarious influence looms large as it brazenly interferes behind the scenes in Taiwan's democratic affairs.

Beijing's antics have not gone unnoticed by the international community, and its actions have compelled the US and Japanese governments to voice concern.

The primary focus of the international attention has been on the methods employed by China as it manipulates Taiwan's elections.

Security analysts agree that ever since Taiwanese voted for their first directly elected president in 1996, Beijing has been interfering in Taiwan's electoral process and continues to do so today. Over the years its methods have evolved into a full-fledged supply-chain, which is able to supply and support Beijing's strategy of political subversion.

With a chain of command based in China, Beijing has constructed a multilayered network that enables it to channel financial payments, disseminate propaganda, and systematically mobilize agitators and provocateurs.

This sophisticated system has infiltrated deep into every corner of Taiwanese society, including media organizations, organized crime and underground gambling groups, as well as China-leaning pro-unification organizations.

China is using this covert network to distribute vast amounts of funding via Taiwanese businesses and other front organizations.

Behind the scenes, Beijing is manipulating Taiwanese media while its "Internet army" is promoting personality cults and working to distort the truth, sling mud, frame and bully anyone who is hostile to China's aims.

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The system is also churning out large volumes of fake news to brainwash the electorate, and shut down any dissenting views and opposing arguments. The purpose of all this activity is clear: to influence the result of Taiwan's elections.

If Beijing is able to get away with using such underhanded methods, it will in a short space of time be able to mold its Taiwanese puppets — people over whom it has influence and control — into Messiah figures who are able to depict themselves as saviors of the nation.

Beijing will also be able to draw upon a reserve force of Taiwanese elites that it has been building up over the long term, and use these contemptible individuals to smear and frame pro-Taiwan voices.

If this is allowed to happen, it would not only be a nightmare scenario for Taiwan, but a catastrophe for all like-minded democratic nations.

Earlier this month Taiwanese news broadcaster Television Broadcasts Satellite (TVBS) pulled an exclusive interview with American Institute in Taiwan Chairman James Moriarty from its programming lineup one day after its initial airing. During the interview, Moriarty warned of “external forces” attempting to manipulate public opinion ahead of the elections.

The AIT subsequently posted the video of the interview on its Facebook page as well as a link to a news report saying that the removal of the interview by TVBS not only demonstrates the extent to which external forces are manipulating public opinion in Taiwan, but also raises concerns for the outcome of the elections.

The worry over today's elections is not limited to the effect the results might have on the future development and political orientation of Taiwan's county and municipal-level governments: far more concerning is the effect it might have on the future direction of travel for the entire nation.

Two US Navy aircraft carrier battle groups have been conducting exercises in the Philippine

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See this month.

Meanwhile, speaking at a seminar on Friday last week at US think tank the Hudson Institute, former Japan Maritime Self-defense Force vice admiral Yoji Koda said that the US and Japan would do whatever it takes to protect Taiwan.

Additionally, during last weekend's APEC summit in Papua New Guinea, Taiwan's representative, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co founder Morris Chang (台积电), and US Vice President Mike Pence held bilateral talks, while no meeting was held between Pence and Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平).

Both the US and Japanese governments have adopted a similarly strong stance toward Taiwan. As an interested party, caught in the middle of a power struggle between two superpowers, Taiwan cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to the US' and Japan's concerns over China nor attempt to place itself outside of events.

As Beijing steadily closes in on Taiwan and unleashes a variety of means to subvert and overturn its democratic system of government, the elections have taken on a new and significant meaning.

It is the new frontline in the nation's battle to preserve its democratic freedoms in the face of Chinese dictatorship.

Each and every Taiwanese voter possesses the power, through their vote, to assert their position and send a clear message not just to Beijing, but to the whole world.

In addition to weeding out those politicians who have shown themselves unfit to hold office, voters must also take care not to overlook one referendum in particular.

Voters must vote "yes" in the referendum to rename the national sports team from "Chinese

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Taipei” to “Taiwan” when participating in the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. It is a golden opportunity for Taiwan to trumpet its democratic credentials and signal its strong determination to rectify the nation's name to the whole world.

Trapped in the middle of a new cold war between the US and China, how should Taiwanese voters cast their ballots today? In favor of politicians and political parties who support the US-Japan alliance? Or should they throw in their lot with candidates who believe that Taiwan's destiny is to become just another province of China?

If voters choose the wrong side, Taiwan will face certain calamity.

Protect your democracy, defend your country; let all Taiwanese unite under the banner of a sovereign and independent future for their country. The power is in your hands.

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