

While China's bullying and obstruction of Taiwan's international space is nothing new, the nation this year is expected to face accelerated aggression from Beijing as its haughtiness has been emboldened by the China-friendly Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) gains in the Nov. 24 local elections.

With numerous KMT winners endorsing the so-called "1992 consensus," Beijing will take it as a sign that pro-China sentiment is rising, despite cross-strait affairs clearly not being the focus during campaigning. Its increasing arrogance is apparent.

China's Taiwan Affairs Office Minister Liu Jieyi (劉傑宜) on Sunday said that "Beijing's dominance over the general trend of events in cross-strait relations is to grow in 2019" and that "Taiwanese independence forces will continue to provoke incidents, but the mainland will have total control to prevail in the face of those risks ... cross-strait relations will make great leaps toward unification."

Xinhua news agency yesterday reported that in Beijing today, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) is to mark the anniversary of the 1979 "message to compatriots in Taiwan" with a "major speech" on Taiwan.

Beijing's gloating confidence is understandable when viewing cross-strait affairs from its perspective. Over the past year, aside from a charm offensive to woo Taiwanese, including 31 measures it said would benefit Taiwanese seeking to study, work, live or start a business in China, it has made gains in undermining Taiwan's sovereign status and international standing by blocking Taiwan's attendance at World Health Assembly and Interpol events, snatching diplomatic allies, pressing international airlines to refer to Taiwan as part of China on their Web sites, and a malicious move to revoke Taichung's right to host the first East Asian Youth Games. These incidents were depressing for Taiwanese. The series of vengeful acts were obviously to put pressure on President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration over its non-acceptance of the nonexistent "1992 consensus" as the political foundation for cross-strait dialogue and development.

While the Tsai administration ought to be lauded for rejecting political coercion, its responses — which were in apparent opposition to the party's founding ideals — to issues such as the appointment of Kuan Chung-ming (關中明) as National Taiwan University president, in which it

Tsai needs resolution over China

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failed to uphold the law by turning a blind eye to procedural flaws and other allegations, Tsai's vacillating remarks and self-imposed restrictions on the implementation of transitional justice, and her aloofness toward the referendum to use "Taiwan" instead of "Chinese Taipei" at next year's Tokyo Olympics, it might be a matter of time before it caves in to China and the nation is disarmed diplomatically.

Fortunately, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement on Sunday came in time to assuage misgivings.

In summing up the past year and outlining its prospects for this year, it said "it is resolved to defend the nation amid increasing pressure from China and would step up efforts to protect Taiwan's sovereignty."

While it might be mere rhetoric, it is at least comforting to know that the ministry has not let its guard down or become passive.

The new year is expected to be a noisy one politically, with Taiwan to enter the campaign season for the 2020 presidential election. The year can also be expected to be a daunting one on the diplomatic front, with Beijing poised to grind its fists into accelerating its agenda to marginalize Taipei.

Hopefully, Tsai's New Year's speech today will include a resolution that the government would stand resolute and uncompromising in the face of China's assaults.

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