

Tsai must back words with actions

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The main difference between political pundits and elected officials is that pundits can at most drive national conversation and help shape public opinion, whereas officials have been given the authority to turn words into actions. Many wonder what actions the Democratic Progressive Party government will take to back up President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) tough talk following Chinese President Xi Jinping's (习近平) remarks on Jan. 2.

Only 19 percent of respondents in a poll by the Taiwan Brain Trust late last month approved of Tsai, but her popularity skyrocketed after she on Jan. 2 sternly repudiated Xi's assertions earlier that day that Taiwan "must and will be" united with China based on the so-called "1992 consensus" and the "one China" principle, and his proposal of a "one country, two systems" framework.

In a Cross-Strait Policy Association poll published on Wednesday last week, 61.1 percent of respondents said they were satisfied with Tsai's response, while 85.2 percent said that they supported her "four musts" — that China must recognize the existence of the Republic of China, respect the values of democracy and freedom that Taiwan's 23 million people hold dear, resolve cross-strait differences in a peaceful and equitable manner, and negotiate directly with the government or institutions with a mandate from the government.

Tsai's words were encouraging and clearly expressed Taiwan's intention to defend its sovereignty, but tough talk is not enough: Tsai must act on her statements, or the public might think she was merely trying to salvage her approval ratings. If Tsai is serious about upholding and asserting the nation's sovereignty internationally, there are several steps she could take.

When former minister of health Lin Tzou-yien (林錫山) was given the chance to speak at the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2016, he used the designation "Chinese Taipei" rather than "Taiwan" for the nation. If Tsai means business, she must instruct all officials to trumpet the name "Taiwan" or the nation's official name, the Republic of China (ROC), in all international forums.

Exceptionally, many senior pan-blue politicians voiced their opposition to Xi's proposal of a "one country, two systems" framework, including Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Wu Den-yih (吳敦義), former KMT chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) and, most notably, KMT Legislator Chiang Wan-an (江萬安), grandson of former president Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國) and a

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fourth-generation descendant of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣經國).

Tsai should seize this rare instance of agreement between the pan-blue and pan-green camps, and try to get all Taiwan's political parties to throw their support behind the nation's sovereignty in the face of China's determination to wipe both Taiwan and the ROC off the world map.

No matter whether opinion leaders support "Taiwan independence" (台獨, taidu) or "ROC independence" (華獨, huadu), Tsai, in her capacity as president, must reach out to them and bring them together to discuss how they can join forces to counter China's ambitions with one voice. Together, they can prevent Beijing from silencing voices in support of Taiwan's or the ROC's sovereignty.

Tsai has shown the public that she can talk the talk. All eyes are now on her to see whether she can walk the walk. Hopefully, she was not just paying lip service to the nation's sovereignty.

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