

On Monday, the government ordered several thousand police officers to forcibly remove the protesters occupying the Executive Yuan building. Scores of people were injured. History will remember this as the time Taiwan's democracy, at the hands of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), regressed. Men such as Ma and his premier, Jiang Yi-huah (江宜華), will be remembered as leaders willing to use force on their own people.

The protesters in the legislative chamber, who had been waiting for a response from Ma for five days, were bitterly disappointed by the press conference he gave. Physically and mentally exhausted, with nothing to show for their action, divisions began to appear among them. Those wanting to escalate the standoff invaded the Executive Yuan, placing even more pressure on the government to respond. However, they misread the situation, overestimated their own power and underestimated the government's ruthlessness in putting an end to the movement. The invasion of the highest branch of government crossed Ma's red line. The protesters were no longer protected by Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng's (王金平) tolerance or Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators, and Ma and Jiang gave the order to bring in riot police and water cannons, leading to unfortunate scenes.

The Ma administration cannot absolve itself of the shameful way these protests have ended. They were sparked by the non-transparent way in which the government handled the cross-strait service trade agreement. The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) violated an understanding it had with the opposition. Its clumsy handling of the affair caused anger among students and the general public, leading to the occupation of the legislative chamber.

The administration showed arrogance in dealing with the protest. Ma has been unwilling to engage with the opposition and failed, during the six days of the occupation of the legislative chamber, to send a representative to listen to the students' grievances and seek a way to bring the affair to a peaceful conclusion. Jiang did go to the legislature, but left after a few minutes in a fit of petulance.

Instead, Ma conspired to capitalize on the situation and bring Wang, his political rival, into the fray, calling him for a meeting by invoking Article 44 of the Constitution, which allows the president to summon leaders of the various branches of government to address inter-branch disputes. His plan was to pass the responsibility for dealing with the protests to Wang. However, Wang declined to attend, saying it was an internal matter for the legislative branch.

## Ma's arrogance aggravating crisis

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There was no need for these protests to produce such regrettable circumstances. Had Ma been more willing to communicate, to open negotiation channels and listen to the students' concerns over the service trade agreement and their own futures; if he had agreed to conduct the promised clause-by-clause review, reopening negotiations with Beijing on the agreement's contentious parts, things may well have developed in a more agreeable, civilized manner.

However, he was reluctant to make even the slightest concession, afraid that to do so would be seen as a sign of weakness by China. Desperate to cling to power, he held firm, indifferent to whether it made an enemy of the public. The forced expulsion of protesters from the Executive Yuan complex was a temporary victory because they have returned to the premises. The stench of blood and bile on the streets is permeating the entire country; media reports have galvanized more students and more groups to take action. Taipei will have to keep a strong police presence not only around the Executive Yuan, but also around the Presidential Office. Revolution is in the air.

For what is left of his term, Ma will be plagued wherever he goes with protests. It will be a nightmare for him and it will be because of his incompetence.

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