

Divided loyalties of military retirees

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Taiwan's retired military officers once again made absurd spectacles of themselves by demonstrating their deficient senses of national identity.

Retired lieutenant-general Wu Sz-huai (吳石), along with several other Taiwanese retired military officers, was spotted in the audience at an event in Beijing on Friday last week listening attentively as Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) claimed that Taiwan and China are parts of a single Chinese nation and warned against "separatism."

While Wu downplayed his presence at the ceremony — saying he attended the event marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of Republic of China (ROC) founder Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙) to pay tribute to Sun — that he sat through Xi's assertion that "the separation of the Chinese territory will not be tolerated" indicates that he has allowed himself to become a tool of Beijing's "united front" tactics aimed at bringing Taiwan into China's fold.

Xi also referred to the so-called "1992 consensus" in an obvious jab at President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) Democratic Progressive Party administration, which rejects that such a consensus was reached.

Wu's attendance at the ceremony was reminiscent of a notorious remark by former ROC Air Force general Hsia Ying-chou (夏英周) over a gathering of retired military officers in China, when he said that no distinction should be made between the ROC Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), as both are "China's army."

Similarly, last year, former vice president Lien Chan (連戰) attended a military parade in Beijing marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, despite warnings from politicians from both political camps that the visit was inappropriate.

That Hsia and Lien no longer occupy official posts hardly matters, as their words and actions still bear weight: A simple remark or a false move could demoralize Taiwan's military and harm national sovereignty.

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Former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) China-friendly administration failed to draw up regulations to curb such conduct by retired military officials in China, spreading confusion among Taiwan's military personnel, triggering doubt over whether Beijing is a friend or a foe and sending the wrong message to serving and retired military officials that Hsia's and Lien's actions were acceptable.

However, Chinese aggression toward Taiwan is a very serious matter, as evidenced by video footage of Chinese military exercises showing PLA troops attacking a building resembling the Presidential Office Building — not to mention the numerous reported cases of Chinese espionage operations in Taiwan over the past few years, despite the Ma administration's claim of closer cross-strait ties.

Therefore, the public and the government must stay vigilant at all times about China's malicious intent to annex Taiwan.

Unlike the former administration, which gave the public the false impression that cross-strait relations had improved under Ma, Tsai's administration must not attempt to make light of China ramping up its military threat against Taiwan.

It appears that Wu and his ilk do not understand who Taiwan's enemy is. It is time the government considers whether these retired military officials deserve to continue receiving money and other retirement benefits at the expense of Taiwanese taxpayers.

One measure the government can implement could be to propose changes to the law that would prevent people such as Wu from engaging in actions that use taxpayers' money to sponsor their "China dreams" and harm Taiwan's national interests.

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