

## Chinese provocations hide its fear

Written by Paul Lin 林

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If China wants to pick a fight with the US, the most vulnerable time for the US would be before the White House handover. However, China does not dare to actually pick a fight, so it is doing its best to be provocative to show that it is the boss and satisfy its own people's vanity.

The most obvious action occurred in South China Sea, in the waters near Subic Bay in the Philippines, where it seized an underwater drone from right under the nose of a US surveillance vessel, despite warnings to stop.

The Chinese were very excited by this.

However, after US president-elect Donald Trump angrily said: "We should tell China that we don't want the drone they stole back, let them keep it," the vehicle was soon obediently returned to the US.

Following this incident, the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning entered the western Pacific through the Miyako Strait under the escort of a number of vessels, but instead of sailing east toward the US territory Guam, it took an immediate turn south along the east coast of Taiwan and then headed west into the South China Sea, using this "little trick" to intimidate Taiwan over the telephone call between Trump and President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文).

To intensify the threat, the Liaoning carried 15 Shenyang J-15 fighter aircraft. In general, an aircraft carrier can carry 70 to 100 aircraft, yet the Liaoning carried only 15.

Huang Dong (黄东), a military researcher based in Macau, said that there were traces implying that the numbers on the fuselage might have been altered, and that it might have been an attempt to inflate the number of aircraft — during an exercise after the fleet left the Bohai Sea, there were only 12 aircraft.

These acts cannot cover up China's lack of confidence. The Chinese Central Economic Work Conference that closed last month set the goal for economic growth this year at 6.5 percent.

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However, a week later, Chinese media reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) had made it clear that China's economic growth rate could fall below 6.5 percent.

The media said it was a sign of Xi's "open" mentality; but, in fact, the fear that a trade war might ensue after Trump takes office.

In its attempts to alleviate the threat that Trump poses to China, Beijing has not only used its official media outlets to both threaten and entice the US president-elect, but it has also infiltrated foreign media outlets.

On Dec. 16, a new column named the New Sino-US Observations (新中美观察) appeared in the China section of the Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao. The first column was entitled "Russian alliance fraught with difficulty, suppressing China even more of a fantasy."

Considering the importance of the commentary, it was surprising to see that it was not a signed piece and that the author's name was only given as "Ming Bao reporter." I immediately left a message stating that this was an official submission from Beijing. Beijing's approach is for a Chinese official to send a "party article" like this to the owner of Ming Pao, who will then assign it to a subordinate for publication, thus disguising the opinion of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as an "objective and neutral" Ming Bao report.

Probably because of my comment, beginning the next day, the New Sino-US Observations column has always carried the author's name "Yu Mingzhong" (余明忠), which could be read as "I am Ming Bao, I am China."

The column is published daily, with the exception of weekends, and it is very likely that the articles are authored by the writing squad at the Chinese think tank Academy of Social Sciences, which has been instructed to turn public opinion against Trump.

The article published on Dec. 23 was entitled "Don't think Trump is an ordinary businessman," and it warned people to take Trump seriously. It also smeared Trump and tried to confuse the

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public by telling them how Trump, when he almost went bankrupt 20 years ago, sought help from Hong Kong businesspeople, and how the seeds of his hostility toward China was planted when his business ventures there failed repeatedly.

The column on Monday last week, which was entitled “Trump’s hard-line attitude toward China has academic background,” described the harsh confrontation between China and the US as an academic argument in a bid to reassure the public.

No matter what China does, it cannot hide the fear a paper tiger feels when it is faced with a real tiger.

*Paul Lin is a political commentator.*

Translated by Lin Lee-kai

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