

Commenting on Panama and the People's Republic of China (PRC) establishing diplomatic ties, former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) expressed regret, but said he was not surprised. Indeed, during the Ma administration, there were reports that Panama sought to set up ties with China, but that it was “declined” by Beijing.

As the Ma administration recognized the so-called “1992 consensus,” Beijing made concessions in public, while piling on the pressure behind the scenes, letting China's Taiwan Affairs Office play the good guy to enhance its “united front” tactics.

Today, Beijing has been trying to extort President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), but so far has not gotten its way, so it put away the smiling mask it showed the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and let the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) experience the pressure of severed diplomatic ties.

Having grasped this situation, it is not difficult to understand that maintaining diplomatic ties was not a matter of Ma's or Tsai's capability, but rather that China has never changed its ambition to annex Taiwan, only its tricks. Any “tide of nations breaking ties with the Republic of China (ROC)” is a double-edged sword that will affect both the independence and unification views.

Whether bad things can be turned into good ones in response to geopolitical changes will depend on whether the government can ride out the storm with courage and wisdom.

Having said that, now that government transitions have become the norm, how can Chinese manipulation continue to have an effect? The clue is in the joint communique establishing diplomatic relations between China and Panama: “The government of the Republic of Panama recognizes that there is but one China in the world, that the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory.”

In other words, Panama's view of the country of China has changed from recognizing the ROC as the legitimate representative of “China” to recognizing the PRC as its legitimate representative. Panama's move undoubtedly is based on its national interests, but it also

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indicates that the nation had to face the UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 passed in 1971. The situations with the nation's other diplomatic allies are similar to Panama: There is diminishing doubt in the global community as to which government is the legal government of China.

The domino effect of countries severing ties with Taiwan is probably just a matter of time.

This is not scaremongering, but another reminder to the public and the government of Taiwan's passive position in the international community and of where the root of the problem lies.

Without addressing the problem in the right way, it will be difficult for Taiwan to escape China's trickery. For example, Panama on one hand recognizes reality — the government of the PRC is the government representing China — while on the other falling for another fiction — seeing Taiwan as an inalienable part of China.

This fiction is based on four key words: China, the PRC, the ROC and Taiwan. Logically speaking, UN Resolution 2758 and the communique signed by China and Panama only defines who has the right to represent China; it has nothing to do with Taiwan's sovereignty.

Unfortunately, after the Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) retreated with the remaining ROC troops to Taiwan. As the democratic world prevented communist expansion, Chiang occupied Taiwan and held a place as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In 1971, the UN resolved the issue of "the representatives of China," but Taiwan was still carrying the ROC burden, forever caught in the war between two Chinese parties.

Following democratization and localization of the government, many people came to regard the ROC in Taiwan as the greatest common denominator. Emotionally, there is nothing wrong with this, but in reality it is an endless source of problems.

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Panama went from recognizing the Qing Dynasty, then the ROC and now finally the PRC as representing China. This century of history shows that the ROC succeeded the Qing Dynasty and that the PRC succeeded the ROC as the internationally recognized government of China.

The “China” — the ROC — that Taiwan is emotionally connected to not only bars Taiwanese from representing Taiwan as a separate entity, it has also become the springboard of the claim that Taiwan belongs to China.

Tsai has made it clear to the international community, both in her response to Panama’s move and in her inaugural address, that “the Republic of China is a sovereign state.”

“I was elected president in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of China, thus it is my responsibility to safeguard the sovereignty and territory of the Republic of China ... the existing political foundations include the existing Republic of China constitutional order,” she said.

This is like putting the Monkey King’s magical headband on one’s own head: Whenever the “one China” headband-tightening spell is heard, Taiwanese begin to struggle, but the more they struggle, the more painful it gets and the less sustainable the “status quo” becomes.

The KMT says it is the government’s refusal to recognize the “1992 consensus” that caused the diplomatic crisis, but that is only because it is doing nothing but awaiting its doom.

The KMT and the DPP both face a dilemma, but there is way out of this trap.

In 2007, then-UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon said that under the terms of UN Resolution 2758, “the United Nations considers Taiwan for all purposes to be an integral part of the People’s Republic of China,” which led the US and other countries to express their opposition.

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Ban then gave assurances that the UN would no longer state that Taiwan is part of China.

In the three Sino-US communiques, the US only “acknowledges” Beijing’s subjective claim that Taiwan belongs to China, but it does not “recognize” the claim as an objective fact.

The Taiwan Relations Act and the “six assurances” convey the US’ geopolitical map, which treats Taiwanese sovereignty as disconnected from China.

The PRC conducted “missile tests” in waters surrounding Taiwan during the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, prompting then-US president Bill Clinton to order an aircraft carrier group to sail through the Taiwan Strait to deter China and commander of the US Pacific fleet Admiral Harry Harris Jr to warn that any attempt at unification by China using military force would be unacceptable. These show that the US has never fallen for the fiction that Taiwan belongs to China.

Taiwan was occupied by the US after World War II and given up by Japan in the Treaty of San Francisco. It is self-evident that Taiwan will be able to find a solution by decoupling itself from the ROC, or continue in uncertainty by hanging on to it.

Translated by Lin Lee-kai

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