

Unity is the key to thwarting China

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The severing of diplomatic relations with Panama is a sign that the diplomatic truce that was a result of former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) recognition of the so-called "1992 consensus" has come to a screeching halt.

China will now put huge pressure on Taiwan and its diplomatic allies, and the nation should prepare itself for a hard landing.

China's diplomatic battle against Taiwan is not intended to bring external pressure, but to stir up domestic trouble. If everyone starts to point fingers, criticize the purity of their opponents' national identity and discuss whether to accept the "1992 consensus" whenever an ally severs diplomatic relations, China will develop a taste for it.

On the other hand, if external pressure begets greater unity and a more unified approach to the outside world by Taiwanese, inciting allies to break diplomatic relations with Taiwan would not make much sense to Beijing.

China is continuously pressing President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) to accept the "1992 consensus" and it is trying to drive a wedge between the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), as well as between Tsai and Taiwanese. It is convinced that if Tsai relents, the public will be willing to accept the "one China" principle.

However, reality is different: The reason Tsai cannot accept the "1992 consensus" is because Taiwanese do not accept it.

If Tsai went against public opinion, the DPP government would collapse just like the KMT government before it. No elected government would commit suicide in this way.

Although the Tsai administration remains silent on cross-strait relations and diplomatic affairs, local government leaders are more outspoken.

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Be it the view of Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) — who is to go to Shanghai for a cross-strait forum early next month — that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are “one family,” Tainan Mayor William Lai’s (賴清德) talk about “affinity with China and love for Taiwan,” Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-tsan’s (鄭文燦) view that Taiwan should “reconcile with China and love Taiwan,” or Taichung Mayor Lin Chia-lung’s (林智鴻) suggestion that we should be “friendly toward China and love Taiwan,” everyone is looking for a way to interact with China.

Whether Taiwan can find more time and flexibility in the extremely unfavorable situation will not depend on Tsai’s acceptance of the “1992 consensus,” but on changes in the international situation and the cross-strait geopolitical relationship, as well as on how highly Taiwanese value their way of life, human rights and freedom, and how willing they are to protect them.

The international situation and the cross-strait geopolitical relationship might not be decided by Taiwanese, but they are in charge of protecting their collective way of life.

The more united Taiwanese are and the more determined to protect their way of life, the higher the cost to China, regardless of how it seeks to control Taiwan. That would give the nation more time.

However, the opposite also holds true.

Freedom, democracy and human rights are the most powerful weapons Taiwanese have to oppose China’s threats. Without democracy, Taiwan has no future, and democracy without unity also spells doom.

This is why the suggestions of local government leaders are not an attack on the government and Tsai, but a diverse defense aimed at exploring all possibilities, because the final decision is not in the hands of local government leaders or the president — it is a decision to be democratically made by all Taiwanese.

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