

China on Tuesday marked its Army Day, commemorating the 1927 founding of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

In a speech to mark the occasion, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) said: "Today, we are closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any other time in history."

The term "great rejuvenation" is a reference to the "China Dream." The remark about "at any other time in history" was a bold claim, given that China boasts a continuous history of over 5,000 years.

Xi also said: "We absolutely will not permit any person, any organization, any political party — at any time, in any form — to separate any piece of Chinese territory from China."

That was wholly appropriate. It is the duty of any state, and the armed forces loyal to it, to protect the sovereignty of the nation they serve.

Three themes, then: rejuvenation (the "China Dream"), collective history and territorial integrity.

What is the "China Dream"?

We can start with what it is not: It is not some kind of cheap knock-off of the American Dream. The latter is essentially an individualistic endeavor; the "China Dream" is a collective vision, involving personal sacrifice, to return China to its former glory.

For the Chinese, it is "our dream," not "my dream."

It is a response to China's perception of its "century of humiliation" at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialism, starting with the First Opium War (1839–1842) and ending with the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1945. It is, essentially, founded on a conception of collective history and a wish to return to a state prior to the humiliation.

However, this "historical reset" presents major problems for the Taiwanese. Just as China will not countenance its territorial integrity being compromised, its idea of what constitutes that territory is based upon a deluded sense of history — and one that necessarily denies us our own territory.

China has only controlled Taiwan for just more than 200 years of its 5,000 year history — and that was back in the Qing Dynasty. That period ended when the Qing ceded Taiwan to the Japanese in perpetuity with the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895.

The Taiwanese are not trying to disturb China's dream by expecting to be left alone. They do not want to see any territory separated from China. In the real world, Taiwan has not been part of China's territory for well over a century.

Beijing's continuous contention that Taiwan remains an "inalienable part" of China's territory — there is no such thing — is a delusion that the international community indulges China with, because of what members of that community stand to gain from so doing.

Taiwan is a sovereign nation. There is nothing de facto about it. It is manifestly evident that this country is a nation in its own right, with its own government, its own body of laws, its own — albeit slightly hybrid, considering its complex history — culture.

What about the collective vision and aspirations of the Taiwanese? How about a "Taiwan Dream" of finally being able to hold its head up and stand proud in the international community, after being thrown around between foreign rulers for the past few centuries, from the Dutch to Ming loyalists to the Qing to the Japanese to the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT)?

No nation is locked in a historical snapshot. China would do better concentrating on building

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the future with what it already owns, not continuously engaging in self-deception about its historical rights at the expense of the peoples of other countries. It invaded Tibet. It wants to annex Taiwan. At that point, it becomes invasive rather than defensive.

Taiwan's message to Xi should be: The "China Dream" is your dream. It is not ours.

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