

## The US is waking to China's cold war

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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The term “cold war” is being bandied about again. This time it is not referring to the Cold War between the former Soviet Union and the West, but to a new state of international competition in which a resurgent China seeks to restructure the international world order in a form more favorable to itself.

If China succeeds in this, it will pose an existential threat to Taiwan as a sovereign, independent nation enjoying democratic freedoms.

Taiwan is used to the threat from China. US guarantees on Taiwan's security are well-documented and codified in US law. Under the administration of US President Donald Trump, there has been a distinct and welcome stepping up of security cooperation between Taiwan and the US, and US Secretary of Defense James Mattis has pushed back against Beijing's bullying tactics in the South China Sea and the region in general.

In an interview with CNN that aired on Monday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) said that stronger Taiwan-US security ties would “become a barrier for the Chinese to think about the future military scenarios against Taiwan.”

While all of this is welcome in terms of military security, Beijing has its eyes on achieving its goals in more subtle, all-encompassing and pernicious ways.

The cold war that Beijing is pursuing was on Friday last week brought up by Michael Collins, deputy assistant director of the CIA's East Asia mission center, during a discussion entitled “China Rising” at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

Collins differentiated his use of the term from the Cold War with the Soviet Union, calling the present situation with Beijing a “cold war by definition.” He talked of China exploiting “all avenues of power, licit and illicit, public and private, economic [and] military” to undermine the standing of its rivals, “without resorting to conflict.”

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At the same event, former US undersecretary of defense for intelligence Marcel Lettre talked of Beijing's systemic approach to advancing its interests, using a "whole-of-government, whole-of-system, whole-of-state approach," including influence operations, cyberespionage and intellectual property theft.

Two days earlier at the forum, FBI Director Christopher Wray said that China wants to position itself as "the sole dominant superpower, the sole dominant economic power," employing a wide-reaching and coordinated approach involving academia, research and development, and "everything from agriculture to high tech." To illustrate what he called the "pervasiveness" of the situation, Wray said that the FBI had economic espionage investigations in all 50 US states that "trace back to China."

When Collins talks of a cold war, when Lettre speaks of the systemic, "whole-of-state approach," when Wray talks of the pervasiveness of the situation, they are essentially referring to the "united front" tactics that China has been employing for decades.

However, it is worth bearing in mind who the real rival, and not demonize an entire country. As Collins said, the threat of China to the US and to the international order does not come necessarily from the nation itself, nor from its rise, nor from the Chinese public or the wider Chinese diaspora: it comes from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Taiwanese have long been aware of the CCP's united front tactics and the persuasiveness of this approach. They have no problem with China itself; the fear and frustration derive from the CCP's persistent threats and intimidation, and its insistence that it has some kind of historical right to control how they live their lives.

The good news is that US security and intelligence agencies are evidently becoming more aware of what China is trying to achieve in terms of not just regional, but global hegemony, the pervasiveness of its tactics and how it is silently moving the world into a kind of new cold war. Wray said that people "are starting to wake up and ... rub ... the sleep out of their eyes." The nightmare is just starting.

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