

The freedoms of speech and expression are among the nation's most precious assets, standing as pillars of its democracy. However, a shrine to communism created in Changhua County by a former military officer who advocates unification with China is a timely reminder for the government that it needs to remain vigilant over how democracy could be undermined and national identity disintegrated through abuses of these rights.

Wei Ming-jen (魏明仁), who is in the construction business, acquired a Buddhist temple seven years ago and converted it into its present form, with the national flag of the People's Republic of China (PRC) flying and daily broadcasts of the Chinese national anthem.

Following years of complaints by locals, the Changhua County Government finally took action on Friday last week, cutting power and water supplies to the property and pledging to demolish illegal buildings on the site tomorrow.

Changhua County Commissioner Wei Ming-ku (魏明坤) said that respect for Wei Ming-jen's right to freedom of speech meant that the county government had not taken action earlier, but the illegal buildings and use of the site to engage in activities that slandered national dignity had prompted the action.

Such remarks expose the mindset common among government officials, who more often than not maintain adherence to freedom of expression, but lack awareness of how national security and sovereignty are undermined by fifth columnists by means that go beyond the bounds of freedom of speech to become assaults on democracy.

Indeed, freedom of speech is not a license to abuse: There is nothing more unfortunate than when the values of democracy are twisted and the line between enemies and friends is blurred.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

## Rights do not include threats

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However, Article 29 also notes that “in the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

Regrettably, it appears that the public’s sense of national identity remains vulnerable to Beijing’s infiltration and “united front” tactics. Why? The answer is simple: How can people be expected to tell friend from foe when the government itself appears to be just as confused?

While the military says that China is the enemy, with thousands of missiles aimed at Taiwan, the government allows the PRC national flag — a symbol of China’s sovereignty — to fly in streets across the nation.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), when it was in opposition, was critical of the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration’s handling of issues when it came to China and concerning the nation’s security and dignity. However, even with the mandate of the public giving the DPP control of the executive and legislative branches, it appears to be just as gutless when safeguarding national security calls for boldness and toughness.

Or could it be that DPP officials, interested only in holding on to power, are not prepared for Chinese aggression?

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