

On Saturday, two rallies were held to oppose China's ambitions to annex Taiwan. One of them, organized by the Formosa Alliance in Taipei, used "Referendum yes! Annexation no!" as its main slogan, while the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) held a separate march in Kaohsiung under the slogan "No annexation! Defend Taiwan!" The main difference concerns their attitudes toward allowing referendums on national sovereignty.

Those who oppose such referendums say that independence cannot be achieved solely through such a process. They say that the international situation should be carefully assessed and foreign policies should be enacted that draw allies great and small, and gradually gain endorsements of the nation's sovereign status. They say that the referendum demand could blur the focus of the Nov. 24 nine-in-one elections, while not helping to promote opposition to annexation.

They think that the nation's sovereign status is not whatever Taiwanese want it to be, but also depends on the internal politics of the US and China.

Having won a great deal of power for himself, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) wants to wrong-foot his opponents by taking a hardline approach to Taiwan, so the nation could face a military invasion if it adopts adventurist policies.

As the US and China face off, some say that Taiwan should work in harmony with US strategy instead of making trouble. They say that by keeping an eye on developments, the space for national sovereignty could be slowly, but surely widened.

The Formosa Alliance says that the DPP has always guided Taiwan toward achieving direct democracy through a referendum on sovereignty to decide constitutional reform and the nation's future.

However, the alliance complains that, since gaining a legislative majority as well as the presidency, the DPP has reneged on its promises by blocking attempts to amend the law to allow sovereignty-related referendums.

Over the past century or so, referendums have become a fairly common way to decide questions of sovereignty.

Alliance supporters say that for a nominally “democratic” and “progressive” party that was always talking about defending national sovereignty to oppose sovereignty-related referendums betrays its supporters’ expectations.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) calls for maintaining the “status quo” of the Republic of China, but her displays of goodwill and non-resistance to China abandon the boldness one would expect of a national leader.

Tsai said plenty of friendly things in her address on Double Ten National Day, but China still called her speech “hostile.”

Evidently, stooping low has not pleased the other side, so the alliance says there should be a sovereignty referendum to show that Taiwan is determined to defend its independence and oppose annexation.

The evolution of the nation’s democracy over more than three decades and its pursuit of universal values have attracted the US’ attention and made it want to include Taiwan in its counter-Chinese strategy. Rather than accusing Taiwan of making trouble, US President Donald Trump’s administration hopes the nation will stand by the US in saying “no” to China.

Not long ago, Taiwanese stood together in all weathers, facing riot police to win freedom and democracy. Hopefully Tsai will use her communication skills to make sure that the two trends “march separately, but strike together” instead of canceling each other out.

To do otherwise would look silly and make things easy for China and its supporters in Taiwan.

Alliance, DPP must focus on shared goal

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