

Taiwan will prevail against China

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday delivered a forthright New Year's Day address, her first major speech since her party's poor showing in the local elections. Her speech contained tough words for Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平):

"Here, I would like to call on China to face squarely the reality of the existence of the Republic of China on Taiwan," Tsai said, adding that China "must respect the insistence of 23 million people on freedom and democracy, and must use peaceful, on-parity means to handle our differences."

Given her party's electoral setback, people might have expected Tsai to soften her language toward China, but her resolute stance, although counterintuitive, is the correct approach.

The differences between Taiwan and China have never been greater.

As Taiwan's democracy evolves and strengthens, China under Xi is regressing into rigid totalitarianism and a Mao Zedong (毛泽东)-style leadership cult.

The ever-widening chasm between the two nations was aptly demonstrated on Wednesday last week, when Qiu Zhanxuan (邱展轩), head of the Peking University Marxist Society, was grabbed by plainclothes police officers and forced into a black car outside the university's east gate.

He was on his way to attend a memorial marking the 125th anniversary of Mao's birthday.

Chinese police officers kidnapping a student from the country's most prestigious academic institution for trying to celebrate the birthday of the country's founder — and a founding member of the Chinese Communist Party — reveals the Xi regime's extreme level of paranoia.

More absurdly, a giant portrait of Mao still hangs above the entrance to the Forbidden City —

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the symbolic political center of China's governments through the centuries.

As one student said of the kidnapping: "What's wrong with remembering Chairman Mao? What law does it break? How can they publicly kidnap a Peking University student?"

Yet, in the bizarre, Kafkaesque world created by Xi, nobody can be sure anymore what is safe to say and what is verboten, as the rules of the game change inexplicably, from one day to the next.

Events are certainly moving quickly in China. Who would have predicted a decade ago that as the world crossed the threshold into 2019 — the 30th anniversary of the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, which triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union — China under Xi would have regressed to such a state that it now bears all the hallmarks of Stalinist Russia?

Human rights lawyers are regularly detained, while officials, high-profile businesspeople and even celebrities are singled out on spurious corruption charges. Even the Chinese former head of Interpol, Meng Hongwei (孟宏偉), could not protect himself from one of Xi's random purges.

This cannot end well. Despite China's apparent strength, its model of government rests on fragile foundations. Xi's centralization of power and megalomaniacal tendencies increasingly seem like the actions of a leader struggling to keep a grip on power.

Taiwan and the West must have faith in their superior forms of government and play the long game. Freedom of speech, thought and ideas, and the rule of law eventually proved ineluctable for the Soviet Union, there is no reason why the same democratic ideals cannot prevail against China.

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