

During a state visit to Nepal on Sunday, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) told Nepali Prime Minister Khagda Prasad Oli that any attempt to drive a wedge between China and its “territories” would “end in crushed bodies and shattered bones,” China Central Television reported.

Xi's comment was an explicit threat to Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters, who have been a thorn in Beijing's side for months.

The message was plain: If you carry on like this, you will share the same fate as the pro-democracy protesters whose bodies were crushed and bones shattered by the tanks that rolled into Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The comment seemed particularly crass as this year marks the 30th anniversary of the massacre, but more than lacking compassion, it was a strategic blunder: Whenever Beijing interferes in the affairs of Hong Kong — or Taiwan — its leaders only end up making matters worse for themselves.

In 2002, just five years after the handover of Hong Kong from Britain, the Hong Kong Legislative Council, apparently on orders from Beijing, proposed legislation to amend the territory's Basic Law to prohibit treason, secession, sedition and subversion against the Chinese government.

Panic spread as Hong Kongers justifiably feared the bill would sound the death knell on freedom of speech. The public mobilized and an estimated half a million or more Hong Kongers marched through the streets in protest on July 1, 2003 — a watershed moment in Hong Kong's democracy movement.

In 2012, the authorities proposed amendments to insert patriotism classes into Hong Kong's school curriculum. Much of society united against what was viewed as an attempt by Beijing to brainwash Hong Kong's youth. It also led to the formation of the student campaign group, Scholarism, headed up by then-15-year-old Joshua Wong (黃之鋒). Two years later, Wong was back spearheading the “Umbrella movement,” after Beijing went back on its commitment to

## Beijing's inept 'Greater China' strategy

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introduce universal suffrage.

Xi is interfering again this year, attempting through Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) to introduce a law that would have allowed any Hong Kong resident to be extradited to China.

Beijing's meddling is counterproductive and a strategic blunder. All the Chinese government needed to do was scrupulously adhere to Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" model — and Taiwan's pro-independence movement would have been effectively neutered.

Beijing has been similarly tone-deaf to Taiwan, most famously firing missiles in 1996 into waters near it to prevent then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) from becoming Taiwan's first directly elected president. The strategy backfired.

Today, Chinese warships and military aircraft regularly conduct encirclement drills around Taiwan in a crude attempt at psychological warfare.

With Xi's militarization of the South China Sea and brazen cyberespionage worldwide, he might have moved his chess pieces too early, prematurely waking the US lion from its slumber and alerting the whole world to Beijing's nefarious intentions. In years to come, these actions might also be viewed by historians as major strategic blunders.

That is not to say that in Taiwan, and elsewhere, people should be complacent, but perhaps China's leaders are not the formidable strategic geniuses that the outside world takes them for.

Having surrounded himself with a coterie of yes-men, the arrogant Xi and his regime might be weaker than the world thinks. Taiwan — and Hong Kong — must stay the course and play the long game.

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