

China is looking for a scapegoat

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
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Nouriel Roubini, a New York University economics professor who is sometimes called “Dr Doom,” has accurately predicted several financial crises.

In a Feb. 20 interview with *Der Spiegel*, he predicted that the COVID-19 epidemic would lead to a global economic disaster, that stock markets around the world would fall by 30 to 40 percent and that US President Donald Trump would fail in his re-election bid.

Roubini also said that the Chinese government “will need a scapegoat” to deal with the impact of the epidemic, and that he assumes “that China will start trouble in Taiwan, Hong Kong or even Vietnam. They’ll crack down on protesters in Hong Kong or send fighters over Taiwanese airspace to provoke the US military. It would only take one accident in the Strait of Formosa and you would see military action. Not a hot war between China and the US, but some form of action.”

Judging from how China has been flexing its military muscle recently and its all-out attempt to improve its image internationally, Roubini’s talk about a scapegoat does not seem too alarmist.

At the beginning of the outbreak, China faced an even more difficult situation than South Korea, Italy and Iran face today. Together with the sealing off of cities, and the strict control and quarantining of people in a paramilitary manner, it placed the operation of the state apparatus in a very difficult situation and was unable to deploy any other plans and schemes.

As it began to gain control of the situation and stopped panicking, it started to understand that the extent of public discontent could have an impact on the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule, and began to put maintaining calm — saving the government — on a par with disease prevention and perhaps even treated maintaining calm as more important than prevention.

As a result, the tone of the CCP’s international propaganda and its military actions have made it clear that they are making Taiwan and the US the targets of its attempts to divert attention from the domestic situation.

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China's traditional Asian opponents are Japan, the Southeast Asian nations disputing its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, Taiwan, as well as the US — the superpower that maintains order and stability in the region.

Due to its tourism economy, Japan has not introduced strict controls on Chinese entering the country, and they have also donated epidemic prevention supplies. Thanks to the great improvements in bilateral relations, Japan is not on China's blacklist.

However, the US started a trade dispute and poked a hole in the economic fairy tale behind China's rise built on unfair practices, such as intellectual property theft, counterfeiting and national subsidies to businesses, thus destroying Chinese President Xi Jinping's (习近平) attempts to build his "Dream of the Red Empire."

Furthermore, at the beginning of the outbreak, the US worried that it could lead to a pandemic that could threaten the lives of Americans. It therefore placed travel restrictions on Chinese entering the US and began to evacuate Americans from China.

This caused China to lose face and it also had a substantive effect on the country. All this made the US China's enemy No. 1.

China responded by accusing the US of overreacting and setting a bad precedent, and by expelling three *Wall Street Journal* reporters over an opinion piece that labeled China "The Real Sick Man of Asia."

The US the day before had reduced the number of reporters for Chinese state-run media allowed to remain in the US.

Above all, Beijing's goal in trying to change its international image is to show that COVID-19 did not originate in China, and it has conducted a propaganda campaign to show that the results of its response to the epidemic are excellent and that it is an example to the rest of the world.

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The WHO is following Beijing's every whim and has repeatedly praised the results of China's prevention measures. It has even said that the world owes Wuhan a debt in response to Beijing's absurd claim that China sacrificed itself to save the world.

Even more important, a vicious rumor that the virus came from the US is spreading in China in an attempt to change the negative international image of the country, which has led to criticism and discrimination.

China is completely ignoring Taiwan's epidemic prevention-related concerns and expert advice as it tries to blame the government for using the outbreak to promote independence.

As a result, the export ban on masks and the debate on whether to donate supplies and funds or charter return flights for China-based Taiwanese businesspeople became topics of debate.

Even the Taiwanese practice of referring to the disease as "Wuhan pneumonia" has been used by the CCP to attack the Democratic Progressive Party by saying that it was using the epidemic to promote independence.

This is why Chinese military aircraft have repeatedly provoked the nation by circling Taiwan, and China's Taiwan Affairs Office and official media have used exceptionally coarse language to accuse President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of being "cold-blooded," which is being repeated in Taiwan by a small number of pro-unification people who are trying to bully the government.

China's international propaganda is illogical and coarse, making it obvious that Beijing is looking for a scapegoat as it tries to divert attention from the domestic chaos and consolidate the regime's hold on power.

This kind of propaganda is intended for domestic consumption. Once Chinese believe that the virus was planted by the US to suppress China's growing strength and that Taiwan is willing to serve as a US pawn to promote independence, Chinese discontent would find an outlet. When that happens, the embattled CCP would have succeeded in stabilizing its hold on power.

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