

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. In that war's aftermath, novelist George Orwell produced two prophetic works. The first, *Animal Farm*, was published in August 1945; the second, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, came out in June 1949.

Both still ring true and cover a wide range of messages, including even how the mid-sized nation of Taiwan achieved its democracy and why it still maintains an outlier status in a COVID-19 world.

With its full planetary scope, WWII left untold millions dead and injured, cities were destroyed and the future path of most nations was altered. New nations arose, old ones disappeared, few were left untouched.

As an allegorical tale, *Animal Farm* reflects what Orwell saw coming in the resultant Cold War period and how revolutions, though often needed, can easily fall prey to greed, a lust for power and a justification of the cult of personality.

Though supposedly for the common good, revolutions do not always turn out that way. Orwell anticipated this and so penned how the pigs, which had masterminded the revolution in *Animal Farm*, soon became as bad as the capitalist oppressors that they had replaced. Orwell's capitalists were no heroes, but neither were the new breed of "communist leaders."

As the animal's revolution progressed, slowly but surely, the animals' seven commandments were changed.

"All animals are equal" took on the addition of "but some animals are more equal than others." "No animal shall kill any other animal" was altered with the addition of "without cause," to cover certain "executions" and so on.

Now, 75 years after the end of WWII, an Orwellian irony exists: the two major and largest communist countries, Russia and China, have become capitalist, with oligarchs often

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controlling internal profits and even collaborating with oligarchs in the US. Whatever nation of those three one is in, the average citizen (animals) still looks in at opulence and privilege from the outside.

However, it is Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four that more closely captures the problems and dystopian threats we see in today's world.

From it, familiar terms and phrases come to mind, such as Big Brother and its constant surveillance; the Ministry of Peace, which needs and promotes perpetual war; the Ministry of Truth, which pushes "fake news" and rewrites history; and doublethink and doublespeak. We see that these dystopian characteristics remain alive and well in the three major powers of today's world.

Orwell divided the post-war world into three major powers called Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. The names and parameters may vary, but it could be said that Orwell foresaw and spoke of the US, Russia, and China.

Like Orwell's three powers, the US, Russia and China too often pursue zero-sum games to advance their own interests and protect their own turf. At the same time, they ignore the world as a whole. They fail to cooperate and resort to keeping small wars going simply because they still live under the old paradigm of a global village and not a global home.

Their very size prevents any joint cooperation or progress. The gain of one must come at the loss of another.

Where then do mid-sized nations and the outlier Taiwan come in?

Look no farther than COVID-19, and where this global crisis lays bare the inadequacy of the three major powers. Instead of working together to solve the virus problem, they play the "blame game," while oligarchs and corporations continue to seek personal gain in zero-sum games relating to trade.

The US and China continue to accuse each other of failing in the handling of the virus. Russia remains relatively silent, perhaps because it is more interested in hiding its own death toll and examining where its advantage over the other two lies.

In the WHO, China opposes the participation of the capable mid-sized nation of Taiwan. In its zero-sum game, it seeks to foist its doublespeak “one China” principle on the world, while many other nations strive to follow a “one China” policy.

With poor leadership, the WHO gets caught in this nomenclature game and sides with China’s doublespeak to exclude Taiwan.

The US, which is still “undecided” on Taiwan’s status 75 years after WWII, plays a weak hand and finally promotes the idea of Taiwan having “observer” status in WHO.

Russia again remains relatively silent on this issue. Where does it seek its advantage?

Size continues to be a key factor in the Orwellian problem of the three major powers. As a nation grows in size, its leaders suffer the Peter Principle of ineffectiveness and lose touch with their average citizens.

One does not have to look far for examples. The media in China and Russia operate like the Ministry of Truth, and even in the US, its president deflects by accusing the media of being “fake,” because they do not praise him.

To compensate, the cult of personality is used to justify leadership. Russia eventually threw off the cult of Joseph Stalin only to return to it with Russian President Vladimir Putin. China of course still relies on the cult of Mao Zedong (毛泽东) to justify its leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) and the Chinese Communist Party.

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The larger a nation is, the more easily it shelters incompetence and greed. Russian oligarchs buy Trump properties in the US to escape taxes in their own country. Wealthy Chinese nationals similarly invest in US properties as well. US corporations return the favor by exploiting profits from the cheap labor in Chinese factories.

Orwell would have had a field day if he knew that the three countries with the most millionaires and billionaires in the world are the US, China and Russia. He would also not be shocked that the people with the biggest non-tax paying accounts in the Cayman Islands, or as found in the Panama Papers, are US, Russian or Chinese nationals.

Politicians in these three countries are more in bed with big donors than their average citizens.

In true Orwellian fashion, US senators used a private briefing on the dangers of COVID-19 to first divest themselves of stocks that would tank before they considered seeking ways of helping their people.

Mid-sized nations are far from perfect, but the advantage that they have is that by nature, they must be closer to the people and their failures are more evident. While many mid-sized nations have had their failures in the handling of the virus, the real success stories in handling COVID-19 are only found in those same mid-sized nations.

Taiwan stands as the outlier here; it is the point-counterpoint in this argument. It has taken the virus with its global impact to expose the Orwellian dystopia that is being revealed before our eyes. One wonders what Orwell would have written about Taiwan in such a situation?

Perhaps if he had lived, Orwell would have come up with a new novel, one where the outlier becomes the surprise that offers the solution that the big three and the others failed to find.

How Taiwan, existing outside the system, still managed to find its democracy and, though like a stepchild, became the one that helped point the way to handling and resolving the virus crisis. It did this all as a participative democracy.

George Orwell and outlier Taiwan

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Stranger things have happened.

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