

Carl Schmitt and Taiwan's future

Written by Jerome Keating
Saturday, 18 July 2020 07:01

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” So goes the ancient saying, one that nonetheless rings true. It is an aphorism that Taiwan needs to consider as it watches the enemy at the gates in Hong Kong and ponders the future.

Taiwan is an independent, multi-party democratic state. If it ever has any doubts about who is its enemy, it need look no farther than the People's Republic of China (PRC), the one-party state on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

The flag of that hegemonic PRC has never flown over Taiwan, yet it covets Taiwan and constantly tries to get other nations to acknowledge its ambitious “one China” principle.

The PRC also makes a point of regularly threatening to invade Taiwan by force if it formally declares how its de facto independence separates it from China.

From Taiwan's perspective, what should the rationale be for dealing with this real separation and contention?

In *The Concept of the Political*, political theorist Carl Schmitt lays out the distinction of friend and enemy among nations. He analyzes how states must first assess each other regarding sovereignty, and decide who is friend and who is foe.

If states operate from the standpoint of economics, they limit themselves to whether any relationship is profitable or unprofitable. However, states can and will have temporary but profitable relationships with an enemy.

On the other hand, if states go deeper into the issues of national sovereignty, then clearer lines can be drawn. That is the territory of friend and enemy that Schmitt discusses and sees as crucial — there is no wiggle room there.

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Taiwan has been down this road before and seen both sides. When it was a one-party regime under the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the KMT stated that the PRC was its enemy. However, when Taiwan became a democracy and China's economic lures were tempting, things changed for the KMT.

In 2000, in Taiwan's second direct presidential election, the KMT lost the presidency to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). That marked a tipping point in the KMT's alleged practice and beliefs. It did not like a democracy where it could lose and it started to only look for economic gain.

This led to then-Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi's (蘇起) invention of the term "1992 consensus."

The KMT was attempting to rewrite the ongoing narrative of Taiwan in a way that tied it to the party's past. Fortunately, Taiwanese in their new democratic "imagined community" saw things differently and never quite fell for this ruse.

More followed. The KMT's duplicity created a double irony, one that former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) still tries to foist on Taiwan. Ma recently said that the KMT should get the PRC to agree on how the KMT term "1992 consensus" allows for two interpretations. He also challenged the DPP that if it did not like the KMT's invention, it should come up with a better way of describing Taiwan's relationship with China.

Ma's fantasy fixates on an alternate reality in which Taiwan could simply convince the PRC that they are one country, but can live happily ever after with different interpretations as to who legitimately rules them.

This boggles the mind. Is Ma blind to how the PRC has not even honored the "one country, two systems" model that it established in Hong Kong?

How laughable it is that the PRC would willingly accept Ma's claim that Taiwan and the PRC simply differ on this "small matter" of interpreting who legitimately rules this alleged "one

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China.”

Ma ignores that he had eight years as president when his party controlled the legislature. In that period, he could have resolved this issue with Beijing, but he did not. Why? In typical Ma fashion, of course, he feared to bring it up.

In 2015, Ma had his one-on-one meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) in Singapore. Again, that would have been a perfect time to raise the matter of two interpretations, but Ma sidestepped that opportunity, too.

No, unless he happens to be a traitor, the only relationship with the PRC that Ma seems to have sought and won was a profitable trade balance. How then does he have the audacity to suggest that others should resolve this distinction of friend or enemy that Schmitt discusses?

To Ma's challenge to the DPP that it find a better solution, there is a simple, easy answer: State the reality that does exist.

Taiwan need only review the basic requirements of nationhood in the Montevideo Convention to discover that it meets all of those qualifications: Taiwan has defined territorial boundaries, it has its own army, it levies its own taxes, it governs its own people, etc.

Recognition by other nations is not a requirement, although Taiwan still has 15 friends who shun all of the economically profitable relationships that the PRC offers them.

Taiwan's choice should therefore be to return to what former democratically elected president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) proposed in 1999, namely that China and Taiwan deal with each other on a state-to-state basis.

This is the real world and the realm of sovereignty that Schmitt describes. In this realm, it becomes evident why China remains Taiwan's No. 1 enemy. Not only is China's one-party

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state diametrically opposed to Taiwan's democracy, but China also constantly seeks to absorb Taiwan's sovereignty.

From this, there follow two questions for Taiwan. First, who is the enemy of my enemy? Taiwan needs to determine which nations also see China as an enemy in the hard politics of Asia.

Second, which nations would have the most to lose if Taiwan's democracy was destroyed by China?

All nations, not just Taiwan, must ask themselves these hardball questions given the stark reality uncovered by recent events.

India is beginning to wake up to the fact that China is its enemy. It has lost territorial ground to China in the region of the Himalayas, where many of its soldiers were killed in a border clash. Through Tibet, China seeks to control the headwaters of rivers feeding India and Southeast Asia — that is not make-believe, and it does not bode well.

Other nations are finding themselves in the coils of this PRC boa constrictor as it continues to dam up the rivers. Vietnam is one such nation. Along with Taiwan, Vietnam has an ongoing dispute with China over the Paracel Islands (Xisha Islands, 西沙群岛) in the South China Sea and it should not forget past border clashes with China over its intervention in Cambodia.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend" should be Taiwan's mantra as it examines which nations see the PRC as a growing enemy.

As COVID-19 has spread around the world, even nations outside Asia realize the growing threat that the PRC poses not just to the financial livelihood of their citizens, but also to their lives. The PRC only plays by its own rules.

Japan and the US have the most to lose if China attacks and destroys Taiwan's democracy.

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They are directly affected by the PRC's hegemonic ambitions in the South China Sea and its efforts to break the first island chain, and they can no longer remain as ostriches hiding their heads in the sand.

It is simple math and the reality of self-preservation: The coils of the PRC constrictor continue to tighten.

Taiwan is not the threat. It has been friends with most if not all nations of the world. However, Taiwan is the only one that clearly knows who its enemy is.

As for other nations, will they finally become aware of China's threat or simply listen to the many "panda huggers" who blindly judge from the limited perspective of profitable or unprofitable relationships?

Recent events continue to reveal that the enemy is at the gates. There is a lot more at stake in Taiwan's democracy than meets the eye.

Xi has read Carl Schmitt and uses his ideas — it is time for others to do the same.

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