

On Nov. 19, Australian Defence Force Chief General Angus Campbell released the findings of a four-and-a-half-year inquiry into alleged war crimes by Australian special forces in Afghanistan. The report recommended that 19 soldiers should be investigated by the Australian Federal Police over the alleged murders of 39 prisoners and civilians.

The report is a brutally honest assessment of alleged wrongdoing — and a subsequent attempted coverup — by the pride of Australia's armed forces, which shocked the nation.

Despite the serious allegations against a small number of personnel, Australians have good reason to hold their heads high, for the report is also an affirmation of the strength of Australia's open democracy.

Unlike totalitarian regimes such as China or Russia, when things go wrong, self-correcting democracies such as Australia have the courage to wash their dirty laundry in public and own up to wrongdoing. Those born in democracies intrinsically understand that transparency and public accountability are the best way to improve governance and fix mistakes: Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

To counter China's lack of transparency, Beijing employs "political warfare" to subvert democracies by distorting their values and twisting the truth.

This was aptly demonstrated by Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian (赵立坚) at a news briefing on Friday last week when he made hay out of the report's findings, saying that it "fully exposed the hypocrisy of the human rights and freedom these Western countries are always chanting."

On Monday, Zhao went further by posting a doctored image of a smiling Australian soldier holding a bloody knife to the throat of an Afghan child holding a lamb. A large Australian flag adorns the image's background. In his social media post of the picture, Zhao wrote: "Shocked by murder of Afghan civilians & prisoners by Australian soldiers."

Taiwan must stand with Australia

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The decision by Chinese officials to troll the Australian government with such a provocative image shows that Beijing's so-called "wolf warrior" diplomacy is here to stay. It is also a salient warning of the futility of Australia — or any other nation — that tries to appease the Chinese tiger by appealing to the Chinese Communist Party's "good nature."

Only one week prior, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison attempted to reset the strained relationship during a speech at British think tank Policy Exchange by praising China's economic record and urging Beijing not to view Australia through the lens of strategic competition with the US.

Morrison's olive branch was summarily snapped in half four days later, when the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced the imposition of fresh tariffs of up to 212 percent on Australian wine.

The Morrison government's misguided overture betrays a flawed understanding of China, whose neo-imperialistic government views middling powers like Australia as vassal states. Any concessions are interpreted by Beijing as signs of weakness.

Like a tiger having scented blood, an emboldened Beijing has pounced on its prey and is proceeding to tear it up. China wants to make an example out of Australia, believing that geographically isolated from the West, it presents a soft target and will roll over under pressure.

However, it has underestimated Australia's resolve. Many like-minded democracies, including New Zealand, the US and the UK, have come out in strong support of Australia over these latest attacks. On Wednesday, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) promised concrete actions to support Australia.

Canberra has been quietly bolstering its relationships with friendly regional nations; Beijing's latest paroxysm of fury will only hasten its realignment. This presents a golden opportunity for Taiwan's diplomats — they must rise to the challenge.

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