

People would expect the political parties in their country to uphold the security and prosperity of the nation, regardless of political affiliation. One exception might be fringe parties, such as the New Party, which explicitly seeks to surrender Taiwan to a hostile government.

However, major parties — whether in opposition or in government — should be completely above suspicion. Yet, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) at times makes this extremely challenging.

On Thursday and Friday last week, the KMT legislative caucus proposed cutting the entertainment budgets for Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭淑慎) by 30 percent and Representative to the Czech Republic Ke Liang-ruey (柯良瑛) by about 8 percent.

Why would the party target the nation's representatives to these two countries specifically, beyond its tenuous reasoning provided in the proposals?

While KMT caucus secretary-general Lin Yi-hua (林錫山) has accused Hsiao of irreparably damaging Taiwan-US ties by incorrectly saying that the US would not sell Taiwan smart mines — a mistake she has acknowledged and apologized for — it is the KMT itself that has been doing its utmost to stymie the government's attempts to smooth relations with Washington.

The KMT spent the past few months whipping up the public into a frenzy against US pork imports by spreading unsubstantiated or incomplete information about the health risks of pork containing ractopamine. It continues to do so, with a focus on its campaign for a referendum on the issue.

The KMT has a record of trying to push back against ties with the US: For more than a decade, it boycotted the purchase of US arms that Taiwan needs to defend itself against China.

Then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in 2010 said that Taiwan would not call on the US to come to its aid if it were attacked by China, and instead would defend itself.

KMT helps Beijing with messaging

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That message has resurfaced over the past few weeks, cloaked in noble sentiments about national dignity, even though there would be no nation to feel dignified about were China to invade Taiwan without Taiwan's allies coming to its aid. Beijing must be loving this.

Did Czech Senate President Milos Vystrcil not stand in the Legislative Yuan and say: "I am Taiwanese" on Sept. 1 last year? Did he not help raise Taiwan's international profile, even before its response to the COVID-19 pandemic brought it global plaudits, and demonstrate support and goodwill from a country with which Taiwan does not even have official ties? Did he not find himself in hot water on his return to the Czech Republic, not least because Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi (王毅) threatened he would pay a "heavy price" for his visit?

Several European leaders criticized Wang for issuing threats. The KMT did not.

The reduction of Ke's entertainment budget would in no way be a "heavy price," but what of the message that it would send?

The KMT's problem is that, despite all its talk of reform, people's immediate response to its proposal was to doubt the party's motives, and how it coheres with Beijing's messaging.

Someone should tell KMT leaders that if the Chinese Communist Party ever succeeds in annexing Taiwan, it would not be lavishing them with favors and high office. They would be in for a rude awakening if the unthinkable comes to pass.

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