

Stop wasting words, take action

Written by Tzou Jiing-wen 鄒景文

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On Nov. 5, the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of the Chinese State Council announced a list of three so-called “Taiwanese independence diehards”: Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌), Legislative Speaker You Si-kun (游錫堃) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義). The office said that those on the list, along with their relatives, cannot for the rest of their lives enter China, including Hong Kong and Macau, without facing legal consequences.

In Taiwan, responses to this act of psychological warfare have ranged from amusement to anger, but there has been a lack of effective countermeasures, which can only be due to negligence and incompetence.

Statements in Taiwan have remained at the level of “verbal artillery.” Those on the “diehards” list have reacted by calling the move absurd, while others whose names did not make the list have urged China not to forget them.

Such reactions lack any sense of history or strategy, and they lack the range to reach any target on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. No wonder bystanders have butted in to say that the TAO’s move is meant as a warning to Taiwanese investors in China not to financially back Taiwanese independence forces. These critics sarcastically say that this would make things hard for those on the list when elections come around.

If this matter ends here, without any meaningful response, it would mean that Taiwan has suffered a beating with no consequences for the aggressor. It would be no exaggeration to say that the government is incapable of standing up for itself.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a history of drawing up lists of “war criminals,” having done so twice.

The first time was in December 1948, when it published a list of 43 “war criminals” headed by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), who was then president of the Republic of China and leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). The announcement called these people heinous criminals, who everyone in China agreed deserved to die.

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The CCP had just won its Huaihai campaign, which the KMT calls the Battle of Xuzhou and Bengbu, making it clear that the KMT was headed for defeat in the Chinese Civil War. The CCP's list of "war criminals" was clearly intended to sow division within the KMT and sap the morale of its army.

The second time was in January 1949, when the CCP, in the name of celebrating its Huaihai victory, launched a search for Chiang and the other "war criminals," saying that it would bring them back to stand trial with no lenience, even if they ran to the ends of the Earth.

This threat of lifelong pursuit was phrased in just the same way as the TAO's recent announcement, and with just the same mentality.

By copying what it thinks of as a successful strategy, the CCP aims to drag cross-strait relations back to the legacy of its civil war against the KMT, but today's conditions are different.

The first and biggest contrast is that the three Taiwanese politicians named by the TAO are all members of a government elected by the public. This gives them a sound foundation of public support that those on the 1948 list lacked.

Second, in the present international situation, Taiwan is able to muster the support of like-minded countries and alliances to resist China's aggression. Such vigor can hardly be compared with the KMT of 1948, which had suffered a massive military defeat that allowed the CCP to sow discord in the KMT's core, while luring allies from its periphery to ultimately break it apart.

The psychological effect of naming a few "Taiwanese independence diehards" is nothing compared with what took place decades ago.

Nevertheless, it does not mean Taiwan can act like a punching bag by letting itself be beaten

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up time and again. Taiwan cannot keep weighing potential countermeasures only to do nothing. Limiting ourselves to a verbal response gives our opponents an inch while waiting for them to take a mile.

As a democracy, it would not be right for Taiwan to declare a list of Chinese officials as war criminals, but to publish the names of those who call for unification by force, list them as *personae non gratae* and deny them entry would be the most basic way of dealing with them.

However, in the more than five years since the Democratic Progressive Party took control of the Executive Yuan in 2016, despite numerous acts of oppression by China, it has not proposed any meaningful countermeasures.

The government should remember that it is important to take prompt and effective action. “Verbal artillery” only makes the government look useless, so it might as well hold its fire.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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