

Why Taiwan and Lithuania matter

Written by Jerome Keating
Sunday, 26 December 2021 08:04

Bigger is not necessarily better, especially as regards nations. In the business world, using the Boston Consulting Group matrix, a company or corporation might aid its growth and power by purchasing other select companies to add to its portfolio. Later, it might divest and choose to sell its “dogs” and even “cash cows” when they approach becoming clear liabilities. All this is done to please shareholders.

The practice does not fit the world of nations, especially as regards the “big three”: the US, China and Russia. The world of people is not the same as the zero-sum game of business.

To counter this, more than ever today the world is in need of strong mid-sized and small democratic nations. Taiwan and Lithuania are outstanding in this regard.

As I have written numerous times, in *The Paradigms that Guide Our Lives and Drive Our Souls* and past op-eds, the world is moving from a global village paradigm to that of a global home paradigm. This is more easily seen in the allegories and metaphors of English author George Orwell’s classic post-World War II novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell had it right about the future of nations as that war ended; now, more than 70 years later, his words still ring true.

Looked at from a broad brush perspective in *Animal Farm*, he saw how the most idealistic of revolutions easily slip and degenerate into power struggles between wannabe rulers, and they lose the true spirit and purpose of a revolution being for all.

There is an irony in how the Russian revolution got rid of the tsar, but then soon replaced him with “Tsar” Joseph Stalin, and later with “Tsar” Vladimir Putin. The same has happened in China, where the people disposed of the emperor only to find a second revolution fought between two megalomaniacal wannabe emperors, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and Mao Zedong (毛澤東). Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) is seeking the same status.

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The only major change that took place in these nations is that they do not allow the rule to be passed on by lineage.

However, different questions must be asked: Are the people better off now than then? After all the deaths and collateral damage, do they have any more freedom or opportunity?

With their one-party state rule, have things changed that much in terms of freedom? Unfortunately, after all the deaths and sacrifices, what these countries now have is an “Animal Farm” with Russian characteristics and another with Chinese characteristics.

Whatever the revolution, the competitive, greedy and power-hungry instincts of human nature and of individual personalities soon become evident. Idealism has been easily lost or brushed aside and the nation goes through the spiraling factor described in W.B. Yeats’ The Second Coming: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”; therefore only an alleged “strong man” can save the day. Let him be king or emperor.

Other questions that must be asked are why did these nations not become democracies? It was their goal. Why have they replaced one past “all perfect” ruler appointed by “God” or “the heavens” with another?

In countries of such size and population, why is it that after a set term, the people could not find another competent leader to take the reins? Questions like these should be asked, except the answers might be too revealing.

Problems and ironies created by the draconian rules of one-party states become evident. Many can remember the trauma and suffering imposed by the Chinese Communist Party’s dictatorial one-child policy. Families were punished and abortions forced if a woman had more than one child. Similarly, forced sterilizations occurred in many cases. Yet, ironically, as China’s population ages, there are editorials saying it is “one’s duty” to have three children.

This is not to say that a democracy such as the US is a shining light in governance. It has its own problems. Democracies are not perfect either, but their strength is that if one leader is not

up to the task, they can be replaced peacefully.

The US recently dodged its own bullet. With former president Donald Trump, it had a president who could mouth the jingoistic message that many voters wanted to hear. However, if more closely examined, one had to ask: Why were these people so easily fooled by simple rhetoric?

Trump lost by nearly 3 million votes in 2016, but was elected by the quirks of the outdated Electoral College system. In his case, ironically, the nation had a man with at least six bankruptcies to his name, who was unable to run either a university or a casino, and avoided military service with fake excuses and yet would turn and mock veterans all the while claiming he knew more than his generals.

His only saving characteristic was that he was a good huckster, and he could sell real estate at a profit to people who apparently often wanted to launder or dispose of money. Yet he was able, at least temporarily, to sway enough voters that he won the presidency.

What all this brings us to is Orwell's dystopian Nineteen Eighty-Four, in which he saw the world heading toward a disturbing continuous competition between three major powers. Orwell named them Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, and these superpowers were involved in continuous war to justify their existence. In effect, Orwell, in an uncanny way, predicted the current situation between Russia, China and the US, as they compete in zero-sum games among themselves when they should instead make an effort to work together. Such is the dystopian world that is currently evident.

This does not mean that small and medium-sized nations are automatically good, but with them it is easier to see where things fall through the cracks. Issues can be worked out at a local level. In short, small and medium-sized nations remain important, because they provide needed balance to the foibles of the big three. They should not have to bow to the personal whims of those three.

A case in point is where Nicaragua gave in to "dollar diplomacy" and traded its recognition of Taiwan, the Republic of China to that of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Why could it not acknowledge both? Why should any nation be forced to choose between one or the other? What zero-sum games are happening when the nations of the world should be working toward

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a unified whole?

Nicaragua has one-third the population of Taiwan, yet it chose to diplomatically “sell out” its recognition of Taiwanese; such has been the case of many of Taiwan’s allies.

Lithuania has one-third the population of Nicaragua, but it has chosen to stand by Taiwan. Why?

These are questions that must be asked, not just for the simple immediate “yes” or “no” of dollar diplomacy, but for the question of what should the nations of the world be working toward?

Instead of being solely driven and affected by the zero-sum games of the three larger powers, small and mid-sized nations should start looking at the larger picture. Granted, this skirts the question that not all small or mid-sized nations are solvent or free, but the larger picture must be examined.

The three super powers have their own problems and challenges in leadership. The people need to abandon any past cult of the hero or leader worship, whether it once was tied to a king or emperor or to a chief revolutionary.

Ultimately, the leaders of any nation are simply people; they have no super powers. It is difficult for any one person to sustain the needed vision. New leadership must constantly be developed.

Most democracies have term limits for this purpose. In Germany, former chancellor Angela Merkel saw it was time to step down after more than a decade of service. In large one-party states, the problems multiply, especially as the adage goes: “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Stepping down becomes a matter of losing face or power or both, and few leaders can do so gracefully.

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This is why Taiwan and Lithuania matter. They are mavericks, but in another way they are prime examples pointing the direction to the future as they work toward a sustainable environment that must be jointly obtained by all nations.

Taiwan is a mid-sized democratic nation that punches far above its weight in a world of competing economies. It has no territorial ambitions; it contributes well, and yet it is often not a member of the club or allowed a seat at world tables.

Lithuania is a small democratic nation; it also has no territorial ambitions. It has been able to free itself economically and resist the threat of economic sanctions from the PRC. It stood up for the democracy of Taiwan, and has pointed the way for others in the EU.

Taiwan, Lithuania and Orwell are linked. They exemplify points that matter for the future if the nations of the world want to escape the Orwellian universe of the big three and realize that we are all one family on one home, Earth. That is where sustainable living must be worked out.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2021/12/26](#)