

Hsia's feeble objections to China

Written by Lin Han 林漢

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Even as China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) was conducting live-fire drills and a simulated blockade in the waters around Taiwan, and despite concerns that his plans would seriously damage the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) prospects in the November local elections, KMT Vice Chairman Andrew Hsia (許水龍) insisted on leading a party delegation to China.

Unable to prevent the trip, KMT politicians were only able to call for the itinerary of the visit to be public and transparent, and urge Hsia to express Taiwanese's dissatisfaction with the PLA's exercises.

According to the KMT's account of what occurred during his meeting with China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits Chairman Zhang Zhijun (張志軍), Hsia did object to the exercises.

However, Zhang said that China's activities were aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty and its territorial integrity, and that it was targeting separatist activities by the Taiwanese independence movement and foreign interference.

Taiwanese remain unconvinced about whether Hsia did make those objections on their behalf, as the KMT's "account" would have them believe, and Hsia did not press the matter further after Zhang's lecture.

The PLA subsequently announced that it would conduct another two days of live-fire drills, on Friday and yesterday, off China's Fujian Province and only 140km from Hsinchu. They were enough to show that Hsia's objections were a mere formality at best, designed only for the optics they would afford back home.

When it comes to expressing objections, it is a case of "go big or go home." Former minister of health and welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳水扁) showed how things should be done when he led a delegation to the World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, in May 2017.

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Despite Taiwan not having received a formal letter of invitation, Chen went anyway, to present a letter of protest to the Swiss, expressing Taiwan's anger at China's interference in Taiwan's participation at the WHA. He also held a news conference an hour before the opening of the meeting, protesting the WHA's failure to invite Taiwan.

If Hsia cannot find anything useful to learn from the way Democratic Progressive Party politicians do things, perhaps he could take a leaf from his own party's book, and how it protested the government's decision to lift the ban on US imports of pork containing ractopamine residue. That certainly grabbed people's attention.

In November 2020, KMT legislators flung pig offal around the legislative chamber and blew whistles and air horns to drown out Premier Su Tseng-chang's (蘇貞昌) question-and-answer session to boycott the government's policy. The story even made it into the foreign media.

Throwing offal and sounding air horns might have been gilding the lily, but if Hsia had refused to attend the dinner with Zhang, having expressed Taiwan's objections to the drills, or even staged a mass walkout after Zhang had delivered his little lecture to express his dissatisfaction with the response, there would have been no need for the KMT to offer its own account: Taiwanese and the international community would have been very clear about what the KMT's position on the PLA's live-fire exercises was.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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