

Stand up to China, think tank urges

Written by Taipei Times

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The Taiwan Thinktank yesterday urged political parties to pay attention to China's democratic development and refrain from falling into an "economic diplomacy" trap, which it said has replaced human rights with money power.

In a report published yesterday, the think tank said China has launched "global economic diplomacy" in the attempt to expand its global domination. It has increased its investment in the eurozone and hopes to salvage the European economy and has done the same in Africa in a bid to expand its influence on that continent.

Facing China's "economic diplomacy," the report said more Western countries are avoiding the issue of human rights, a move that worries international rights groups.

"In the past, the US and European countries attached great importance to freedom, democracy and human rights. They did not mind offending China if necessary," the report said. "However, since US President Barack Obama took office more than two years ago, Western countries seem to avoid such a sensitive issue."

While most governments offered strong support for the Norwegian Nobel Committee's choice of Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波) as the peace prize laureate, the report said it was "puzzling" to see many Western countries show a "near cowardice" in dealing with China, adding: "It is regretful to see such political pragmatism in action."

The think tank's report came two days after Human Rights Watch, a New York-based watchdog, accused Western governments of "near universal cowardice" in their dealings with China, saying in its *World Report 2011* that these countries preferred opaque talks to taking a vocal stand against repression.

The Taiwan Thinktank said it was unprecedented for China to stress in a joint statement with a US leader — as in the statement by Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) in Washington last week — that "there should be no interference in any country's internal affairs."

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“It is shocking that the US seems to have forsaken its fundamental principle of defending democracy and human rights for the world,” the think tank said.

It noted that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said in his New Year address that democratic values are not a monopoly of the West and Taiwan should strengthen its soft power, therefore Ma’s administration should be bold in criticizing China’s poor record on democracy, freedom and human rights when necessary.

Taiwan was bound to suffer if it continues to make concessions to China and falls into Beijing “economic diplomacy” trap, it said.

It said it hoped Ma would turn his words into action this year and speak up for Tibet and Chinese dissidents such as Liu.

In his New Year address, Ma reiterated that Taiwan’s future should be decided by its people.

“The two sides of the Taiwan Strait should not fight over political power, unification or independence, or international space,” he said. “They should be motivating each other to upgrade core values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”

Additional reporting by staff writer

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