

Taiwan should not be left alone while fighting against authoritarian regime

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The Baltic States and China in stark contrast

While free and dynamic Latvian and Estonian parliamentary elections were respectively taking place in early October 2022, and early March 2023, authoritarian China was concurrently conveying in Beijing the Chinese Communist Party's 20th National Congress, and the Two Sessions of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the National People's Congress.

It is sheer coincidence that we witnessed two distinctive political systems working their own way during the same time period. However, these are two political philosophies, institutions and ways of life in stark contrast to each other — an open and electoral democracy earnestly implemented in the Baltics vs “socialist democracy” with Chinese characteristics vividly functioned in the other part of the world, embodied by the CCP's intensified assaults on civil rights activists, religious believers, and ethnic minorities throughout the nation.

Democratic Taiwan vs Autocratic China

The comparison can be also drawn between autocratic China and democratic Taiwan, where people have a deeper and widely shared belief in the notions of freedom, participation, pluralism, and checks and balances, based on deeply rooted principles of the procedural justice, free and fair elections, and rule of law.

According to the recently released annual report “Freedom in the World 2023” by the United States-based non-governmental organization Freedom House, Taiwan retained its position as a highly free country for the 25th consecutive year. With an overall score of 94 out of 100, Taiwan is ranked second in Asia. The report praised Taiwan for having a well-rounded democracy that safeguards the liberties of its citizens, and its vibrant and resilient democratic system has allowed for regular peaceful transfers of power between political parties since 2000. Meanwhile, China continued to be rated as “not free” in the report with a score of 9 points, receiving -2 points out of 40 for political rights and 11 out of 60 for civil liberties.

This fact was echoed by similar investigations conducted by various prestigious internationally renowned institutions. The Democracy Index 2022 made by London-based Economist Intelligence Unit(EIU) revealed that Taiwan is rated first in Asia and 10th globally among the 167 countries and territories surveyed. The Human Freedom Index, released jointly by Washington-based Cato Institute and Vancouver-based Fraser Institute, put Taiwan first in Asia and 14th globally out of 165 countries and territories.

On the contrary, Beijing has cracked down on the international media outlets in China with foreign journalists getting their visas revoked and being expelled on a regular basis over the past few years. Furthermore, after the Chinese government imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong, freedom of speech and judicial independence in the territory were greatly curbed due to journalists being barred from reporting in Hong Kong.

The 2020 Annual Report issued by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China suggests conditions for foreign journalists in China were harsh before 2020. However, Chinese authorities and state power "dramatically stepped up efforts in 2020 to frustrate the work of foreign correspondents."

As a result, from 2020 to May 2022, 63 more foreign correspondents and 29 additional news organizations relocated their staff to Taiwan from Hong Kong and China. Taiwan's strong support of foreign media, democratic system and values, and strategic location, has made it an ideal bastion for journalistic reporting in the region.

Beijing ramping up military threats against Taiwan

Since the start of 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's military provocation of Taiwan have highlighted the security threat posed against democracies by authoritarian expansion. With world's attention focused on the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan's geopolitical importance and military strategic value is increasingly recognized by the international community.

In the past two years, China has forcefully ratcheted up military pressure against Taiwan. In display of force, in 2022 Beijing sent 1,732 warplanes to cross the Taiwan Strait median line and enter Taiwan's air defense identification zone in 2022, compared to 960 incursions in 2021 and 380 in 2020. Among which, fighter jet sorties grew sharply from 538 in 2021 to 1,241 in 2022, while bomber sorties rose from 60 to 101. Not seeing any sign of reducing its hostility, Chinese PLA continued sending more than 450 warplane and naval vessels around Taiwan in February alone.

It is more than obvious that these actions, along with large-scale military exercises held by China in the Strait are aimed to incorporate the Taiwan Strait into its jurisdiction, unilaterally alter the status quo, and to establish a new normal. China's claims and actions not only escalate cross-strait tensions but also severely jeopardize the freedom of navigation and regional peace and stability. The international community now clearly recognizes the importance of peace across the Taiwan Strait to maintain security in the

Indo-Pacific region and the world as a whole. At numerous summits and high-level meetings, democratic partners have voiced grave concerns over China's provocations and its disruption of the cross-strait status quo. This shows that the situation across the Taiwan Strait is not domestic in nature, as China has claimed, but rather matters of great importance to the world. As stakeholders, all members of international community should call on China to refrain from escalating tensions in the region, and strongly condemn its heavy-handed actions that undermine regional peace, disrupt global value chains, and diminish the rules-based international order.

Enhancing Taiwan's defence capabilities

In recent years, the Chinese Communist regime has vehemently accelerated its authoritarian agenda both at home and abroad. Beijing has been using its increased influence to undercut democracies around the world, gearing up military threat against Taiwan, and trying to expand sphere of influence and project its forces far beyond Asia. China has always a good command of weapon zing economic power to target free market systems and robust democracies, and driving a wedge between U.S. and allies. And It is also trying to divide Europe in two by pursuing a divide-and-rule tactic, and exploit the openness of democracy to destroy the rule-based international order and establish an alternative set of rules that serves its own interest and political agenda.

From a military perceptive, China now controls the world's largest navy by size, and this year it will boost defence spending by 7.2 percent to \$225 billion to continue to modernize and build-up it military. In facing the existential threat posed by the Chinese PLA, the government has not only effectively enforced domestic laws governing territorial seas and airspace under its jurisdiction, but also adopted proportionate countermeasures and substantive actions to defend the country's safety and sovereignty, including enhancing defense capabilities, launching defense reforms, implementing and institutionalizing the Overall Defense Concept(ODC), extending compulsory military service from four months to one year staring from early 2024. Among which, most notable measure is that the government has raised national defence budget by 13.9 percent to \$19 billion this year. The spending marks Taiwan's sixth consecutive year of growth, which accounts for 2.4 percent of its GDP. The government also spares no effort to revise its military doctrine to embrace asymmetric defence, and engage in a whole-of-government and society operation toward comprehensive defence, lessons drawn from the war in Ukraine.

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Taiwan Strait is one of the world's busiest trade routes. China's intensified military actions around Taiwan are threatening to disrupt trade and commercial travel in East Asia, and putting further pressure on strained global value chains. Any disruption to the trade and supply chains in the Strait risks serious economic consequences for the EU and other continents. Maintaining cross-strait peace and stability is therefore not only the interest

of the international community, but also the collective responsibility of all countries and stakeholders.

Considering the expansionist ambitions of authoritarian regimes, it is more important than ever for democracies to stand together. While striving to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and remaining open to constructive dialogue, Taiwan will neither escalate conflict nor instigate disputes. However, Taiwan's resolve to defend its national sovereignty and security will never waver. Taiwan is willing to share its long-term experience in countering authoritarian threats from China, and continue to strengthen cooperation with like-minded partners to jointly safeguard regional peace and stability and uphold the rule-based international order.

It's only with Taiwan in its security composition that the international community will become truly united and safe. It's only with Taiwan in democratic alliance that the democratic partners and like-minded countries will become a truly strong defender of equality and well-being of humanity, rule-based international order and all our common values.

Taiwan's people will never succumb to the PRC's ambition and pressure, and will never surrender the country's statehood, sovereignty and independence to anyone under any circumstance.

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