

COMMUNISTS DEMAND PEOPLE OF TAIWAN CEASE THEIR “SEPARATIST ACTIVITIES.”

By Don Feder

When China threatens force to “reunify” Taiwan, the danger to the island is obvious. When the communists are more subtle, and turn to divide-and conquer diplomacy, the threat becomes a bit more murky, but equally ominous.

Last week was full of peril for the Republic of China on Taiwan. On May 3, Lien Chan, head of Taiwan’s opposition Nationalist Party (KMT), ended an historic 8-day visit to China – the first time since 1949 that a Nationalist leader has set foot on the Mainland.

The regime was delighted to host Lien, a former vice president. It views the Nationalists as more flexible than the rival Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of President Chen Shui-bian.

More importantly, it has insisted all along that it will negotiate not with the government of Taiwan (it says there is none) but only with the leaders of political parties or “factions” on the island. Lien’s visit makes it appear the communists are realizing this goal. While Lien doubtless has the best of intentions, Beijing will promote his trip as the opening of diplomacy with Taiwan’s political parties.

Confirmation of this may be found in a statement by Wang Zaixi, deputy head of the Communist Party’s Taiwan affairs office. On the day of Lien’s departure, Wang announced that, currently, there would be no talks with Chen’s DPP.

“For the time being, we have no *party-to-party* exchanges with the Democratic Progressive Party, for the key reason that its party constitution advocates Taiwan independence,” Wang explained. If the DPP removes the pro-independence plank, and stops its “separatist activities,” then it will be afforded the same opportunities for state dinners with Hu Jintao enjoyed by the Nationalists.

As a reward for good behavior, Beijing isn’t offering talks with the democratically elected government in power in Taipei, but with the political party of Taiwan’s president.

Again, the People’s Republic insists that Taiwan has no government – that it is a “province in rebellion.” If it ever acknowledged the reality that Taiwan has leaders freely chosen by a vote of the people, its house of cards would come crashing down. Hence, its insistence that it treat with party leaders, rather than representatives of a people.

What does it mean for the Chen government to cease “separatist activities”? For starters, the PRC wants Taipei to stop acknowledging the reality that Taiwan isn’t an appendage of China (and the Taiwanese don’t exist for the communists to dispose of as they choose) but an independent self-governing entity – in short, a country.

Taiwan has been self-governing for 56 years. For the past 12 years, its leaders have been chosen democratically. China controlled the island for only 5 years of the past century. When you get right down to it, Britain has a better claim to India or Ireland, than Beijing does to Taiwan.

Whenever a Taiwanese president gets uppity, Beijing labels him a criminal who's leading the island to Armageddon. When Chen's predecessor, Lee Teng-hui (then a Nationalist) said he wanted "special state-to-state relations with China," the communists went ballistic – figuratively, as well as literally -- and began test-firing missiles in the direction of Taiwan.

For suggesting a new designation on Taiwan's passports, or calling for a referendum on the island's future, Chen has been accused of employing "unscrupulous, divisive tactics," "pushing Taiwanese compatriots toward a dangerous abyss," and being guilty of "splitism," a truly heinous offense.

What are other "separatist activities" from which Taiwan must desist to placate the thugs next door?

- Taiwan's annual bid for United Nations membership (started 12 years ago, under the Nationalists). Although Taiwan's 23 million people make it larger than almost two-thirds of the General Assembly's 171 member states, the Taiwanese have been without representation in the world body since 1979.
- Applying for membership in the World Health Organization. Even though Taiwan was sorely in need of WHO help during the 2003 SARS epidemic – and even non-state entities like the International Red Cross belong to WHO – Taiwan is left out in the cold here as well.
- Maintaining diplomatic relations with 25 nations around the world. How dare this "province in rebellion" deal directly with foreign governments.
- Operating representative offices in 122 foreign cities. Although they function below the radar screen, everyone knows that the Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices in the United States, to cite one example, represent the interests of the people of Taiwan – just as the American Institute on Taiwan is a de facto U.S. embassy.
- Having an armed forces, a flag, a constitution, a legislature, an anthem or any other manifestation of sovereignty.

China's masters would be content to have the Taiwanese sit there quietly and unobtrusively, waiting for the executioner's axe to fall.

If the carrot of party-to-party ties (or the offer to send giant pandas to Taiwanese zoos) doesn't work, the PRC has an arsenal of sticks – including 700 medium-range missiles targeting the island.

In March, the communists unleashed their so-called Anti-Secession Law. Approved by the rubber-stamp People's Congress, the measure is an attempt to create a legal framework for planned aggression. It says that if Taiwan makes what the PRC considers moves toward independence, the People's Liberation Army is authorized to respond with unspecified "non-peaceful" means.

This puts the island completely at Beijing's mercy. What are independence moves? Anything China doesn't like. What are non-peaceful means? Whatever the PRC thinks it can get away with: a blockade (economic strangulation), missile strikes, up to and including invasion.

Interestingly, this came on the heels of an electoral loss for the pro-independence DPP, in legislative elections last December, and a series of increasingly conciliatory moves by President Chen. (Just last week, he proposed military-to-military communications to ease tensions and avoid misunderstandings.)

In response to the anti-secession law, something extraordinary happened that must give China's rulers pause – Roughly 1 million people marched through the streets of Taipei. (Former president Lee, now 82-years-old, marched proudly at their side.) The sentiments of demonstrators was summed up by Wu Chao-hsiung, a carpenter from Taipei: "China is a violent country. We want nothing to do with it. We have to insist on the freedom to determine our own fate."

In contemplating those words, think of the Czechs in 1938, or the Tibetans in 1951, or the Hungarians in 1956. Each was swallowed by a totalitarian neighbor while the West stood by indifferently.

News flash: Wang Zaixi just announced that China's Communist Party will not have talks with the people of Taiwan until they cease their separatist activities and remove pro-independence longings from their hearts.