



STEPHEN DAVIS

China's chilling games

Are you enjoying the Winter Olympics? Are you impressed by China's ability to organise major events, even in the middle of a pandemic?

The sheer economic and political power to get everyone to turn up; to get the international Olympic Committee on bended knee; to have everyone check in their consciences at the door, ignoring Uighur sterilisations and jailed Hong Kong journalists.

Perhaps you like the (environmentally damaging) artificial snow, or the way they created a bubble, separating the event from the country it is being held in?

While you are contemplating that, let me introduce you to a faraway country of which you probably know little – Lithuania.

Lithuania is one of three Baltic states. It covers an area of 65,300sq km, a quarter of the size of New Zealand, with a population of 2.8 million. Its capital and largest city is Vilnius.

It is the subject of a grotesque bullying campaign by China, in which the world's largest country is trying to damage the economy of the 142nd-largest.

Lithuania's "sin", in China's view, was to allow Taiwan, which China considers part of its own territory, to use the word "Taiwan" to describe its unofficial embassy in the country.

Under the "One China" policy insisted on by Beijing, countries are supposed to

call such offices the "Taipei Representative Office", and of course they should never be accorded the status of an official embassy.

The One China policy – which the West including New Zealand has gone along with to keep economic ties with China – is, of course, simply state-

But China wants to keep the pretence.

Lithuania suddenly disappeared as an option on Chinese customs forms, thus blocking all imports from the Baltic nation. Its embassy in Beijing was downgraded to a lower diplomatic status. Staff, fearing for their safety, had to

European countries have resisted.

"The European Commission, which deals with the EU's external trade, is diligently putting together a case that China is breaching its obligations as a member of the World Trade Organisation," the *Economist* reported. "The big member states ... have now waded in. France is promoting an 'anti-coercion' plan that it hopes would deter bullying".

Taiwan itself stepped in to help – it bought up the containers of exports turned away from Chinese ports, including large amounts of rum.

Not everyone is on board. German car makers, which sell lots of Mercedes, BMWs, VWs and Porsches in China, are unhappy and there has been the usual silence elsewhere.

China, a totalitarian state, has an ability probably unmatched in history to use its economic power to enforce its will abroad. It combines Orwellian information control at home with information warfare abroad to influence public opinion.

Facing such power, there is always going to be an economic cost to standing up for human rights and democracy.

Maybe we should all celebrate the end of the Olympics with a glass of Lithuanian rum or vodka and raise a toast for Jimmy Lai, the Hong Kong owner of the now closed pro-democracy paper *Apple Daily*, imprisoned for the crime of practising journalism. ■

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Stepping in: bottles of Lithuania rum in Taoyuan, Taiwan.

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sponsored disinformation.

Taiwan split from mainland China after the 1949 civil war and has since established itself as a model democracy, distinguishing itself from its big brother next door.

The Taiwanese people, in vote after vote, have shown themselves unwilling to be reunited with China, which would mean giving up most of their freedoms.

be evacuated. Companies all over Europe whose exports to China contained some Lithuanian components – such as engineering parts – were also targeted for bureaucratic harassment.

There is a long history of governments, and countries, giving in when faced with such pressure from China. But this time,