

# The Ma Government's Defense Governance

| *York Chen*

The military capability of Taiwan's national defense is the basis for our survival and future development. It is also crucial for maintaining security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. All past governments have attached great importance to national defense and military affairs, be it the authoritarian regimes under Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo or the democratic governments of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian. Now matter how dramatically the external environment changed, they retained the firm resolve to rely on Taiwan's own military capability and never lightly made any concessions. And the democratic camp's military security cooperation also never relaxed. But in the two years since taking office President Ma Ying-jeou has strictly enforced a China-centric policy. Trying to curry favor with the government in Beijing, the Ma government thinks that even national defense interests can be compromised and sacrificed. Since the Ma government's defense governance has been inept and indifferent, Taiwan's military security risk factor is currently soaring.

Following China's military modernization the capability of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has greatly increased in qualitative and quantitative terms, tipping the military balance across the Taiwan Strait in the favor of Beijing. The China-centric policy of the Ma government has also not prompted China into relaxing its military preparations against Taiwan. China continues to deploy targeted weapons and equipment against Taiwan according to a fixed timetable. For its routine deployment of surface to surface guided missiles China maintains the pace of adding 150 missiles per year. The number of missiles targeting Taiwan, including cruise missiles, is expected to top 1,800 by 2012, which means that China will have a missile strike capability that suffices to completely destroy all our political and military targets. China also continues to deploy a new generation of military aircraft so that air capability shifted in favor of China already around 2006-2007. Aside from that the PLA also deploys a long range strike capability against Taiwan with its H-6 bomber aircraft at the core as well as the Harpy unmanned aerial vehicle, which can counter Taiwan's anti-aerial radar and missile positions. Recently China deployed land-based S300-PU2 long range anti-aircraft missiles whose range covers the air space above the northwestern part of

Taiwan proper, thus interfering and inhibiting sorties by Taiwanese military aircraft in the Taiwan Strait.

The PLA naval forces aim to expand their reach beyond the first island chain in the Pacific by 2020 and continue to deploy weapons targeting Taiwan under a strategic posture that views the Taiwan Strait as part of China's territorial waters. On top of stationing at its coasts attack submarine and missiles whose range covers the entire Taiwan Strait, the PLA also actively strengthens its military capability both at sea and under the sea. The PLA does not only threaten the safety of Taiwan's sea lanes, but also creates pressure on U.S. military forces in times of relief missions. Furthermore the PLA navy is currently in the process of putting together its first aircraft carrier battle group with the Ukrainian carrier Varyag at its core. Once the aircraft carrier is put into service, the strike capability of the PLA navy will extend beyond the Taiwan Strait area to the Western Pacific, directly challenging Japan and the United States.

Overall the military balance in the Taiwan Strait is already flashing a red danger signal. But back in Taiwan the Ma government is not only unwilling to squarely face this severe situation, it even takes contrary measures with regard to strategy and policy. When the Ma government had just taken power, there were rumors that a high-ranking national security official from Taiwan took the initiative in demanding from Washington that arms sales to Taiwan be suspended. No matter whether this is true, but there is no smoke without fire and it has never happened before since 1949 that such rumors have circulated. In early May Ma personally stated in a CNN interview "We will never ask the Americans to fight for Taiwan," causing a public outcry and again revealing his government's strategic intention of "moving away from the United States and joining China." As the Ma government eagerly works for closer relations with China, it is equally eager to pull out of the de facto military alliance with the United States and draw a clear line between Taiwan and the U.S. In Ma's thinking cross-strait relations are not international security issues, they are unrelated to regional peace and stability and do not pertain to U.S. interests. Instead he regards them as the affairs of "one country, two regions" under a one-China framework.

Taiwan's military was perplexed to see Ma make such a strategic thrust. In Ma's eyes the painstakingly cultivated bilateral military cooperation mechanism and relations did not seem to matter and seemed not really necessary. In 2009 Ma claimed that military officials had won promotions after paying bribes. Without any evidence he launched a collective purge reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution demanding that the Ministry of National Defense carry out a full-scale investigation. The Ma government

took it for granted that any military officer who was promoted under the previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government must have questionable or even corrupt ethics. These allegations did not only deal severe blow to the military's self-respect and morale. After a whole year of investigations during which 910 ranking military officers were questioned by military prosecutors, not a single officer was indicted. This blanket political purge in the guise of an anti-corruption campaign has led to thorough disappointment among Taiwan's high-ranking military officers over the Ma administration's leadership.

On top of that Ma continued to promote a voluntary conscription system since taking office two years ago. A voluntary conscription system does not suit Taiwan, in particular because it would result in rising personnel costs, which in return would severely eat away at the budget that is needed to procure further military hardware. Moreover, in order to realize military recruitment on an entirely voluntary basis Taiwan's military would have to cut the feet to fit the shoe, meaning that one fifth of the military leadership would have to retire early. This would again severely undermine our military capability and combat readiness.

Externally Taiwan faces a severe challenge from the PLA's intensifying military threat. At home, Taiwan suffers from the chaos and bewilderment caused by the inept defense governance of the Ma administration. This constitutes a severe crisis for Taiwan's military security, jeopardizes the island's democracy and prosperity as well as U.S. strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Here in Taiwan we need to forge consensus to constrain the Ma government's pro-China policy through democratic procedures. But we also hope that our friends in the international community pay attention to this gathering storm. **BT**

*York Chen is a former Senior Advisor of the National Security Council.*