

## *TBT Forum-Recent Security Development in East Asia & Taiwan's Strategies*

Recent tension initiated by the Cheonan Vessel Incident in March, followed by several military maneuvers in East Asia in July, has created uncertainties in the region. The joint military exercise in the Yellow Sea between US and South Korea in the coming September, together with China's own military exercise in the Yellow Sea, further implicated the situation Taiwan Brain Trust held a TBT Forum at the Grand Formosa Regent Taipei to discuss "Recent Security Development in East Asia & Taiwan's Strategies" to provide foreign diplomatic circle in Taipei a timely review of the latest development as well as offering strategies for Taiwan.

The discussants for today's forum on August 31 are York W. Chen, a former senior advisor of Taiwan's National Security Council, David W.F. Huang, an associate research fellow of Academia Sinica, Shih-Chung Liu, a research fellow at the Taiwan Brain Trust, and Bai-Ku Wei, an assistant professor of National Chengchi University. And the forum is moderated by Chih-Cheng Lo, the president of the Taiwan Brain Trust and an associate professor of the Political Science Department at Soochow University.

The forum started by analyzing the recent security development involving China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and US and

provided suggestions to Taiwan government. The tension originated from the Cheonan Vessel Incident, Chen says, "It shows China's incapability and/or unwillingness to take its share of responsibility in East Asia." And Liu states that, "It dignifies Washington's stronger determination to re-establish an Asian security in order to deter any irrational and belligerent actions."

And Huang points out President Obama declared in July 2009 that "the pursuit of power among nations must no longer be seen as a zero-sum game", and Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State, rejected that geopolitical balancing in favor of "tilting the balance away from a multi-power world toward a multi-partner world", to emphasize the Obama government's cooperative engagement with China, but this relationship failed because Beijing still drove its policy with geopolitical concerns.

As the suggestions for the best strategy for Taiwan, Huang suggests that Taiwan has following options: first, cooperative engagement in China with a soft hedge; second, competitive engagement in China with a hard hedge; third, balancing and containment; fourth, strategic bandwagon. However, Huang continues, "since China has become an enormous commercial opportunity

and Taiwan on itself has no capacity to balance or contain China, it makes no sense to Taiwan to adopt the third strategy.”

Huang also states that, “some signs have signaled that the Ma government is implementing strategic bandwagon to China and the pressures from China may increase to such a point that strategic bandwagon becomes inevitable, but domestic constraints in Taiwan, such as democracy and election, prevent the Ma’s government from going down to this bandwagon track too quickly.” But Liu points out that Ma might take on more sensitive and political issues or further actions once the KMT won the upcoming five municipality elections.

“The Ma government is adopting the first strategic option, which is cooperative engagement with China with a soft hedging, in order not to offend China in public”, Huang says, “That’s why Ma concedes to its Chinese counterpart in October 2009 by stating that the premise of “One China, with respective interpretations” implies that Taiwan government also endorses “One China” as the base for both mainland China and Taiwan to negotiate on pragmatic issues.” This shows Ma believe that the optimal security comes not from a stronger US-Taiwan military alliance, but from the improvement of cross-strait relations.

And Chen also reminds that China military threat to Taiwan still remains the

same, even after Taiwan signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China, according to the US Department of Defense 2009 annual report on “the Military Power of the People’s Republic of China”.

Liu also states that, “While Washington is supportive of closer cross-strait economic relations, Ma should not take it for granted that the US would welcome any leaning to one side in Beijing’s direction on security or political issues on the part of his KMT government.”

As the strategy of competitive engagement with hard hedging, “Taiwan should be always on guard when engage with China, even in the realm of economic interaction and financial operation”, says Huang, “since China is not shy of using its economic leverage to persuade Taiwanese people to adopt strategic bandwagon, Taiwan’s choice of economic engagement with China should also be tied to its security interests.”

Lo concludes the forum by stating that, “On one hand, most countries don’t want to treat China as a threat, but on the other hand, they don’t want to forget that China is a threat. China will expect other countries to respect its “core interests” and might broaden the definition of its “core interest diplomacy”. And this should affect Taiwan’s strategies. More importantly, we shouldn’t forget the fact that China’s threat has not reduced.” **BT**