

Beware of China's Peace Offensive

| Joseph Wu

Tension in the West Pacific rose substantially in recent months when China decided to show its support for North Korea after the sinking of a South Korean naval ship, while also displaying its territorial ambition over the South China Sea. The changing regional dynamics and the attitude of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government are reason enough to warrant a deeper look at the developing relations between Taiwan and China because the interests of many countries in the region may be affected in a fundamental way.

China laid down its road map for resolving the issue of Taiwan on Dec. 31, 2008, in Chinese President Hu Jintao's (胡錦濤) six-point statement. It wanted Taiwan to follow the "one China" principle to build closer economic and cultural ties, to be followed by talks of a political nature.

The Chinese model for political settlement is, based on the "one China" principle, for Taiwan to agree to the talks on the "end of hostility" before a peace agreement is negotiated.

When a peace agreement is reached, details of the military confidence building measures would then be worked out. At the same time, China would provide a framework for political relations between the two sides of

the Taiwan Strait before unification would be achieved. Taiwan's international participation would also be reasonably arranged by China.

This concept is arrived at from the perspective of China's "complete unification," which is no other country's business — these are Hu's words.

Checking carefully, one finds that there is a serious lack of response from Taiwan to China's political road map, not to mention the absence of a counter proposal. The only official statement was when President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) mentioned in a video conference with the US Center for Strategic and International Studies in April last year that he found a genuine goodwill in Hu's statement. Ma also mentioned several times that a peace agreement would not be signed before China withdraws its missiles that are targeting Taiwan.

He did not specify the number of missiles that needed to be withdrawn, the dismantling of the withdrawn missiles or any international oversight of the missile withdrawal. Of course, a reading of the very passive nature of the Ma government would imply that it does not object to the Chinese proposal.

Taiwan's rather passive response to China's political road map prompts those who care about Taiwan's de facto independence

to worry that some under-the-table understanding or agreement has been reached between the two.

This concern is not overstated considering Taiwan's official response to North Korea's reckless action carried similar tones to China's, which called for all parties concerned to act rationally and peacefully. It is inconceivable for a long-term US friend in East Asia to find comfort in speaking in unison with China, rather than speaking and acting in support of the US.

Peace between Taiwan and China has been desired by the people in this country. However, in China's model: The "one China" principle means Taiwan is part of China; ending hostility means the two parties of the Chinese Civil War will become one again; and a peace agreement and confidence building measures mean the end of Taiwan's security cooperation with its most important partner — the US.

This is layer upon layer of bondage compared to Taiwan's current independent status. If China's model for peace is reached, it means Taiwan would be in the firm hands of China. This would definitely be a serious scenario shaking up the strategic picture in the region. The most important concept of peace is the non-existence of acts of war and the lack of the threat of war. Under this internationally recognized concept, peace between Taiwan and China will only be reached when China

renounces the use of force against Taiwan.

For the moment, Ma is still resisting the pressure from China to enter into political negotiations for fear of sparking serious domestic dispute. However, two important factors may affect the dynamics of cross-strait political talks. One is Hu's desire to leave a legacy before he steps down as president in March 2013. The other is the consistently low level of popular support for Ma in Taiwan.

Chinese officials have already increased their call for political talks since the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). The first factor already seems to be having an effect.

Judging from the series of setbacks for the KMT in the legislative by-elections and its predictable defeat in the municipality elections, China is likely to ramp up its support for the KMT in the 2012 presidential election to keep the "China friendly" Ma in power.

According to some news reports, China is studying the feasibility of withdrawing some of its missiles in order to rescue Ma's re-election campaign in exchange for a quiet agreement for political talks. Ma might get a boost and China would earn a reputation internationally for making peace.

Ma would be in a very weak position to refuse to enter China's road map at all, if he wants to be re-elected. Of course, it would also mean the end of Taiwan's security ties

with the US.

For China, this would be the stone that killed three birds. However, the consequence for Taiwan is that it would sink politically into “one China” without any prospect of reversing the unfortunate situation. It would also change the regional strategic picture dramatically. Japan worries about this scenario — with very good reason.

This scenario might take place next summer, when the presidential election heats up and if Ma’s popular support is still low. Judging from the non-transparent approach of the KMT and the Chinese governments in handling issues, such as Taiwan’s participation in the World Health Assembly, military confidence building measures and other contacts of a political nature, this situation may materialize — and it would be a nightmare for those who worry about China’s dominance of the region. **BT**

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