

The US-China Joint Statements and Taiwan's National Defense Crisis

| Michael Tsai

U.S. President Hussein Barack Obama visited Beijing in November 2009, whereas Chinese President Hu Jintao traveled to Washington in January 2011. On both occasions the two leaders signed a "U.S.-China Joint Statement." Aside from strengthening bilateral ties through economic, commercial, cultural, space science and military exchanges, the statements said that China and the U.S. will work in concert on international issues and disputes such as climate change, energy efficiency and clean energy and will peacefully solve the conflicts in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula. A more far-reaching, if not crucial, impact on Taiwan's sovereignty and national security stems from the fact that the two sides "reaffirmed respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity" in both statements.

In a speech held in Washington on January 20, 2011, Hu stated even more boldly that "Taiwan and Tibet-related issues concern China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and they represent China's core interests...We hope that the U.S. side will honor its commitments and work with us to preserve the hard-won progress of our relations." The government of President Ma Ying-jeou has remained mum on this issue and has not voiced any

objections. Could it be that in the mind of the Ma government, which is beholden to the idea of "one China, different interpretations" and a China-centric policy, Taiwan's sovereignty has already been handed to China? Although the U.S.-China joint statements pertain to Taiwan's territorial sovereignty, the Ma government does voice any protests. Such an attitude does not only weaken Taiwan's national sovereignty and threaten Taiwan's national security, but also undermine the U.S. government's willingness to sell weapons to Taiwan and assist the island's defense.

The U.S. government would be happy if cross-strait ties remained peaceful thanks to Ma's China-centric government. But it would also give the U.S. a pretext to say that it is not necessary to sell advanced weapons with defensive combat capability to Taiwan such as F-16 C/D fighters and submarines as well as equipment and key components for guided missile launchers to counter China's military expansion. Thereby Washington could avoid angering China and harming bilateral military cooperation. On top of that the U.S. government will take into consideration that should Taiwan and China enter into strategic cooperation, these high tech defensive weapons and software code secrets are very likely to fall into Chinese hands.

That's another big reason why Washington is not very keen on selling arms to Taiwan.

The Ma government has been slashing the defense budget year after year in order to accommodate its China-centric policy. As a result, Taiwan's own development of cutting edge weapon delivery systems has been weakened and its pledge to buy defense weapons from the U.S. has been affected, jeopardizing the island's capacity to defend itself. Taiwan's defense budget for 2010 and 2011 stood at NT\$300.1 billion and NT\$297.1 billion, respectively. Both amounts are less than 3 percent of Taiwan's GDP in each respective year and considerably less defense spending than during Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) rule in 2007 and 2008.

Moreover, in September 2010 the Ma government demanded that the U.S. government postpone the delivery of Black Hawk helicopters as well as an upgrade of Patriot PAC-2 batteries that had already been approved. This will also affect Taiwan's self-defense capability and make Washington wonder even more whether the Ma government is less determined and less likely to take action with regard to self defense.

Furthermore a number of unrealistic populist policies that the Ma government pursues such as ending conscription in favor of an all volunteer army, cutting the military forces and slashing the defense budget in the absence of sufficient necessary complementary measures have weakened Taiwan's "total defense,"

"military morale," and self defense capability. That's the price that the Ma government must pay for its China-centric policy and the reason why military officers and soldiers face the predicament of having to ask themselves "why" and "for whom" they should fight.

Without doubt maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is our common military strategic objective. But in order to maintain peace, Taiwan needs to have a sufficient self-defense capability, backed by the entire people, and the determination to defend itself. For example, countries that face a military threat from hostile neighbors like Singapore, South Korea and Israel usually spend more than 20% of their annual budgets on national defense and promote total defense plans based on mixed conscript-volunteer forces to fight potential external threats.

In order to address Taiwan's weakening national defense, the following five points must be taken into consideration: First, increasing the annual defense budget for military investments as well as operation and support, strengthening own R&D and mass production of launch devices in order to put into practice the strategic objective of effective deterrence and a policy of "self-reliant defense." Second, strengthening "air superiority," "naval superiority" and "anti-landing" capabilities. Priority must be given to the compilation and execution of the budget to safeguard security in the Taiwan Straits, guarantee effective combat power for Taiwan's

self-defense and realizing the strategic objective of "resolute defense." Third, strengthening policies and measures regarding technology first, joint warfare by the three forces and "total defense" to improve the proficiency and effectiveness of Taiwan's combat power, boost troop morale, and upgrade total defense capabilities.

Fourth, strengthening Taiwan's national identity and its determination and capacity for total national self defense. As long as the ruling and opposition parties have not reached a consensus, Taiwan should not rush into discussions or negotiations with China on cross-strait military confidence building measures (CBMs) or political issues to prevent being caught in China's united front tactics, which would affect troop morale and undermine the government's determination and measures toward protecting Taiwan. Fifth, strengthening joint defense with the U.S., Japan and the Southeast Asian countries for regional security in the Asia Pacific. Threatened by China's soaring military power, economic clout and political influence, Taiwan must cooperate with Washington, Tokyo and other countries in the following areas: Concrete, feasible and effective proposals and approaches on communications intelligence, missile defense, maritime rescue, humanitarian assistance, freedom of navigation on the high seas and crisis management should be jointly discussed to maintain lasting peace

and stability in the Taiwan Straits and the Asia-Pacific region. **BT**