

## *The Hong Kong-ization of Taiwan*

| Chih-cheng Lo

In early 2010 U.S. scholar Bruce Gilley published an essay in *Foreign Affairs* magazine which discussed the "Finlandization of Taiwan." Looking back on the development of Taiwan's foreign relations during the past two years, one cannot help but worry whether Taiwan is not just headed toward Finlandization (the goal of Finlandization was preserving Finland's sovereignty), but marches straight down the road of Hong Kong-ization. Under such a scenario China becomes Taiwan's sovereign Country in the international community and Taiwan's diplomatic activities can only develop if China has given prior tacit approval or endorsement. The biggest problem of Finlandization was that in interior affairs Finland was forced to submit itself to the laws and regulations of what was then the Soviet Union, which prohibited anti-Soviet statements and opinions.

Taiwan's refusal to let Uigur political activist Rebiya Kadeer into the country and President Ma Ying-jeou more and more slowly responding to or keeping silent on Chinese human rights issues (such as the Liou Xiaobo incident) give reason for concern that Taiwan is already gradually Finlandizing. And the constant diplomatic retrenchment and stagnation give rise to concern that Taiwan will eventually head toward Hong Kong-ization.

Why do we face Finlandization and Hong

Kong-ization? I am afraid the key point is that the Ma government keeps reiterating that "mainland policy" takes priority over "foreign policy." Since the Ma government believes that Taiwan's "foreign policy" must take a back seat to "mainland policy" and that "foreign policy" must not stand in the way of "mainland policy," Taiwan's diplomacy has been characterized by strange phenomena such as self-belittlement and self-limitation.

During the past couple of years, the Taiwanese government has virtually not invited any internationally prominent figures from non-diplomatic allies to visit the island in order to prevent repercussions on cross-strait exchanges. Furthermore during the past two years the government has no longer pushed the campaign for Taiwan's entry into the United Nations and has failed to make progress in negotiations on free trade agreements with other countries, because ultimately it still needs to gain Beijing's approval.

The Ma government's continued emphasis on its "diplomatic truce" with China reflects that it is toeing the line of "mainland policy taking precedence over foreign policy." However, the current situation is going beyond a mere ceasefire, rather amounting to already complete "disarmament" in preparation for surrender. High-ranking officials from Taiwan's diplomatic allies are more and more frequently visiting

China. In contrast visits to Taiwan by the leaders or high-ranking officials from Taiwan's diplomatic partners are getting rarer, both in terms of frequency and number of visitors.

On the surface these diplomatic relations have not been severed, but in reality they have already completely shifted toward China. When time is ripe, Taiwan's diplomacy might face total collapse. We need to bear in mind that the People's Republic of China has never used the term "diplomatic truce," whereas Ma after almost three years in power still keeps mentioning it. He has, though, begun to talk about "flexible diplomacy" after being criticized, but the diplomatic truce still continues to exist in that the Ma government "does not make trouble for cross-strait relations."

Cause for even greater concern is the problem of Taiwan's sovereignty. The U.S.-China Joint Statement issued in November 2009 states that the U.S. respects China's sovereignty and territorial integrity as its core interests, indirectly hinting that these core interests include Taiwan. Not only did the Ma government fail to submit a protest to Washington regarding the statement's wording, but even directly and indirectly pledged to take the same stance, namely that "Taiwan is a part of China." However, what China means to say is that "Taiwan is a part of the People's Republic of China."

On the website of the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry is a document regarding Taiwan's status under international law, but it is only

available in Chinese and Japanese, there is no English version. There is a sentence in the document that states "Taiwan is Republic of China territory." This implies that the word "Taiwan" does no longer stand for a sovereign country, but has been reduced to a territorial concept. If on the one hand we say that Taiwan is Republic of China territory, but on the other hand the territories of the Republic of China and China also overlap, then we acknowledge from a certain perspective that Taiwan is Chinese territory. In the end, China seizes the opportunity to pull off a massive hoax by spreading propaganda that Taiwan is a part of China.

Over more than two years the Ma government has kept undermining Taiwan's status as a sovereign country as well as Taiwan's diplomatic prowess. During previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government, Taiwan was always well informed even if a section chief from a diplomatic ally traveled to China. Now we don't see anything like this. Under the Ma government, not only national defense capability is deteriorating, on the diplomatic front we also face a big crisis.

Su Chi, the former secretary general of the National Security Council, once said "the Ma government's foreign policy is seeking peace with China, friendship with Japan and a close relationship with the United States." But the outcome that we see is "seeking a close relationship with China, a distant one with

Japan and parting ways with the United States." Since taking power the Ma government has been reiterating that it does not want to be a troublemaker; consequently orienting its U.S. policy toward causing "no trouble." However as cross-strait tension has become a "non-issue" over the past two years, Washington is no longer paying much attention to it.

Gilley concludes in his essay on Taiwan's Finlandization that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan should be halted, arguing that Taiwan is already too close to China to be wooed back and suggests that Washington abandon Taiwan. That this will happen is our greatest concern. If Gilley's conclusion continues to gain ground in the U.S., then Washington might worry that if precision weapons are sold to Taiwan, secret technology will probably be leaked to China. Also, will China allow Taiwan to "seek peace with China, friendship with Japan and a close relationship with the United States?" Will China be able to tolerate U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in the long run? Should Taiwan continue to seek a close relationship with the United States, then China will definitely exert continued pressure on Taiwan on that front.

In recent statements on Taiwan-U.S. relations, Chinese officials have always noted that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan have gradually evolved as the "most serious problem" in China-U.S. ties. In other words, for China arms sales to Taiwan have already become an important issue for putting pressure on the U.S. Taiwan may want

to "seek a close relationship with the United States and friendship with Japan," but China will definitely not give us an opportunity to do so.

On the surface the Ma government's strategy looks like a brilliant balance of power strategy. Still, the problem is that not only the government's actual course of action deviates from this goal, but more importantly that China will not grant Taiwan an opportunity to realize it. As China has drawn a single conclusion, namely that Taiwan must have a close relationship with China, Beijing will not allow that Taiwan maintains friendly ties with Japan and close ties with the U.S.

To put it simply, it is very clear that China's goal is the Hong Kong-ization of Taiwan. More worrisome, however, is that Taiwan's own diplomatic approach does not only promote the island's Finlandization, but goes even further towards its Hong Kong-ization. That's what constitutes Taiwan's biggest crisis at the moment. **BT**