

## *A Shock on National Defense, Can Taiwan-U.S. Relationship Get Any Worse?*

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Facing direct military threat from China, Taiwan must make the effort to strengthen its security affiliation with the United States with the purpose of raising their defense capability. The US's motivation to reinforce the security relationship with Taiwan is closely associated with Taiwan's determination to defend itself. Ironically, this year's defense budget under the Ma Ying-Jeou administration is far lower than what Ma had promised when he first assumed office. As for next year's budget on F-16 jet fighters and submarines, many believe it is only a symbolic provision. This approach will not only have a negative impact on our defense development, but will also have an impact on Taiwan-US security relation.

Ma often emphasizes on "Strengthening Taiwan's Defense;" however, the United States does not find it credible and continues to inspect this statement practically in order to understand whether Ma treats what he says seriously. But clearly there is a gap between Ma's commitment and action. This gap has caused those who deal with Taiwan-US relationship to experience a credibility crisis in Ma. A heavyweight friend from the United States has revealed that, "if Taiwan was to purchase weapons, they must first perform budgeting, or it is sure that they cannot purchase anything." Currently, the budget for F-16 jet fighters and submarines has already been removed for other purposes and Taiwan cannot ask the United States to sell these two types of weapons until they have performed budgeting for this purchase.

What is more unbearable for the United States is the Ma administration's media spin. For example, in February 2010, when Obama sent the sales notice of Patriot missiles and Black Hawk

helicopters to Congress, Ma was then eager to announce that Taiwan would like to purchase these weapons. However, at the same time, his government's budget was highly uncoordinated, and failed to come up with the budget to purchase the helicopters and missiles at that moment; yet Ma inquires the US to sell F-16 jet fighters to Taiwan on every occasion when he meets with US guests and officials. Such manner puts the US in a difficult position in making their responses. In his video conference with the US think tank this May, Ma again talked about purchasing F-16 jet fighters and submarines. Clearly, this is a reflection of how the media operates for domestic consumption. In this particular case, the Ma administration seems to transfer all military purchase responsibilities to the US.

The Ma administration's conduct in security and regional strategies has also disappointed and worried many friends in the US in the past few years. These conducts include:

- During the crisis on the Korean Peninsula, the Ma government's remarks are almost identical to that of China's.
- After the collision controversy of Senkaku Islands between China and Japan, National Security Council issued English press releases claiming Japan and Taiwan has sovereignty dispute. While when facing China's claim, Taiwan government advocates not to argue.
- In the South China Sea dispute, Taiwan did not stand on the same side as the US.
- For the upcoming election, the Ma administration is still pushing for complete mercenary system even though this takes up a large amount of military budget.

- Openly declares advances in confidence-building mechanisms while across the Taiwan Strait, retired generals keen to go to China and meets Chinese generals for drinks and laughs.
- Adopt China-friendly policy, but muddles with the US. Political interactions with China are kept from the US. Many foreign policies, speeches, and actions, seems to be integrating themselves with Beijing.

Apart from these security and regional strategy situations, the attitude from the Ma administration towards the US also seems passive. Friends of Taiwan in American government feel worrisome and helpless, they express this is a great difference compared to Ma administration's earnest attitude with China. An American official who deals with Taiwan-US relations deems that Washington D.C. already has a lot of business to deal with, and does not have the leisure to give Taiwan more attention than it already has, but Taiwan needs to work harder itself. Yet the conducts of the Ma administration always let those who support Taiwan feel disappointed and frustrated. Negotiations on Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) are halted, no more new military purchases, no more cabinet-level officials visiting Taiwan, no visa-waiver program, and no extradition agreement. Ma keeps saying that since he assumed office, the trust between Taiwan and the US has resumed, but in reality, Taiwan-US relations are not optimistic. A friend who serves in American government told me recently that Taiwan-US relations can only be described as "getting nowhere;" he feels, as a contributor to the development between Taiwan and the US, extremely frustrated.

Even if Taiwan can proceed to political party change in 2012, the opposition DPP would succeed

to a weak Taiwan-US relation on the basis of no significant military purchase, no new programs of discussions, and no budget to support our practical needs of the past 4 years.

Even though Ma's attitude towards the US is that of "say one thing and do another;" towards China, he is receptive. This situation has made some individuals in Washington D.C. position themselves to abolish the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and review or halt arms sales to Taiwan. Those who brought up these extremely unfavorable ideas for Taiwan include those who used to work at the US Department of Defense. Robert Sutter, who is influential in Washington D.C., has already written several texts arguing that China's influence on Taiwan has now surpassed that of the US, and the US should review their policy towards Taiwan in order to avoid the loss of any American interest. Even though these extremely unfavorable words towards Taiwan are not a mainstream idea now, but if we let this idea to expand, it will certainly have a lethal effect on Taiwan.

This condition has left many Taiwan-friendly Americans feeling insecure; they believe that Ma's excessive China-centric approaches might affect American interest. For this reason, they mobilized their own congressional networks, alone or jointly wrote to Obama and asked of him to sell F-16 CD type jet fighters to Taiwan. Recently, Congress Foreign Relations Committee also held hearings on this issue. This is the effort made by overseas Taiwanese organizations; yet the Ma administration still claims credit for it. However, if the Taiwanese government does not have the heart for the US, no matter how hard our friends and organizations abroad try, their efforts will be limited. **BT**