

## *Saving Taiwan from Degenerating Diplomacy*

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Taiwan's circumstances in the broad international context have been unfavorable. Diplomatic prowess is a vital matter on which this nation depends for survival and development. For now, with regards to diplomacy, Taiwanese media is concerned partly about matters of personal morality and partly about other situations such as the U.S. government's constant questioning of Taiwan's handling of Taiwan-U.S. relations, the Taiwan government's hesitation to move forward in relations with the U.S., Japan, and Europe, and the reality that Taiwan's participation in the international community has not made progress because the Ma administration has bowed down to China. Another issue of concern is that the diplomatic system has been deliberately removing those holding different opinions and has been turned by the Ma administration into a tool for elections and partisan fights. But these are all superficial problems. What we need to probe into, examine, and seek ways of improvement for are the deeper structural problems. Only when we make these efforts can we improve our diplomatic circumstances as a whole.

Under the Ma administration, the gravest diplomatic problem caused by a structural factor is that the administration does not consider Taiwan owns sovereignty; rather, it thinks that Taiwan's sovereignty belongs to the "Republic of China" that includes mainland China. Diplomacy represents the exercise and extension of sovereignty. If this administration does not assert that Taiwan owns sovereignty, the consequence is that the Taiwan government is in no position to defend itself when Taiwan's sovereignty is damaged or oppressed. For instance, the 2009 U.S.-China Joint Statement hurt Taiwan, but the

Ma administration even doesn't dare to say a word. Rather, the administration applauded the good relations between Taiwan and the U.S. at the time. However, if this government dares not proclaim to the outside world that Taiwan's sovereignty should be not violated, other countries are in no position to assist Taiwan either.

Another key structural problem is the wrong direction of the comprehensive strategy, which set the nation's foreign strategy as "cross-strait relations above foreign relations" and further adopted the policy of "diplomatic truce," leading the diplomatic system to be regarded as of secondary and lesser importance in its works on relations with the U.S., Japan, and Europe. The diplomatic system can only assume the role of a spectator when other government agencies endeavor to develop relationships with China—or it just expects China to cast a patronizing look on it in passing so that Taiwan may participate in international organizations symbolically. As things stand, all that the diplomatic system can do is to hang around low-level issues such as getting visa-free status for Taiwanese citizens. Consequently, other crucial works on foreign relations, however, have been deeply suppressed.

Since the Ma government has strategically placed cross-strait relations above diplomacy, no one, from Ma himself down to all in the diplomatic system, dares to speak the truth. The diplomatic system has been evasive or has beaten around the bush in speaking about any of China's diplomatic actions that would displease or repulse the Taiwanese people. Information about China's oppression on Taiwan has been completely removed from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The ministry

dares not mention China even when commenting on events obviously caused by China's malicious maneuvers, such as forcing the Philippines to deport Taiwanese citizens to China. When China coerced the World Health Organization Secretariat to send letters to its member states which refer to our country as "Taiwan, Province of China" all the ministry knew what to do was to dodge the problem by vilifying the previous administration. Even as MOFA's aid to Taiwan's diplomatic allies has only increased and has not decreased, the ministry still criticized the previous administration for engaging in "checkbook diplomacy."

Diplomatic personnel are supposed to be the most combat-effective among all civil servants. However, Ma's "regal" bearing since coming to power and the National Security Council's chaotic orders have caused diplomatic personnel to place severe restrictions on themselves, to look up to their superiors for guidance as well as waiting for central leaders' instructions in everything, and to refrain from taking actions or speaking truth. This has brought back the "bureaucratic politics" denounced by the people, corrupted diplomatic personnel's abilities and intelligence, and reduced the tasks of frontline diplomats to the mere performances of receiving and sending off guests and of serving their superiors.

In order that Taiwan's diplomacy as a whole may make progress, we have to thoroughly revamp diplomatic thinking and approaches. We must validate, reiterate, and reaffirm Taiwan's position on its independent sovereignty and respond to any actions or remarks that damage Taiwan's sovereignty with immediate repudiation. In the face of the overall international environment, the Taiwan government also has to change its foreign strategy instantly and rectify the thinking that puts China first in everything. In addition,

the diplomatic system needs to be reformed and flattened so that young, capable frontline diplomats may have room to bring their talents into play. **BT**