

Taiwan's Diplomacy – Reflections and Outlook

By Jausieh Joseph Wu

Foreign ministries and their subordinate units represent nations' exercise of power toward the outside world, protect their nationals living abroad, extend national sovereignty, and guard the national interest. Since there is only one national interest, it should be possible to unite all citizens unanimously behind foreign policy endeavors. This is even more true for the work of Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because we face merciless pressure from powerful China in the international community. Beijing's steadfast claims that its sovereignty includes Taiwan and its constant obstruction of the Taiwanese people's legitimate right to participate in international activities also damage Taiwan's national interest. The most logic reasoning and best strategic option would likely be strengthening our links with the international community so that the crucial factor of "international" involvement becomes the most important force supporting Taiwan. During their terms in office former presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian both made relentless efforts toward that aim.

However, due to diverging national identities Taiwan's foreign and defense policy became increasingly affected by ideological differences and political party intervention after the first transfer of power from one political party to another (in 2000). Following the second power transition in 2008 the the nation's overall strategy and foreign policy changed direction on an unprecedented scale. The original strategic thinking, which considered international linkages as a supporting force for Taiwan when countering China, was completely substituted by China-centric thinking. The true meaning of the "diplomatic truce" proposed by the government of President Ma Ying-jeou is that cross-strait policy stands above foreign relations. If any foreign policy collides with the development of cross-strait relations, cross-strait ties take priority. Due to this major turnaround in strategic thinking, foreign policy is no longer an important task of government. Even for the upgrading of foreign relations Taiwan needs to seek China's support.

But whether this outside strategy and policy of bandwagoning China serves Taiwan's longterm interest deserves to be examined. First, the Ma government claims that relations between Taiwan and the U.S. are at their best in 60 years, but the facts tell us a different story. Since the second power transition, we have neither seen high-ranking U.S. officials visit the island nor new agreements or new arms deals. Dialogue with the U.S. under the Trade and Investment Agreement (TIFA),

which has been in place for many years, has been derailed due the crude handling of a dispute over U.S. beef imports. Furthermore Ma touts as one of the successes of his “diplomatic truce” or “flexible diplomacy”¹ the fact that Taiwan’s diplomatic relations remain stable, and that not a single diplomatic ally has broken off official relations. But since the second power transition we have only heard Ma constantly emphasizing that we won’t engage in money diplomacy again. On the other hand, have relations with our diplomatic allies made any progress after all? Finally another success Ma proudly attributes to his diplomatic truce is that Taiwan in May 2009 for the first time served as an observer at the annual World Health Assembly (WHA). But subsequently we gradually found out that Taiwan’s participation is probably owed to a severe belittling of our sovereignty. The Secretariat of the World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, issued a memo to member countries in which it called Taiwan “Taiwan, province of China.” In contrast the title “Chinese Taipei” can only be used during the five-day assembly.

Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) has brought together former government officials who have served in the fields of defense and foreign affairs as well as young scholars for continued in-depth discussions about various aspects of Taiwan’s foreign policy. Our goal is to mull the best policies for Taiwan with regard to international strategy and diplomacy to carve out space for the island’s further development. This book collates the fruits of these discussions to create an opportunity for the general public to probe deeper into foreign policy.

The book’s authors include Shih-chung Liu, Joanne Chang, Ming-juinn Li, I-chung Lai, Chih-chung Wu, Wen-hsien Chen, Parris Chang, Szu-wei Wang, Chih-cheng Lo, Maysing Yang and me.² The book has a total of 11 chapters that can be grouped into three parts. Part One constitutes a retrospect on Taiwan’s diplomatic status quo. In Chapter One TBT research fellow Shih-chung Liu, a former vice chairman of the Research and Planning Committee under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), conducts an in-depth review of the “diplomatic truce” policy and elaborates on the core interests of Taiwan’s foreign policy. In **Chapter Three** (Ming-fu: I wonder whether this should be Chapter Two since the other chapters are all listed in numerical order) Ming-juinn Li scrutinizes Taiwan’s potential space for development in the international community based on its current legal status from an international law perspective.

Part Two analyzes fields of diplomacy that are currently important for Taiwan. In

¹ Since the term “diplomatic truce” met with constant doubts from all walks of society, half a year into his term Ma accepted scholars’ suggestion to change it into “flexible diplomacy.” But the strategy that puts cross-strait relations above foreign affairs and the content of actual policy has not changed at all.

² Listed in the order of the book’s chapters

Chapter Two Academia Sinica research fellow Joanne Chang, a former National Security Council deputy secretary general and former deputy representative to the United States, looks back on and analyzes the changing strategy during the previous Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration with regard to participation in the WHA and the United Nations (UN) as well as Taiwan's experiences of taking part in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. She also makes policy suggestions for Taiwan's participation in international organizations. I review and compare the U.S. policies during the Lee Teng-hui, Chen Shui-bian, and Ma administrations in Chapter Four to understand the strategic thinking, changes and different strategies toward U.S. policy during different eras. Also examined profoundly are the different outcomes resulting from the different strategies. Chapter Five, written by TBT international department head I-chung Lai, examines Taiwan-Japan relations. Lai has served as head of the DPP's Chinese Affairs Department and as special assistant to Taiwan's former representative to Japan Lo Fu-chen. Lai takes a closer look at the structural factors determining Taiwan-Japan relations and at the development of bilateral ties within the international strategic environment. He posits that Taiwan-Japan relations must be delinked from China-Japan relations and proposes four objectives that should be pursued in rebuilding mutual trust between Taiwan and Japan. In Chapter Four Chih-chung Wu, who earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Paris and serves as associate professor at Soochow University, discusses the DPP era's Europe policy as well as the strategic thinking, ideas and values behind it. Wen-hsien Chen assesses the political situation on the Indian subcontinent as well as the development potential of Taiwan-India ties in Chapter Seven. Chen holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Florida and serves as professor at the Graduate Institute of Taiwan History at National Chengchi University. In Chapter Eight Parris Chang, professor emeritus of political science at Pennsylvania State University, examines the cooperation between Taiwan and the Middle East in the areas of national security, foreign affairs, and economic exchanges. Chang is a former National Security Council deputy secretary general and has served as Taiwan's representative to Bahrain. Szu-wei Wang looks into food security in Chapter Nine. In his article Wang, who obtained his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Paris V and teaches as assistant professor at Nanhua University, explores recent developments in food security from a global perspective and also analyzes Taiwan's countermeasures.

Part Three focuses on the reform of Taiwan's diplomatic service. In Chapter Ten TBT President Chih-cheng Lo discusses institutional reforms that would allow Taiwan's diplomatic service to work with utmost efficiency. Lo holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles, and teaches as

political science professor at Soochow University. Chapter Eleven considers in depth a restructuring of the diplomatic service and its personnel system. Since the Ma administration came to power the diplomatic service has seen several cases of gross misconduct that severely damaged Taiwan's image and national interest. This chapter is authored by Maysing Yang, former chairperson of the Research and Planning Committee under MOFA and former deputy minister of the Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission. Yang discusses the difficulties encountered by Taiwan's diplomacy. Looking back on the reforms and achievements made during the rule of the previous DPP government in the sphere of foreign relations, Yang concludes with concrete suggestions for the future.