

Taiwan's Diplomatic Policy under the MA Ying-jeou Administration

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I. Flexible Diplomacy

Since Ma Ying-jeou became the President, Taiwan has taken a flexible diplomacy policy. The essence of this policy is an accommodation of Taiwan's foreign policy and mainland policy. Taiwan will pursue its diplomacy with the precondition of maintaining friendly and cooperative relations with China. Taiwan pursues its foreign policy based on accepting the so-called 92 consensus (that is, one China with different interpretation). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China declares that it has implemented this policy based on the principles of "dignity, autonomy, pragmatism, and flexibility", that is, this policy aims to allow Taiwan to forge ahead with its diplomatic work and find a *modus vivendi* for its diplomacy.

II. The reasons for this new approach of diplomacy:

1. Taiwan realizes China's rising power and influence in the world. It will be difficult for it to develop diplomacy without reducing China's suppression.
2. Taiwan can avoid spending unnecessary resources in pursuing Taiwan's diplomatic interests by stopping diplomatic race with China.
3. Taiwan can avoid being considered as an unstable player in East Asia by not taking a provocative diplomacy against China which creates tension in the Taiwan Strait area.

III. The content of flexible diplomacy

1. Passively, this policy means diplomatic truce between Taiwan and China. Taiwan and China have stopped vying for the recognition of each other's allies.
2. Actively, this policy wants to expand Taiwan's international space and participation by reducing China's opposition. Taiwan will pursue its concrete interests without insisting on using formal titles in participating in international organizations.

IV. Flexible Diplomacy is a triple-win policy, that is,

Taiwan, China and the international community all benefit from it.

V. The achievements of flexible diplomatic policy

1. International

Flexible diplomacy has defused tensions across the Taiwan Strait, bolstered Taiwan's diplomatic relations and international space through pragmatic means, and earned considerable recognition from the international community. It has also helped restore mutual trust between Taiwan and other countries, especially the US, as well as create additional avenues for Taiwan's future diplomatic work.

2. Regional

Flexible diplomacy is helping Taiwan to further strengthen its substantive relations with countries in the Asia Pacific region, thus raising the prospect of Taiwan playing a more active role and yielding greater influence in the region. Taiwan wins praise from the international community, especially the East Asia, considered as a peace-maker rather than a trouble-maker.

3. Cross-Strait

Flexible diplomacy is continuing to help ease cross-Strait tensions. China's support Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly has reduced hatred of the Taiwanese and thus help to promote more cross-Strait interaction.

4. Diplomatic Truce

The friendly and stable relations that Taiwan maintains with all 23 of its diplomatic allies have continued to improve. So far, Taiwan has not lost any one of its allies since Ma's inauguration as President.

5. Taiwan-US Relations

Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg, said that improvements in cross-Strait relations conform to the common interests of Taiwan, the US and mainland China. US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Wallace Gregson, all publicly reaffirmed that the US would maintain substantive bilateral relations with Taiwan and assist it in strengthening its national defense capabilities, as stipulated by the Taiwan Relations Act. For example, the Bush administration agreed a 6.2 billion sale of weapons to Taiwan in October 2008. The Obama administration agreed an arm sale of 6.4 billion to Taiwan in January this year. The later case is especially meaningful for Taiwan's security and the bilateral relations because the Obama administration seems to be quite conformed to Beijing's stance. The U.S. has also supported Taiwan's appeal to more international room.

6. Relations with Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region

The Ma administration has continued to strive for Taiwan's participation in integration mechanisms in the Asia Pacific region, at the same time as strengthening interactions with countries in the region. Bilateral relations in a variety of fields have significantly improved. For example, Taiwan and Korea signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Aviation Safety Cooperation on August 11, 2009; the deputy-minister level economic and trade consultations between Taiwan and Malaysia resumed in Taipei on September 8, 2009 after being suspended for four years; both the Philippines and India agreed, in May and June 2009 respectively, to grant the same tax-free treatment to the staff of Taiwan's Representative Offices as the diplomatic staff of other countries, which significantly promoted the status of Taiwan's representative offices in these countries; Taiwan and Vietnam signed the Temporary Customs Clearance Agreement and its Protocol on June 26, 2009.

7. International organization

Taiwan was formally invited to participate as an observer in the 62nd World Health Assembly held in Geneva on May 18, 2009. The ROC Minister of Health led a delegation to take part. This significant occasion marked the first time Taiwan has been involved in the UN system since losing membership and being forced to withdraw from UN institutions in 1971.

The people at Taiwan still highly desire to see their nation play a greater role in international organizations and activities. For this reason, the Ma administration hopes to take advantage of the cross-Strait détente to increase Taiwan's international participation through pragmatic measures. The primary goals are as follows:

- (1). Seek to gain membership or participation in international and regional inter-governmental and professional organizations and mechanisms. At this stage, Taiwan is focusing on UN specialized agencies and other functional inter-governmental organizations and, particularly, those directly related to Taiwan's overall development and other national interests. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) have been given top priority.
- (2). Consolidate Taiwan's interaction with those international organizations and mechanisms in which Taiwan currently participates, including the World Health Assembly and APEC. Taiwan also hopes to continue

taking part in regional economic integration under the APEC framework.

VI. The Challenges of Taiwan's flexible diplomatic policy

1. China's power and influence is growing. It will constrain Taiwan's international participation and bilateral relations with allies and non-allies. Even the United States has to concern China's reaction.
2. China's consent to Taiwan's international participation is still limited. Beijing has only allowed Taiwan to participate in international organizations as an observer. It has also allowed Taiwan's international participation case by case and has not agreed with Taiwan's appeal to U.N. members.
3. The political gap across the Straits still exists. There is still no consensus on the principle and content of one China. The 92 consensus is only a consensus on the one China principle. Yet Taiwan and China have different perception on the content of one China. Beijing considers it as that the mainland China and Taiwan are all part of it. Taipei thinks that the one China means the ROC rather than the PRC and that Taiwan is a part of the ROC. Without a consensus on the content of one China, Beijing will only make limited concession to Taiwan's foreign relations. It wants to avoid the appearance of two Chinas or one China and Taiwan in the international community.
4. There is still no consensus on Taiwan's mainland policy and foreign policy within Taiwan. The opposition camp (the Democratic Progressive Party) still opposes the one China policy and the 92 consensus. It considers Taiwan as an independent country from China. It therefore also opposes the flexible diplomacy. It has asserted Taiwan's participation in international organizations as a formal member with the official title of state (the ROC) or Taiwan.

This factor will constrain to some extent the Ma administration's mainland policy and diplomatic policy. Without further development of political relations across the Strait, Beijing will make little concession to Taiwan's diplomatic appeal in the future. The worst situation will be that the currently moderate cross-Strait relations and flexible diplomatic policy will be overruled once the DPP comes to power again in Taiwan's politic.