

China rolls out sticks and carrots

Written by Paul Lin 林

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China wants to absorb Taiwan. That's its policy, which it calls "complete reunification" (一國兩制). The policy will change as circumstances change. The basic strategy is a two-pronged approach of military force and the so-called "united front strategy," a classic carrot-and-stick policy that is manifested in a variety of ways. Intimidation by violence is relatively simple, but Beijing can be more creative with the carrots.

What is the united front strategy? Put simply, it's the use of underhanded tactics to divide the enemy, win over the majority and come down on the minority, in order to crush both — divide and conquer. In the past it spouted noble concepts like equality and justice, but then the world found out how Beijing ruled its own country. After that, it needed to offer some incentives to implement the united front policy. It had little choice.

Beijing has used these incentives to lure Taiwanese businesspeople, and dangled other carrots to tempt the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) to move from opposing the communists to colluding with them. Fast forward to when President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) came to power, and even Beijing was surprised by how pro-China his administration became.

And so Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) collects incentives he can parcel out to Ma so he can keep up the litany of demands. An example is the promise to reduce restrictions on tourists, which fell through, leaving Ma having to make more concessions.

The same is happening with the signing of an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA). Meanwhile, we have not seen an actual improvement in diplomatic relations since Ma gave up and conceded to the use of "Chinese Taipei."

There have been improvements in other regards, in that Ma is being rewarded for pressing on with his pro-China stance, but only because this very stance is being met with fierce opposition in Taiwan, and Ma's popularity is sinking like a stone. These rewards are an emergency measure to prevent the government from crashing.

During the Typhoon Morakot disaster in August, Beijing offered to help, ostensibly to help the rescue efforts, but actually to gather some intelligence. When the US got wind of this it rushed a US rescue team to Taiwan to diffuse a potential crisis. Beijing wasn't happy, and is still fuming.

In mid-November, Zheng Bijian (鄭其江) from Hu's staff came to Taipei with some retired generals to take part in the first round of cross-strait talks, where they blasted the pro-independence faction. One week later, Chinese Major General Luo Yuan (羅元), a known hawk, publicly accused Ma of following a policy of "peaceful secession" with his "three noes" — no unification, no independence, and no use of force — obliging Ma to backtrack.

Then there was another perceptible shift. When China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin (陳雲林) made his second visit to Taiwan, he was met not

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only by protests from Taiwanese but also Ma's inability to quell unrest within his own party. When the US sold arms to Taiwan, Beijing blamed the US for selling, not Ma for buying, making allowances for him.

During the Lunar New Year break Hu went to Fujian to address Taiwanese businesspeople there, dangling still more carrots. After this, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) made concessions to speed up the ECFA process.

Wouldn't it be nice if these were offered with no strings attached? Unfortunately, there were two conditions: First, Taiwan was to accept the "one China" principle, and second, China was to get something in return down the road.

For the first condition, Beijing was not actually asking for a written acceptance of the "one China" principle, but more of a tacit agreement — which would have gone on record nonetheless — and a public announcement that Taiwan accepted the principle. Although this would not be a formal agreement, the government would have a difficult time backtracking on it and would end up hoist by its own petard.

For the second condition, Beijing stands to lose precious little, but gain a huge amount. It says there will be a temporary ban on importing Chinese agricultural products in Taiwan, but this means the Taiwanese market will be flooded in the future, putting local farmers at a distinct disadvantage, unless the ECFA includes a clause stating the ban would be in place for 50 years. This is another reason why we need a referendum on the ECFA.

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TRANSLATED BY PAUL COOPER

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