

## Taiwan is building a bridge too far to China

Written by Jean Wu and Susan Wang  
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The Taiwan Strait can certainly be characterized as “troubled waters.” Ever since the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) defeated troops retreated to Taiwan at the end of the civil war, there has been tension across the strait, first because of Chiang Kai-shek’s (蔣經國) dreams of “recovering the mainland” and more recently because of Beijing’s insistence that Taiwan is part of China.

It is interesting that the KMT has now started to refer to its efforts at reconciliation as a “bridge over troubled waters.” Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Minister Lai Shin-yuan (賴清德) used the term in a recent speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington.

Let us ponder for a moment what kind of bridge this might be.

The main component of President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) “bridge” is the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Lai said that contrary to the perception that the ECFA sets a dangerous precedent, it actually reduces danger by establishing peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

How true is this?

Lai also said that China continues to stockpile missiles and is unwilling to renounce the use of military force against Taiwan. The Chinese government has taken no action to dial down its military threat, while pressuring the US to end arms sales to Taiwan.

Even if China were to consider a reduction in its military buildup, it would only do so if Taiwan agreed to the so-called “one China” principle. Interestingly, when a reporter from Hong Kong asked for Lai’s view on this, she responded that there should be “no political preconditions.”

If that is the case, why did the Ma administration agree to the “one China” principle and the so-called “1992 Consensus” in the run-up to signing the ECFA? Hasn’t it already drifted into China’s orbit at the expense of Taiwan’s sovereignty and autonomy?

This part of the bridge looks rather shaky.

In her AEI speech, Lai said the public was fully behind the Ma administration’s initiatives. She produced various opinion polls showing 79.3 percent support for institutionalized cross-strait relations, 73 percent for an Intellectual Property Rights agreement and 61.1 percent for the ECFA.

However, if this broad support is really there, why does Ma continue to block the referendum proposal on the ECFA submitted by the Taiwan Solidarity Union and supported by the Democratic Progressive Party?

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Wouldn't the outcome of such a referendum validate their optimism. We have a hunch that the reality is quite different and that people continue to have major reservations.

Ma is clearly afraid to allow the people to speak for themselves, another piece of the bridge that is rather wobbly.

If Taiwan wants to maintain its hard-earned democracy and freedom, there needs to be more transparency and checks and balances on the government's policies toward China.

Ironically, Lai also said that there had been "a high level of transparency" and "better communication and discussion of views" with the public. These are nice words, but they are untrue.

The Ma administration has pushed ahead with its policies without first seeking consensus in Taiwan. This is the third part of the bridge with major defects.

Taiwan's future needs to be built on a sturdy foundation. It needs to be built on the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights. Only when those are adhered to can there be a true "bridge over troubled waters."

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