

## Peace Prize for Ma? Let's be serious

Written by J. Michael Cole □□□

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Although the Nobel Peace Prize may have recently lost some of its luster after it was awarded to a man not for his accomplishments, but for what he was expected to do after assuming office, it nevertheless remains a symbol of the good that people of all walks of life can aspire to, and as such, its potential conferral should not be mentioned in vain.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what some people, including renowned academics, have been doing by raising the possibility that in the not-so-distant future, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) could jointly be awarded the prize for resolving decades of conflict in the Taiwan Strait.

What would cheapen the coveted prize is not so much the fact that peace in the Taiwan Strait is undesirable — it is — but that by definition, “peace” between Taiwan and China would, under current conditions, inevitably involve decisions made against the will of the 23 million people of Taiwan.

Jerome Cohen, Ma's former mentor at Harvard University and a well-known academic, was the latest to hint at the possibility of Ma being nominated for the prize if, during his second term, he managed to “work out unsolved issues between China and Taiwan.”

The devil, however, is in the details and in this case the details stem from the incompatibility of the two political systems that “peace” would bring together. For Beijing, peace in the Taiwan Strait inevitably involves the negation of Taiwan's sovereignty. Any arrangement that comes short of this objective signifies that the military threat from China, including ballistic missiles and the like, will remain on the table. Peace, therefore, means agreeing to Beijing's terms, which is capitulation. And capitulating to an authoritarian and undemocratic regime goes against the wishes of 23 million citizens of a free and democratic society (including the millions who re-elected Ma, as well as most members of his party).

Unless the prize has lost all its meaning and become an empty symbol, it's hard to imagine the architects of such a “peace” deserve to be recognized for their services to humanity.

Even the foundations that could give Ma and Hu a shot at a future peace prize are shaky, as

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the thaw in what we have experienced in the Taiwan Strait since Ma came into office in 2008 is but the deferral of an eventual reckoning — and a hard one at that. While Beijing has made little secret of its intentions, the Ma administration was both pressured and encouraged by the US government to create a rapprochement with Beijing and lower tensions in the region.

No doubt the White House had its reasons for wanting this, busy as it was dealing with an economy in a shambles, instability in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the ever-present risk of war with Iran over its nuclear program, among others. The last thing Washington wanted was for Taipei to increase tensions in the region at a time when the US, albeit reluctantly, was becoming increasingly dependent on Beijing's assistance to help resolve the issues that were most pressing for its national security.

Ma, as he had promised, did not depart from the script and created the conditions that made such a thaw possible. However, this cannot go on forever, and at best what the president accomplished was the implementation of a plan that is both near-sighted and dangerous. By pressuring Taiwan (and at times interfering in its ally's electoral process), Washington was hoping for a quick fix while delaying the day when the irreconcilable differences between Taiwanese and Chinese society will have to be addressed.

If anyone involved in cross-strait affairs deserves the Nobel Peace Prize, it is someone who, rather than play into Washington's myopic game, takes a long-term view of developments and recognizes that "peace" — real peace, as opposed to the mere absence of conflict — between Taiwan and China, can only exist when China either fully democratizes or altogether abandons its claim on its neighbor. For reasons evident to anyone who follows the situation in China, such an outcome is unlikely to happen anytime soon, and certainly not within Ma's second term.

The award has already been given to an individual before he could do the things that were expected of him and for which he would have deserved the honor. An even greater affront to the spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize would be to confer it on individuals who defied reality, acted against the will of their own people and only delayed the day of reckoning, probably making things worse, in a way analogous to the awarding of the prize to former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger and Vietnamese politician Le Duc Tho for negotiating the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Ask any Vietnamese at the time how that "peace" felt.

Taiwanese are already at peace with China, and all they want is to coexist peacefully with their

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giant neighbor. As such, if any Taiwanese president is deserving of the peace prize, it is the person who was sitting in the Presidential Office when the decision was made to abandon the ridiculous strategy of “retaking the Mainland.” From that moment on, Taiwan ceased to be a threat to China. Hobnobbing with politicians who are responsible for repressing their own people just doesn't make the cut.

On the Chinese side, the Nobel Peace Prize should be considered for any politician who understands the true meaning of peace and, in doing so, has the vision to cease all claims on Taiwan and the threat of the use of force against it, while allowing Taiwanese true freedom to decide their own future. Anything else falls well short of the qualities necessary for an individual to be worthy of the prize.

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