

Since taking office last year, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has many times assured the public that his administration will deal with economic issues first and not engage in political negotiations with China until Beijing removes the missiles aimed at Taiwan. However, the Ma administration has reneged on this pledge, just as it has on so many other promises it has made.

In reality, political contacts between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait have already commenced in various hidden forms.

The latest move was the visit to Taiwan of Zheng Bijian (鄭建), a key adviser to China's top leaders, who is also the former vice principal of the Central Party School in Beijing and author of China's "peaceful rise" doctrine.

Zheng led a group of heads of Taiwan-related research departments from Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen, as well as retired military officers and diplomats, to Taiwan for an academic seminar on the theme of 60 years of cross-strait relations.

Among their Taiwanese counterparts at the forum were key academic advisers to the Ma government, which gives credence to the belief that the seminar marks the start of twin-track political negotiations between Ma's Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The 60-year cycle of the traditional Chinese calendar makes this period of special historic significance. This year marks 60 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The anniversary was celebrated on Oct. 1, China's National Day, with a massive military parade on Beijing's Changan Boulevard and Tiananmen Square. The parade was intended to demonstrate China's military might to the international community — and to Taiwan.

It conveyed the message that, while stressing economic development, China also continues to expand its military capabilities.

As time goes by, China's economic and military strengths will serve as carrot and stick as it seeks to achieve its national goals through a combination of favors and threats. With regard to the international community, China wishes to establish itself as the world's No. 2 power, supplanting the G20 with a "G2" consisting of China and the US on an equal footing.

Given China's current status, the notion that a "G2" can replace the G20 is sheer boasting and delusion, but there are a number of pro-China politicians and media in Taiwan — including the Ma government — who applaud the idea. They are convinced that the only hope for Taiwan is to go along with China. Begging China for economic favors is not enough for these people. They also favor leaning full tilt toward China in politics.

At this juncture, a worrying scene is playing out. Earlier this month, Liang Baohua (梁寶華),

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secretary of the CCP's Jiangsu provincial committee, visited Taiwan in the guise of heading a purchasing mission, masquerading as a friendly Father Christmas bearing gifts.

At the same time, China's theoretical and ideological troops are massing at the border, marked by the appearance of Zheng and his group of Taiwan specialists for the 60th anniversary seminar.

Speaking at the Boao Forum in 2003, Zheng sought to paper over China's hegemonic aspirations by assuring the world that its rise would be peaceful. However, at the recent seminar in Taiwan, Zheng brazenly declared that "the Taiwanese independence trend will inevitably go into decline."

He also distorted the US' use of military force to defend Taiwan and prevent a bloodbath, saying that the US' deployment of navy ships to the Taiwan Strait after the outbreak of the Korean War was a direct interference in China's internal affairs that caused the division between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Zheng further claimed that, although the global structures of the Cold War period have broken down, Taiwan had not fully escaped its reliance on the old framework.

The protective shield of the US' military prevented infiltration and invasion by the communist bloc and protected democracies from falling like dominoes during the Cold War. It also protected Taiwan from the Chinese military menace, allowing Taiwan to build a free and prosperous democracy.

Had the US not sent its armed forces to defend Taiwan, Taiwanese would have found themselves on the other side of the Iron Curtain. So the Cold War years, when the US used its superior strength as the leader of the free world to hem in the communist bloc, were a golden age in Taiwan's historic development. How can Zheng dismiss the Cold War framework as outdated?

The Cold War ended when the Soviet Union broke up and communist rule crumbled in Eastern Europe. It was a positive development that some optimistic academics called "the end of history," meaning that human society had reached a state of perfection. No one expected that the world's biggest communist power — China — would survive intact, casting a shadow over historical progress.

With more than 1,000 missiles pointed at Taiwan, communist China poses a threat to the peace and stability of the East Asian region. And yet, retired People's Liberation Army generals attending the recent seminar had the nerve to dismiss this missile threat as a "bogus issue" stirred up by the US to convince Taiwan to buy more of its weapons.

China's top theoreticians have turned out in force in an attempt to use cross-strait academic exchanges to spread their propaganda and brainwash the Taiwanese public, laying the foundation for "unification." Their efforts, however, have had little effect.

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These people's problem is that they were born under a dictatorship. Their heads are filled with dictatorial ideology and they only know how to serve their autocratic regime. Public opinion means nothing to them, nor do they understand what Taiwanese think.

That is why Zheng — China's standard bearer on this Taiwan visit — revealed his ignorance of Taiwan's history and mainstream public opinion as soon as he opened his mouth, along with his arrogant and high-handed manner.

Taiwan is a sovereign and independent nation, which, through its state institutions, exercises full sovereignty and government over its own territory. In Taiwan, public opinion comes first, and the mainstream public opinion identifies with Taiwan. Only a handful of people in Taiwan still favor unification.

Zheng's claim that "the Taiwanese independence trend will inevitably go into decline" is an ignorant lie that will not fool anyone in Taiwan. Even these Chinese theoreticians, after seeing Taiwanese society up close, may now understand that identification with Taiwan is the mainstream of public opinion, and that Taiwan's sovereignty and independence are an undeniable reality.

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