

## ECFA poses new risks for Taiwan-Japan ties

Written by Taiwan News Editorial  
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The signing of the controversial "Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China has tossed a new variable into an already unsettled security situation in Northeast Asia.

Tension has been running high in Northeast Asia in recent months.

Besides the sinking of the South Korean corvette "Cheonan" in March, Japanese defense officials were disturbed by the encounter in mid-April between two destroyers of the Japanese Maritime Self-defense Forces and a flotilla of People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships, including eight destroyers and two submarines, in waters near Okinawa.

Hence, the possibility that Taiwan may be turning its back on the decades long tacit alliance with Japan and South Korea has sparked concern in Tokyo over possible major changes in the framework of Taiwan - Japan ties.

The situation is also being complicated by a flurry of subtle sabre-rattling with military exercises already underway or planned for later this month by the PLAN itself, the U.S. and South Korea and the Russian Federation.

In addition, Japan MSDF Chief of Staff Admiral Akahoshi Keiji announced June 29 that the MSDF would send 600 officers and sailors to participate in the 14 country "Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 10" international maritime exercise, which is hosted by the U.S. Navy in Hawaii.

Tokyo has stressed that the MSDF will participate in what is a multinational anti-piracy exercise for training purposes and is not directed toward any particular country or concerned with collective defense or security.

It is also noteworthy that the Russian Federation began its own "Vostok 2010" large scale military exercise in its Far East and Siberian provinces that will include at least 20,000 personnel and will be observed personally by Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev.

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### Leaning to one side

It should come as no surprise that the country most impacted by changes in cross-strait relations is Japan, which is seriously concerned that any excessive "leaning to one side" by Taiwan toward the PRC will tilt the balance of power in East Asia in Beijing's favor.

Since Japan broke relations with Taiwan since 1972 in order to recognize the PRC, Japanese officials have rarely commented on the state of cross-strait relations or the security situation in the Taiwan Strait.

Nevertheless, after Taipei's Strait Exchange Foundation Chairman Chiang Ping-kun and Beijing's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin signed the ECFA in Chongqing Monday, Japanese news media expressed concern in editorials and commentaries over its impact on the regional security environment.

In particular, Japanese analysts are concerned that the reversal of the previous administration of the Taiwan - centric Democratic Progressive Party's pro-Japan and anti-PRC stance toward the restored KMT government's adoption of a "pro-China and anti-Japan" stance could have serious implications for Japan's substantive interests in the Taiwan Strait and may add weight to the "China factor" in Tokyo's policy - making regarding Taiwan.

Besides observing that the ECFA would "is certain to provoke Taiwan's rivals in the China market, such as Japan and South Korea," a commentary in the Kyodo News Service made special mention of the remark by ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin that the ECFA would "have strategic significance in enhancing the international competitiveness of the Chinese race - nation" and cautioned that the pact "was closely linked" to Beijing's strategy to unify Taiwan and the PRC.

Relations between Taiwan and Japan have already been clouded since Ma took office in May 2008.

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In June 2008, the accidental sinking of the Taiwan recreational fishing boat "Lienho" after a collusion with a Japanese Coast Guard patrol near the contested Tiaoyutai or Senkaku islets and last year's flap over the remarks by then Interchange Association representative Saito Masaki that Taiwan's status was "undetermined."

Japan is also concerned that Taiwan's ruling KMT may come to a tacit understanding with Beijing and cooperate in resource exploration in the Tiaoyutai that may add new pressures to relations between Taipei and Tokyo.

Tokyo's concerns over Taiwan's change in attitude were not eased when the KMT government in May rejected a security - related request, made in the wake of the PLAN sailing near Miyake Island, to extend Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone westward to help ensure continued control its own airspace over Yonaguni Island but would also overlap parts of Taiwan's ADIZ.

The Ma government evidently believes that the development of closer relations with the PRC is more important than Taiwan's international diplomacy, but also hopes to maintain friendly relations with the U.S. and Japan at the same time as improving links with Beijing.

However, whether this dream can be realized does not depend entirely on Taipei.

The performance of the Ma government in handling the beef import protocol with the Washington and its clumsy handling of the ECFA negotiations themselves raises serious questions regarding whether the Ma government possesses the political wisdom and diplomatic finesse to balance the deepening of cross-strait linkages with the PRC and the need for Taiwan's economic prosperity and security to maintain cordial and cooperative relations with Japan.

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