

Ma's cross-strait approach worries US: expert

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Despite the government's posturing about its success in cross-strait and foreign policies, Washington is concerned about President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) linear approach, a national security expert said yesterday.

Liu Shih-chung (劉世雄), a researcher at the Taiwan Brain Trust think tank and a former aide to former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), said Chen's "zigzag" strategy made him unpredictable in setting policy during his two terms in office.

As frustrating as Chen's strategy may have been, Washington knew that Chen could never realize de jure independence because of domestic and external constraints, Liu said. Additionally, Washington could influence Chen on some policies they deemed "reckless," Liu said.

Ma, on the other hand, is more "uncertain" and "unpredictable" because he is trying too hard and going too fast in his attempts to improve cross-strait ties, Liu said.

"His linear approach worries many, making Washington wonder exactly how far he will go and how fast," he said in an interview with the Taipei Times yesterday on the sidelines of a presentation for his new book, *History Entangled: Strategic Convergence and Divergence of US-Taiwan Relations (2000-2008)*.

"While cross-strait relations appear to be stable now, the Americans feel Ma is more unpredictable because he is unclear about the direction of future cross-strait ties," Liu said.

Ma has insisted that his government's cross-strait policy is to proceed gradually, tackling both the easy and urgent issues while steadily moving toward more difficult and less pressing ones, Liu said. Economic issues also precede political ones.

However, Beijing has been pushing for political talks and Washington is watching to see how much longer Ma can withstand the mounting pressure, Liu said.

Commenting on his new book — a review of Chen's leadership during his two terms in office published by the think tank — Liu said it focused on five major events and interviewed more than 20 retired officials, think tank experts and opinion leaders in Taiwan and the US, including Chen and Richard Bush, former chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan.

The five events are: Chen's theory of "one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait" made public in August 2002, the "defensive referendum" introduced in March 2004, Chen's handling of China's "Anti-Secession" Law in March 2005, his decision to "freeze" the function of the National Unification Council in February 2006 and his determination to hold a referendum on joining the UN under the name "Taiwan."

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