

Ma-Ying-jeou's Flexible Diplomacy, ECFA and Flying by the Seat of Your Pants

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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All politicians seek a catch word or phrase to use for spin and glorification of their policies. Ever since Ma Ying-jeou's inauguration, one phrase Taiwan and the world have regularly heard bandied about is how "Ma has Flexible Diplomacy." Whatever that means has been anyone's guess but with the recent happenings in Honduras things suspiciously took a turn for the worse in finding an appropriate definition.

Previously, some had felt flexible diplomacy meant Ma's willingness to assume any position that the People's Republic of China (PRC) wanted him to, in negotiations of course. Others had thought it was Ma's convenient excuse for being able to claim he supported the Dalai Lama but still chose not to invite him to Taiwan. Others in a more sarcastic vein explained flexible diplomacy as Ma's ability to talk out of both sides of his mouth. Honduras changed all that.

Ma had had in the works a second trip to Latin America to show his international acumen. Instead, Honduras exposed what has been a recognized problem with Ma both as a mayor and since his taking office as president. Continued wild promises no matter how rosy, cannot cover lack of planning and lack of foresight forever.

Ma's infamous 6-3-3 promise of Taiwan's glorious future under him dissolved with the economy quickly tanking. When this was made in November 2007 shouldn't someone on his vast economic team had a handle on what was going on in the world? Of course all was euphemistically explained that Ma really needed eight years and that in 2016 he would be long gone with the booty like Diane Lee.

Flexible diplomacy may be catchy but in reality it is proving to be another political euphemism, a euphemism to cover a policy of making grand promises and then winging it or in the more vernacular, flying by the seat of one's pants.

Honduras is one of the few political allies Taiwan has and had been a major stop for Ma. Despite rumors of potential turmoil there earlier in the week, Henry Chen, the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) under Ma, told reporters not to worry. No coup or troubles were going to take place in Honduras; as a matter of fact Ma was looking forward to visiting its President Manuel Zelaya and that was that.

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Unfortunately, two hours before Chen even spoke; the Honduran military had burst into Zelaya's room in the middle of the night, arrested him and quickly exiled him to neighboring Costa Rica. So much for Ma Ying-jeou's team being on top of the situation.

Not to be dismayed, Ma praised his team for being flexible and able to quickly switch plans and cut short his visit by a couple of days, but is that really the case? True they were able to catch Ma's plane before it even entered Honduran airspace but then came the aftermath. Zelaya has been restored and things can go back on schedule or can they? Now it is determined that Ma does not want to visit there anyway; it was not a top priority flexible diplomacy? Or just not wanting to touch a hot potato?

The unraveling of the Honduras visit brought back the numerous other promises of Ma and how Taiwan has such a short, short memory. Does anyone remember how basically a year to date, Ma touted his flexible diplomacy and how with it he was going to bring hordes of Chinese tourists to Taiwan? They in turn would cure Taiwan's economic woes. We did see a lot of problems with the ill-thought out rush to tourism, but has anyone noticed how great the economy is as a result?

Not to be dismayed, Ma still insists that his China card is the only game in town. Pundits however worry, does he really have an overall plan or is he simply a "one trick pony" whose one trick isn't panning out?

ECFA is the latest brainchild. Don't worry that Ma's team does not really know where it is going with this or that it totally lacks transparency. Ma's team is used to winging it when it comes to Taiwan's future. One does not even want to consider the suspicion that Ma's team is being purposely deceptive.

Henry Chen further muddied the waters of Honduras by saying that, "The fate of the foreign ministry is that we can be misunderstood, but we can never be wrong." This did not help allay fears either. On the contrary Chen is mirroring Ma's personal sense of modus operandi and why he refuses to answer legitimate questions to his programs. In his own warped way, Ma wants to believe that as Emperor he may be misunderstood but he can never be wrong even when he wings it. Ma's spin-doctors are telling the people that they should accept that and believe it. That is a strange contention. Wake up Taiwan.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)