

News that a close relative of a senior military intelligence official is living in a hostile country would be enough to set alarm bells ringing in most countries. Such a revelation would probably lead to the official in question being forced to recall his relative or being disciplined in some way.

Not so in Taiwan.

Reports this week that the daughter of Lee Wen-fang, a section director at the Military Intelligence Bureau, is studying in China may have raised a few eyebrows among legislators, but other than some concerned voices being raised, no action was taken. Lee's bosses in the armed forces seemed satisfied that the situation posed no threat to national security.

But then one shouldn't be all that surprised by the lack of concern shown among security officials when the man at the very top of the national security ladder is himself compromised to a startling degree. Indeed, National Security Council Secretary-General Su Chi has skeletons in his closet that would have precluded him from ever obtaining such an important position in most democracies.

In November 2005, for example, then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislator Su reportedly stayed at the Central Chinese Communist Party (CCP) School guest house in Beijing for three days. During his stay he was alleged to have made a speech to senior CCP members and People's Liberation Army leaders attacking the US for interfering in the Taiwan problem and opposing US arms sales to Taiwan on the strength of a referendum that failed only because of an unreasonable KMT boycott. This episode unsurprisingly caused top US officials to question Su's loyalties.

With Su's wife and brother relying on Chinese money — his wife recently completed a book tour and made money from selling food mixers there, while his brother teaches at a Chinese university — can Su really be expected to protect Taiwan's national interest when facing off with Beijing?

With such a man in charge of national security, others could be forgiven for thinking their comparatively minor transgressions are acceptable.

Although cross-strait relations may have improved since President Ma Ying-jeou came to power last year, China still has more than 1,400 ballistic missiles trained on Taiwan and continues tailoring the modernization of its military machine with one specific aim in mind — the annexation of Taiwan.

Improved economic ties and closer contact have not changed China's agenda and it is therefore folly for the Ma government to believe that China would not attempt to take advantage of easy opportunities such as the one presented by Lee's daughter.

Hard to tell friends from enemies

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A failure to comprehend such threats betrays either a shocking naivete on the part of the government or that Ma and his government don't consider China a threat, or worse still, both.

But with Ma also dependent on China's goodwill so that he can deliver on his election promises, the whole notion that he and this government are capable of protecting Taiwan from a slow death at the hands of China's creeping economic encroachment is plainly absurd.

The question of how a government is supposed to maintain national security and protect Taiwan from a hostile power like China when most of its top officials rely on Beijing in one way or another is a conundrum that not even the best spin doctors of the Ma administration have attempted to explain.

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