

Taiwanese fishing boats have long been menaced by armed vessels from the Philippines and Vietnam, with countless Taiwanese fishermen saying they have either been harassed or had their catch confiscated at gunpoint.

With life on the high seas hard as it is — given the physical and mental effort needed to cope with the uncertainty of the weather, as well as interference from Philippine and Vietnamese ships — imagine the added emotional burden Taiwanese fishermen carry knowing that they cannot count on their own government for protection or support.

“Just like this most recent incident with an armed Philippine ship, fishermen have always hoped to see ships from Taiwan’s navy sail to their rescue, but they have always been disappointed,” veteran fisherman Hsu Wen-piao (許文樵) said, referring to the killing of Taiwanese fisherman Hung Shih-cheng (洪世成) last week by Philippine Coast Guard personnel,

Hsu’s depressing yet poignant statement not only offers a glimpse into the plight of the nation’s fishermen, but also highlights the sense of helplessness they feel as a result of having an incompetent government which lacks the backbone to stick up for its people.

One may recall an incident on Jan. 15, 2011, in which a South Korean-operated cargo ship and its 21 crewmembers were hijacked by pirates in the Arabian Sea. A week later, after then-South Korean president Lee Myung-bak instructed a naval destroyer on patrol in the Gulf of Aden to give chase and take “all possible measures” to save the crew, South Korean Navy commandos stormed the seized ship, rescued all the crew and killed eight pirates.

The South Korean government’s daring rescue operation not only showed it had the strength of mind and resources to protect its citizens, but also sent a loud message that Seoul would look after its own.

By contrast, when Taiwanese fishing boats have reported attacks by pirates — once in 2007, another in 2009 and yet another in October 2010 — the role played by the Taiwanese government was pathetic to say the least.

Protecting Taiwanese is Ma's duty

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 16 May 2013 08:39

Despite the government discussing dispatching navy warships to protect fishing boats from pirates, instead of taking direct action, Taipei left victims of hijacking to seek outside assistance when negotiating ransom demands.

In light of the frequent cases of harassment reported by Taiwanese fishing boats operating close to Taiwan proper, the government, rather than talking up far-fetched plans to send warships to patrol far-flung seas, could better demonstrate its willpower and ability to protect Taiwanese fishermen if it can demonstrate that it could do its job closer to home. For example, in the overlapping parts of the exclusive economic zones of Taiwan and the Philippines that extend up to 200 nautical miles (370km) from the nation's coastline.

A government is responsible for protecting its people's lives and property, and it is important to set precedents to let other nations know how determined — or not — it is to protect its people's rights and uphold its national dignity.

If the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) is unable to achieve a satisfactory outcome in its dealings with the Philippines over Hung's death, a sad precedent would be set that would be tantamount to broadcasting to the world how spineless the Taiwanese government is in protecting its people.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2013/05/16](#)