

## Ma's moves toward political talks

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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Having served up a charm offensive touting the benefits of closer economic ties with China, Beijing is making no secret of its growing impatience for political talks with Taiwan.

Its annoyance is evident in the recent string of calls to talk politics. First, there was the blunt comment from Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) who, speaking with Taiwan's APEC envoy Vincent Siew (宋楚瑜) on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in Bali earlier this month, said "the longstanding political division between the two sides will have to be resolved step-by-step, as it should not be passed down from generation to generation."

China's Taiwan Affairs Office Director Zhang Zhijun (张继军) renewed the call a few days later, saying that Taiwan and China cannot put off addressing their political differences in the long term, adding that sidestepping politics in favor of economic talks was "unsustainable."

While it comes as no surprise for Beijing to want to rush political discourse to attain its goal of unification, the nation's response to Chinese pressure requires careful deliberation.

President Ma Ying-jeou's (马英九) statements on the topic leave many concerned.

In the past, Ma has usually been vague on the issue of political talks with China, saying that there is no need to consider them until more progress is made on economics. He also had a prerequisite for opening political discussions: Beijing must first remove its missiles aimed at Taiwan.

Not only has Ma made no mention of this condition recently, his public statements on cross-strait relations also come across as more aligned with those from Beijing.

First, in March last year, Ma sent former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman Wu Poh-hsiung (吴伯雄) to Beijing, where he raised the issue of defining cross-strait relations as "one country, two areas (一个中国两个地区)" at a meeting with then-Chinese president Hu Jintao (胡锦涛).

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Then, in July this year, the KMT made a sharp departure from the the so-called “1992 consensus” — defined as “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means. It said “both sides of the Taiwan Strait reached a consensus in 1992 to express each other’s insistence on the ‘one China’ principle,” which ceded to China’s definition of the “1992 consensus,” that China and Taiwan are both part of “one China.”

Ma further echoed Beijing’s stance that China and Taiwan do not have a state-to-state relationship by saying in his Double Ten National Day speech that cross-strait relations are “not international relations.”

In Hu’s six points on cross-strait relations, he said the two sides could only talk on a foundation of political trust if they reached a common understanding on the principle of “one China.” This leads people to suspect that all the changes with regard to cross-strait relations are Ma’s way of meeting Hu’s so-called “common understanding on the principle of ‘one China’” to pave the way for political talks.

As if on cue, Ma fueled concerns about his interest in starting a political dialogue with China by saying on Tuesday that the issue of establishing cross-strait representative offices carries some political significance, another departure from his previous stance that had sought to tone down the political nature of the establishment of the representative offices.

Ma does not have a mandate for his cross-strait policy, let alone to begin negotiations with Beijing.

The nation’s future should be decided by its people, not by the president alone. Any step Ma takes on cross-strait relations that is not democratically processed would be a breach of his duty as head of state.

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