

Giving himself yet another pat on the shoulder, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) again touted his cross-strait policy in a recent interview with the Washington Post, crediting himself and his administration with ameliorating cross-strait tensions and broadening Taiwan's international visibility.

"Better cross-strait relations have strengthened, rather than weakened Taiwan's international standing," Ma was quoted as saying, as he stressed that it was under his administration that Taiwan won "observer status" at the World Health Assembly (WHA) and was allowed to attend this year's International Civil Aviation Organization assembly as a "special guest."

Indeed, no one in Taiwan is opposed to better cross-strait relations, because improvements should increase dialogue and understanding about democracy and replace confrontation with peace. However, a number of people have had their doubts about Ma's claims, with many wondering how he could manage not to choke on his words as he blatantly omitted the facts about the second half of his statement.

The truth is that Ma has a long-standing problem of speaking only half-truths, creating false impressions of great achievements to make Taiwanese beam with pride.

While Taiwan might, as Ma proudly pointed out, under his watch have gained a WHA observership for the first time in 38 years, what he failed to acknowledge was that Taiwan's observership was conditional on it being regarded as a province of China — an arrangement between the WHO and Beijing, according to a leaked memo.

How could Ma bill his cross-strait policy as having "strengthened Taiwan's international standing" when the truth is that his administration has reinforced an impression in the international community that Taiwan is part of China? Not to mention that what Ma trumpets as his diplomatic achievement is actually more a victory for Beijing.

The latest survey by Taiwan Indicators Survey Research suggests that most people support increased bilateral exchanges, including visits of officials of the Mainland Affairs Council and China's Taiwan Affairs Office and the establishment of representative offices in each other's

Ma is the master of the half-truth

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territory. While the government under Ma is working to “improve cross-strait relations” as Ma stated, it is a different matter if the so-called improved relations with China are achieved at the expense of Taiwan’s sovereignty and national dignity.

In the interview with the Post, Ma showed no desire to change his cross-strait policies despite his sinking approval rate, concluding that “we have made progress in every area ... we have done what needed to be done, and we will keep doing so until the very end.”

As Ma has made no secret of his desire to create a historical legacy, coupled with his recent string of disturbing statements redefining cross-strait relations that appear to be more aligned with that of Beijing, his concluding remarks are cause for concern.

It is hoped that the “we” the president spoke of referred to the collective voice and wishes of the Taiwanese and not that of the Chinese Nationalist Party’s (KMT) partisan interests, or worse still Beijing’s, in its ambition to annex Taiwan by seeking to establish a so-called “common understanding on the principle of ‘one China.’”

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