

The only loser in the mess is Ma Ying-jeou

Written by James Wang 王健

Friday, 25 April 2014 08:49

The non-transparent way in which the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) negotiated the cross-strait service trade agreement gave rise to the student-led Sunflower movement. There is only one loser in the ensuing mess and that is Ma himself. Who came out in his defense? A bunch of criminals, a ragtag band of pro-unification yes-men bureaucrats and foreign pro-China so-called “experts.”

Here we have a national leader who now relies on the support of gangsters and foreign toady sycophants, who has absolutely no idea of the gravity of the situation, who does not realize he is the root of the problem, and who thinks that the public is just a little “unsettled” and “disconcerted” with the state of cross-strait relations, and simply needs the government to explain the situation a little better.

China is set on annexing Taiwan. This is explicitly stated in its Constitution, codified in its “Anti-Secession” law and manifested in the more than 1,000 missiles it has deployed aimed at the nation from across the Taiwan Strait. It has cajoled international organizations in which we want to join, it has bought off businesspeople, politicians, celebrities, artists, entertainers and generals both currently in service and retired. It says it desires “peaceful annexation,” but its hostile intent is clearly evident. And Ma thinks the public is a little unsettled.

What concerns the public more, what people really find disconcerting, is the idea that Ma does not think of Taiwan and does not care for Taiwanese, but can only repeat his mantra that when it comes to trade with China: “The pros outweigh the cons.” It does not seem to occur to him that the national security risks that fall under the “cons” put the country’s very survival in jeopardy and are entirely unacceptable.

If the national leader is to deal with a country that, like China, bears us hostile intent, it is essential that they have the trust of the public. Ma has a popularity rating of 9 percent, he belongs to a foreign regime, he accepts the idea of “one China” and believes Taiwan is a part of it, he champions unification and he regards the signing of cross-strait agreements as “executive orders.” The public does not trust him.

The Ma administration is relying on toadies from abroad writing about the service trade agreement and intimidating people into thinking that if it is not passed, Taiwan will lose face and other countries will shy away from entering trade negotiations with us.

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It is perfectly normal for international negotiations to proceed in this way. This is how things are done. First the representatives of countries negotiate with each other, then they take the text of the agreement back to their respective parliaments for approval and, if any changes are to be made, return to renegotiate details. It certainly is not a problem.

Ma wanted to negotiate the agreement behind closed doors and then try to force it through the legislature, as is done in Hong Kong. He failed. If anyone has lost face here, it is him, not Taiwan.

Let us explore the government's empty threats about how failure to pass the agreement will affect Taiwan's prospects internationally. It says that if the agreement falters, our relations with China will be retarded. The question is where these relations are ultimately headed. Ma wants to see Taiwan eventually annexed by China. That being the case, retarding relations with China and moving further from Ma's professed goal, is surely good for Taiwan.

Ma's prevarications, machinations and "bumbling" over Taiwan's national status and its system of constitutional government has already lost him the public's trust. Therein lies the problem.

James Wang is a media commentator.

Translated by Paul Cooper

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/04/25](#)