

Sub comments reveal below-par Ma

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The perception of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) as a whiny leader who lacks guts in owning up to his political actions and who constantly makes excuses for his less-than-stellar performance appears to have been bolstered in the public's eyes by remarks he made on Sunday.

During a visit to a propeller factory in Pingtung County, Ma, touching on the issue of the nation's shipbuilding industry and indigenous-built submarines, said that although the US in 2001 agreed to sell subs to Taiwan, "the deal has been shelved for 14 years without any progress. We've come to the point where it is kind of getting hard [for us] to take."

While the remark might make Ma sound totally innocent, suggesting that there is nothing he could do about the situation, the truth of the matter is that an irresponsible Ma was once again trying to evade blame.

In 2004, the Cabinet under the then-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration, approved a NT\$610.8 billion (\$US18.6 billion at today's exchange rate) special budget allocation for procuring arms from the US, with the Ministry of National Defense envisioning the purchase of eight diesel-electric submarines, 12 P-3C marine patrol aircraft and six Patriot PAC-3 anti-missile systems, which then-US president George W. Bush had promised to sell to Taipei in 2001.

While it might be a case of short-term memory loss for Ma, many in the public well recall that it was the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), under its then-chairman Ma, whose lawmakers constantly opposed the procurement of the submarines during the two terms of the DPP government.

During Ma's chairmanship, KMT lawmakers boycotted the arms procurement effort more than 60 times, with then-KMT lawmaker Su Chi (蘇起) publishing an opinion piece calling "the country to devote itself to a defensive military, rather than an offensive military," which he accused the DPP administration of trying to build.

After taking office in 2008, the Ma administration — in stark contrast to the estimated double-digit growth in China's defense budget in recent years — put national defense spending

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on a downward trend so that it fell below his election promise of at least 3 percent of GDP.

According to data and reports from the National Development Council, in 2009, the first full year of Ma's administration, the military budget was 3 percent of GDP, but dropped to 2.98 percent in 2010, to 2.69 percent in 2011, before rising marginally to 2.7 percent in 2012 and 2013, and then dropping again last year to 2.48 percent.

As the numbers clearly reflect a serious lack of credibility on Ma's part, it is beyond comprehension that the president, rather than engaging in introspection, could keep his face straight as he tried to shift the blame on Sunday and "nagged" about the US not selling submarines to Taiwan.

Coupled with the defense ministry's announcement yesterday that the voluntary military plan would be delayed until next year, it appears Ma's failure to deliver on promises has become a bad joke, including his notorious "6-3-3" pledge during the 2008 campaign of achieving an annual GDP growth of 6 percent, an annual per capital income of US\$30,000 and an unemployment rate of less than 3 percent.

It is unfortunate for the public that they elected a president who lacks gut in shouldering responsibility and appears incapable of achieving even a few of his pledges.

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