

Commander-in-chief fails nation

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Much criticism has been leveled against President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) over how he failed Taiwanese by endorsing Beijing's "one China" policy at the summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) without the public's consent. Regrettably, the transcript released on Monday by the Mainland Affairs Council of Ma and Xi's closed-door meeting shows that Ma also failed as the commander-in-chief of the nation's military.

According to the transcript, Ma told Xi that many Taiwanese are concerned about China's military deployment against Taiwan.

"I would like to explain to Mr Xi that recent media reports of [Chinese] military exercises at the Zhurihe training base and missiles [aimed at Taiwan] have given opposition parties leverage to criticize cross-strait ties," Ma said. "If there's a chance, some well-intended actions by your side should help abate this sort of unnecessary criticism."

At first glance, it was comforting to learn that the president voiced an issue that has the public concerned. However, Ma's phrasing and the piteous tone he used had many shaking their heads in disbelief.

First, Ma was representing Taiwan; it was therefore unfitting of a president to complain about the nation's opposition parties to outsiders, let alone shifting the responsibility by making it seem that "opposition parties" were the only ones making "noise" over the issue.

In footage aired by China's state-run China Central Television in July of a series of exercises by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at the Zhurihe Training Base in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, troops were shown sprinting into a five-story structure closely resembling the Presidential Office Building in Taipei. The PLA has also reportedly built a replica of Taichung's Cingcyuangang Air Field in Gansu Province. The reports show without a doubt that Taiwan was the imaginary enemy in military exercises.

It is incomprehensible that an issue that threatens the nation's security and people's livelihoods could become a matter that gives "opposition parties leverage to criticize cross-strait ties."

After the meeting, Ma quoted Xi as saying: “The deployments do not target Taiwan.”

Period. End of discussion.

Ma said nothing in response. He did not point out the obvious: Taiwan is the only nation in sight in the direction and range of China’s nearly 1,600 short-range missiles along its coast across the Taiwan Strait.

If, as Xi claims, the missiles are not aimed at Taiwan, what are they aimed at? Xi cannot possibly be suggesting that the missiles are targeting bluefin tuna off the coast of Pingtung County or humpback dolphins off the coast of Changhua County, can he?

China’s aggression and malice toward Taiwan are real, yet from Ma’s phrasing, it appears that China’s missiles do not concern him.

Further reducing the nation’s dignity was Ma’s tone; he came across as if he was pleading to China for grace.

Late last month, the Ministry of National Defense said in its annual National Defense Report that China has been upgrading its major weapons systems and building up the PLA as part of its goal to have a fighting force strong enough to attack Taiwan by 2020.

Assessments made by other nations, such as a US Pentagon report released in May, also said that China’s massive military modernization program is dominated by preparations for a conflict with Taiwan.

China is the one changing the cross-strait “status quo” by building up its ballistic missile numbers. It is a shame that Ma, as the nation’s commander-in-chief, at the landmark meeting not only failed to point out that fact, but also appeared to make light of the military threat.

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