

President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) unusually strongly worded statement on Wednesday denouncing the Japan Coast Guard's seizure of a Taiwanese fishing boat stands in stark contrast to his lukewarm attitude over the deportation of Taiwanese from Kenya to China earlier this month.

In the statement, Ma vowed to take immediate concrete measures to safeguard Taiwan's fishing rights within a range of 12 to 200 nautical miles (22.2km to 370.4km) around the uninhabited Okinotori atoll, calling it the high seas.

The fishing boat was operating about 150 nautical miles southeast of the atoll when it was seized by Japanese coast guard personnel on Monday morning.

Ma rejected Tokyo's claim that Okinotori is an island, saying that a coral reef with a total area of less than 10m² — which he previously ridiculed as being as small as two ping pong tables — does not meet the criteria set by Article 121 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which defines islands as those which can “sustain human habitation or economic life of their own.”

A day before, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus also denounced Tokyo's seizure of Taiwanese fishermen as a “pirate-like” action, and accused the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of being tough on China, but soft on Japan.

Of course, Tokyo's seizure of a Taiwanese boat operating near an atoll whose legal status is still disputed and demanding a so-called “security deposit” of ¥6 million (US\$54,470) — which the fishing boat's owner considered a “fine” — is brazen and reprehensible.

However, it is apparent that Ma and the KMT only took such a tough tone with Tokyo as a way to get back at the DPP for its harsh condemnation of China over the controversial deportation of 45 Taiwanese fraud suspects — an incident painted by the DPP as proof that Ma's oft-touted cross-strait policies are an utter failure and an attempt by Beijing to belittle Taipei.

Ma and KMT's selective tough stance

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In the direct aftermath of the Kenya case, which is no doubt part of Beijing's efforts to pressure president-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) into following Ma's cross-strait stance, the president only called for the immediate release of the Taiwanese suspects and said the government had lodged a stern protest against Beijing's actions.

Ostensibly worrying about displeasing Big Brother, Ma said during an interview with Singapore's Straits Times on Thursday last week that the Kenya incident was "not a matter of sovereignty, but rather a matter of division of labor."

He also urged "certain Taiwanese" to refrain from treating the Kenya incident as an issue of sovereignty and thus making wrong judgements.

Ma's absurd remarks were followed by equally preposterous statements by KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱).

Instead of condemning China's behavior, Hung on Wednesday last week accused the DPP and the New Power Party of "manipulating" the incident, calling the deported Taiwanese "scums of society" who should be condemned.

It seems that in the minds of Ma and the KMT, the human rights of Taiwanese and national sovereignty automatically become "non-issues" when China is involved.

Perhaps the DPP is indeed less critical of the nation's major allies, such as Japan and the US, but the party has never taken the side of other countries in the event of international incidents. Besides, unlike China, Japan and the US do not have hundreds of ballistic missiles aimed at Taiwan or seek every possible opportunity in the international arena to bully and belittle the nation of 23 million people.

It is sad to see that Ma and the KMT only toughen up for the mere sake of revenge on the DPP and that they cannot even distinguish friend from foe.

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