

Ma desperate to save his legacy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 04 May 2016 07:12

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has been in power for eight years. His political performance on domestic issues and the economy is dire. This is reflected in his rock-bottom approval ratings. In the final month of his last term, he has finally discovered a cause he hopes will restore his reputation: nationalism. His little South China Sea shenanigans are stirring up international tensions and, finally, some of the more hawkish supporters of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) are gradually warming to him again, moving his approval ratings from single-digit figures back into double digits.

Amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea, Ma visited Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island, 太平島) to erect plaques reaffirming the Republic of China's (ROC) claim to the island. He took a media delegation along for the ride, too. That the island has an airport, after all, means that it is more than the reef the Philippines claims it to be.

By going to Itu Aba Island and reminding everyone of the ROC's claim, Ma is repeating what his predecessor, former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), did eight years ago, something he criticized Chen for doing at the time.

"A caretaker president should be ensuring social stability and national security, and preparing for the handover of power. That is the greatest contribution he can make to the system of constitutional government," Ma said at the time.

Perhaps he should learn from his own words.

Ma made a similar visit to Pengjia Islet (彭佳壠). Nobody questions the ROC's territorial claim over Pengjia. However, the situation with the Okinotori atoll is a little more complex. The Japan Coast Guard seized a Taiwanese fishing boat there on Monday last week, leading the Presidential Office to protest in the strongest terms, saying the atoll is a reef, not an island. It sent two patrol boats to the area for a month, a move aimed at pleasing the KMT faithful.

When Ma was strutting his stuff on Kinmen to celebrate the 23rd anniversary of the historic talks between then-Straits Exchange Foundation chairman Koo Chen-fu (辜振甫) and then-Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits chairman Wang Daohan (王達翰), the

Ma desperate to save his legacy

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Wednesday, 04 May 2016 07:12

Chinese response was less than enthusiastic. This demonstrated the illusory nature of the so-called “1992 consensus” and improving cross-strait relations the KMT loves to tout. It was from this point on, too, that the KMT started to appear weakened, and Beijing has increasingly seen the KMT as yesterday’s news, looking more to the incoming Democratic Progressive Party government, and concentrating on how to intimidate and pressure president-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) into accepting the “one China” principle.

The Kenya incident, in which Beijing pressured the African nation into sending Taiwanese suspects to China for prosecution, shows that Beijing does not respect the Cross-Strait Joint Crime-Fighting and Judicial Mutual Assistance Agreement (海峽交流基礎犯罪防治及司法互助協議). Beijing did not contact Taipei over jurisdiction in the case, as is required by the agreement: It merely brushed aside Taipei’s protests. A similar thing has since happened with Malaysia.

Protecting the nation’s territorial rights and its citizens’ interests are the unshirkable duty of a president. However, this should be for the entirety of a president’s term, not just in the waning moments of their time in office. Moreover, in dealing with the governments of other countries, a president should be accommodating, but not to the point of subservience.

Ma’s administration has taken a different approach with Beijing over Kenya and Japan over Okinotori. It has adopted a conciliatory tone with Beijing, sending a task force to China to discuss the matter. In contrast, it has continued to escalate the accusatory language against Japan and to back it up with armed assertiveness. The approaches are night and day. It is no wonder Beijing has given us scant regard, and Tokyo has accused us of escalating tensions. It is enough to make one think Ma is more interested in the theatrics than in resolving problems.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2016/05/04](#)
