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Masahiro Matsumura*

Ma Ying-jeou's inauguration in May 2008 as President of the Republic of China (ROC) was a turning point. It helped defuse tension with the People's Republic of China (PRC), which had built up during President Chen Shui-bian's preceding two terms (2000–2008).

This paper first analyzes Ma's rationale for détente, focusing on some of the major weaknesses of the current cross-strait détente in general and Taiwan's de facto independence in particular. The paper looks at those conditions under which the détente most likely would collapse. That is, if Ma's approach made Taiwan too dependent on the mainland's economy for its survival and prosperity to withstand Beijing's economic, political, and military pressures, Taiwan would be compelled to accede to unification on Beijing's terms. Next, the paper examines some proposals to help Japanese policymakers cope with cross-strait relations after détente, identifying Japan's national interests in regard to Taiwan and analyzing the constraints and limitations of Japan's Taiwan policy after 1945.

1. Ma's Rationale for Détente

In his inaugural address on May 20, 2008, President Ma confirmed the 1992 consensus reached between Beijing and Taipei and unequivocally rejected the de jure independence of a Republic of Taiwan.¹ The consensus refers to the recognition of "one China" with its "respective interpretations", without

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determining whether “one China” means the ROC or the PRC. The President also confirmed his respect for the ROC’s constitution and committed to adhering to it rather than amending it to reflect the ROC’s effective control over only Taiwan and the other adjacent islands.²

President Ma’s inaugural address also stressed the need to maintain peace with the mainland as well as regional stability. He stated that Taiwan has to be a “peace-maker” although it used to be a “trouble-maker” under Chen’s pro-independence hard line. Ma’s assertions agreed with PRC President Hu Jin-tao’s opening address to the Boao Forum on April 12, 2008. That is, they both believe that “reconciliation and truce in both cross-strait and international arenas” will be made possible by “building mutual trust, shelving controversies, finding commonalities despite differences, and creating together a win-win solution.” For the initial concrete steps toward détente, Ma proposed “the normalization of economic and cultural relations” across the Taiwan Strait and the cease of “vicious competition and the waste of resources” in the diplomatic battles both for and against Taiwan’s statehood.

On September 25, 2008, the ROC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted a *Foreign Policy Report* to the legislature, which elucidated Ma’s cross-strait policy in terms of “flexible diplomacy” characterized by “diplomatic truce” and “proactive diplomacy.”³ The primary aim of “flexible diplomacy” is minimizing the PRC’s threat, amassing Taipei’s bargaining power vis-à-vis Beijing, and expanding Taipei’s ability to maneuver internationally amid Beijing’s all-out diplomatic offensives. This *Report* presumes that Taipei’s commitment to the 1992 Consensus will form the solid foundation of a cross-strait détente, focusing on improving Taipei’s relations with Beijing by discussing their common interests and fostering mutual trust. Under this cross-strait “diplomatic truce,” Beijing should at least suspend its unflinching diplomatic battles against Taipei and free it from endlessly bleeding its limited resources to aid diplomacy for merely

retaining its current diplomatic allies. These resources then could be used “to strengthen relations with [Taipei’s] diplomatic allies” and to “upgrade the level of contact with many countries in each region and integrate [Taiwan] into the Asia-Pacific regional economy.” The “diplomatic truce” also should end Taipei’s diplomatic isolation, leading to opportunities to participate in functional and specialized international organizations.

In sum, Ma’s “flexible diplomacy” is based on the strong optimism that Beijing would accept cross-strait détente as a win-win game of mutual growth and prosperity, as far as Taipei withdraws the pro-independence hard line.

2. The Pitfalls of Détente

In order to ascertain Beijing’s real motives in pursuing a cross-strait détente, it is critical to analyze not only Beijing’s immediate need for rapprochement but also its expected power-structural transformation. Beijing seems to have supported the Ma Administration and the ruling party, the Kuomintang (KMT), as demonstrated by Hu’s speech at the Boao Forum. Indeed, its failure to do so would most likely turn Taiwanese public opinion against détente and then bring back to power the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) that would adopt a more tenacious pro-independence position. Thus Beijing is compelled to reciprocate Taipei’s détente initiatives, at least as long as Ma and the KMT continue in power. In turn, Beijing will be restrained from resorting to armed attack or imposing an economic blockade of Taiwan, unless, of course, Taiwan provokes Beijing, for instance, by abruptly switching to de jure independence.

Beijing’s need to reciprocate does not necessarily mean, however, that its top leaders are firmly committed to détente. Beijing has discretion over its response to Taipei, in regard to the scope and the levels of reciprocation: which issue-area to select and to which extent to implement. Accordingly, Beijing may try to minimize the substance of détente and then tip the

cross-strait balance of power in its favor. Taipei then would face an increasing military threat and deepening economic dependence on the mainland's markets.

Important here is a lesson learned from the failed U.S.-Soviet détente in the 1970s to which Washington and Moscow agreed without a common understanding of what it entailed. Washington saw détente as necessary for global international relations and the peaceful coexistence of Western capitalism and Eastern Socialism/Communism. Moscow, however, considered détente as applying to only its European front. As a result, Moscow continued its aggressive military intervention in the rest of the world, particularly in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Central America, since under its conception of "détente," Washington was largely unprepared to counter Soviet military offensives. Consequently, in the 1980s, Washington responded with an even harder line against the Soviets.

It therefore is critical to determine Beijing's real motives because it could take advantage of the current cross-strait détente to gain a decisive, and irreversible, superiority in all areas.

In the military sphere, Beijing has not at all decelerated its defense spending, arms buildup, training, and deployment of forces directed at Taiwan, even during this cross-strait détente. For more than two decades, Beijing has maintained that its offensive posture is justified in deterring Taiwan's de jure independence or preparing for possible cross-strait contingencies if it did declare its independence. Yet this justification is no longer tenable, because both Ma and the KMT are firmly committed to maintenance of the cross-strait status quo that denies the de jure independence. In addition, Taiwan's arms buildup and modernization have stalled, owing to the slowdown of arms imports from the United States, essential to maintaining its military balance over the Taiwan Strait. Beijing's continuing arms buildup, therefore, indicates either its disregard of détente or the inability of its civilian leadership to control its

resource-hungry military, thereby upsetting the cross-strait balance of military power as the indispensable foundation of détente.

In the political sphere, despite the seminal importance of the 1992 Consensus, the Ma Administration and the ruling KMT do not explicitly subscribe to “one China, respective interpretations”, thereby failing to reject the Beijing claim that “one China” means Taiwan is part of the PRC. On May 28, 2008, KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung met with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman and PRC President, Hu Jin-tao, in Beijing. Although both referred to “one China,” Wu failed to obtain Hu’s confirmation on the meaning of “one China, respective interpretations.”⁴ Also during the meeting, Wu addressed Hu Jin-tao as President Hu but referred to Ma Ying-jeou as Mr. Ma.⁵ Finally, Wu was unsuccessful to secure Hu’s commitment to Taiwan’s participation in the World Health Organization (WHO). Hu was willing only to discuss the WHO issue.⁶ The Ma Administration and the ruling KMT could not but submit themselves to their unequal relationship with Beijing, even on a party level. This submissive stance was clear in Ma’s interview on August 26, 2008, citing the cross-strait relationship only as between two administrative regions and not as an inter-state relationship. This admission contrasts with the “special state-to-state relations” and the “one country on each side”⁷ of the former ROC Presidents Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian, respectively. Moreover, Beijing so far has shown no significant sign of committing to Taipei’s interpretation of détente.⁸

In the economic and social spheres, the Ma Administration was quick to implement a series of economic engagement measures, such as starting direct charter flights to the mainland on weekends, the arrival of mainland tourists, deregulating Taiwanese investment in the mainland, and promoting mainlanders’ investment in Taiwan. These measures will surely bring about Taiwan’s integration with the mainland, which already is Taiwan’s largest market.⁹ Closer relations will strengthen the pro-Beijing

forces in Taiwan, particularly among the KMT political and economic elites. They will be inclined to choose unification on Beijing's terms in a social-political progression similar to the run-up process of Hong Kong's reversion to the PRC.¹⁰ Such integration could benefit both Taiwan and the mainland through a win-win game of development and prosperity, but over time, the mainland will inevitably become dominant economically amid increasing Taiwan's dependence on and vulnerability to the mainland. The cost of breaking this interdependent relationship, therefore, would be much higher for Taipei than for Beijing. And when their relationship progresses to the point that Taiwan cannot live and prosper without the mainland, Taipei will have to capitulate to Beijing's terms of unification.

Since the inception of Ma's "flexible diplomacy," cross-strait interaction has rapidly grown economically and socially, but with few military and/or political achievements. This state of affairs hints at, or perhaps attests to, Beijing's only lightly veiled intent to take advantage of the *détente* to create the necessary military and economic conditions for cross-strait unification on its own terms.

3. Japan's Taiwan Policy

Over time, this cross-strait *détente* will have a highly corrosive effect on both Taiwan's *de facto* independence and the regional status quo, even though it has significantly reduced the uncertainty inherent in the spiral of provocation, miscalculation, armed conflict, and escalation. That is, the current stability does not necessarily mean long-term peace. Although in response to this *détente*, Japan has taken a wait-and-see approach, it must begin to recalibrate its cross-strait policy in order to defend its national interests.

Taiwan is of vital strategic importance to Japan's national security. Because of the island's location on Japan's major south-bound sea-lanes of communication, allowing the PRC to take control of them is simply not

acceptable for Japan. This means that Japan needs to secure the freedom of navigation on both sides of Taiwan, though not necessarily the de jure independence of a Republic of Taiwan. But Taiwan also is Japan's fourth largest trading partner, after the PRC, the United States, and South Korea. Therefore, Taiwan's continued prosperity as a democracy and a free-market economy is indispensable to Japan's economic and commercial interests. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, an independent Taiwan is in Japan's best interests.

For practical reasons, the Japanese government has consistently taken a noncommittal position on Taiwan's status under international law. From 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was part of the Japanese Empire, but Japan gave up its sovereign rights to the island in accordance with the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Since then, the official Japanese government position has been to say nothing about who possesses Taiwan. Moreover, it cannot support one country's claim to the island while denying another's. Supporting any country's claim is surely in contravention of the obligations under the Peace Treaty. Because the Treaty does not stipulate which country should have sovereign rights to Taiwan, its status remains unsettled and can be determined unequivocally only by a second peace conference. The 1972 joint communiqué between Japan and the PRC stipulates that Japan fully "understands" and "respects" the PRC's sovereign claim on Taiwan; in turn, Japan has never "recognized" that Taiwan is part of the PRC's territory.

Japan's strategic interests regarding Taiwan and its official international legal position on the island diverge. To sidestep the issue, Japan has taken two approaches to cross-strait relations. The first is for Japan to stay out of the conflict as much as possible and, at most, to provide logistical and intelligence support for any U.S. military operations in this area: buck-passing. The second is for Japan to openly support the United States against the PRC: balancing power.

The first "buck-passing" approach is better because Tokyo then can avoid the issue and can benefit from the cross-strait status quo which

ensures both the freedom of navigation in the area around Taiwan and free trade with it. Nonetheless, this approach makes sense only if the United States is willing as well as capable to use its military power to maintain the status quo. Over the last decade in which U.S. hegemony has gradually experienced relative decline, however, this assumption has become less sure, and now increasingly less sure because the ongoing financial and economic crisis and the quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan have severely weakened the hegemony. As a result, Washington is expected to become less and less inclined to intervene in support of Taiwan.

The second “balancing power” approach carries a significant risk for Japan because it could lead to military confrontation with the PRC. Even so, Japan’s defense policy has slowly but steadily shifted in this direction. Currently, Japanese policy contains elements of both approaches, but the second approach is taking precedence. In the first approach, Japan would give the United States logistical and intelligence support only from Japanese territory. In contrast, the second approach would include such support also from the high seas and the air space over them, as long as Japanese forces were not deployed to a combat zone or Japan’s support did not become integral part of a U.S. military operation. In 1996, the United States and Japan drew up the bilateral Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, and in 1999, Japan enacted the law ensuring Japan’s peace and security in situations in areas surrounding Japan, which authorizes Tokyo to take military action in accordance with the second approach.

The North Korean crisis in 1990s was the impetus for the Guidelines, but both Japanese policymakers and the informed public recognize that the PRC is now a principal target of the Guidelines, although Tokyo has never admitted so explicitly. In addition, “the areas surrounding Japan” is a situational, not a geographical, concept. In February 2005, Japan advanced toward the second approach by concluding a joint communiqué with the United States that openly regards Taiwan as a common security concern. For

its part, Tokyo agreed to give logistical and intelligence support to U.S. forces in case of a Taiwan contingency, but it ruled out any combat missions. In fact, Director-General of Japan's Ministry of Defense Bureau of Defense Policy, Takamizawa Nobushige, announced at a meeting of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party on March 13, 2008, that a Taiwan contingency would be treated as an area-surrounding-Japan situation.^{1 1}

As long as the cross-strait status quo holds, Japan's Taiwan policy will be reasonably stable, needing only minor adjustments between the first and second approaches. But if the *détente* should collapse, Japan will have to rethink its policy. Next, the following will discuss about some ideas and policy measures in regard to preparing for or preventing the worst-case scenario.

4. Risk Management Options for Japan's Taiwan Policy

Preserving the cross-strait status quo until Taiwan and a fully democratized PRC are peacefully united is paramount, owing to the strait's geo-strategic importance to Japan's national security. The alliance between Japan and the United States is premised on Japan's giving up its strategic independence and relying on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. But if the alliance fails to ensure peace and security in the strait, Tokyo will no longer rely on the alliance and either restore its strategic independence or submit to rapidly growing PRC's military power in the area. Whichever its choice, Japan will become a wild card, upsetting the San Francisco Peace Treaty system as the Asia-Pacific part of the Yalta regime. Although it would be intriguing to explore these various scenarios, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

More practical is preserving the cross-strait status quo by Tokyo using specific policy measures to head off or minimize any risks to *détente*. These measures not only must compensate for Taipei's naïve, hasty, and imbalanced concessions in pursuit of the cross-strait *détente*, but also must supplement or even complement U.S. military power so that Washington

remain willing and capable to intervene if necessary. Tokyo will no longer be able to settle in an approach premised on full U.S. hegemony (or the “buck-passing” approach), but instead must increasingly tilt toward reinforcing the United States’ power in the region (or the “balancing power” approach).

First, Tokyo must accelerate its formal and informal policy discussions with Taipei and Washington, with the aim of preserving the cross-strait status quo. Discussions by Japanese, Taiwanese, and American policy researchers and academics are particularly important, since neither Tokyo nor Washington has formal diplomatic relations with Taipei. Such discussions should center on persuading Beijing to agree to slow its rapid buildup of arms and to cease trying to isolate Taiwan diplomatically. Tokyo must reach a common understanding with Washington, and then both must press Taipei to stop making unilateral concessions without concrete reciprocation by Beijing. In addition, to preclude any uncertainty about cross-strait relations, Taipei must remain committed to the 1992 Consensus.

Second, Tokyo must strengthen its involvement in the Taiwanese economy so as to limit Taiwan’s economic dependence on and vulnerability to the mainland. Japan’s support will help halt Taiwan’s downward spiral of unilateral concessions and deepening dependence on the mainland. Tokyo also must expand its trade with Taiwan and encourage Washington to conclude its proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Taipei. If Japan’s closer economic engagement is successful, it will exert a significant countervailing effect on the mainland’s sway over Taiwan. For example, Tokyo’s and Taipei’s recent decision to have their major microchip firms form a strategic alliance during the ongoing global economic crisis may help further integrate Taiwan into Japan’s regional supply-chain networks of investment, production, and trade. Such networks could coexist with a U.S.-Taiwan FTA in context of the evolving webs of open regional economic integration.^{1 2}

Third, in cooperation with Washington, Tokyo has to persuade Taipei, through informal policy discussions, to follow through on its pending arms import agreements with the United States, in order to counterbalance Beijing's extensive arms buildup, which already has had a serious destabilizing effect on the cross-strait status quo. In addition, along with Washington, Tokyo must welcome Taipei's efforts to modernize and professionalize its military, including the proposed abolition of conscription, and encourage Taipei to expend the contrived funds for arms imports. Both Tokyo and Washington need to prompt Taipei to enhance qualitatively, if not quantitatively, its defense capability.

Fourth, Tokyo must strengthen its military power in the areas surrounding Japan in general and its south-bound sea-lanes of communication in particular. Japan also must accelerate the modernization of its maritime and air capabilities. Its priorities should move from the earlier Cold-War emphasis on the northern front, in Hokkaido, to the western and southern fronts, in Kyushu and Okinawa. Funds for mechanized ground forces will need to be reallocated accordingly.

Tokyo is now moving in this direction. For instance, its Air Self-Defense Force (SDF) is planning to acquire next-generation tactical air superiority fighters to replace the current F-15 aircraft. The Maritime SDF (MSDF) has recently commissioned the first de facto helicopter aircraft carrier,^{1 3} after having built three large flush-deck landing ships with limited amphibious assault capability.^{1 4} A second helicopter carrier is scheduled to be commissioned in 2011, and a third being considered is a VSTOL carrier.^{1 5} All these will augment the SDF's military power, which has been improved gradually but substantially through cumulative investment over the decades in major platforms, weapon systems, military infrastructures as related to AEGIS vessels, AWACS aircraft, airborne refueling aircraft, and a missile defense system.

Fifth, Tokyo might have to take more drastic measures to supplement

and even complement U.S. military power if Beijing's arms buildup accelerates and if Washington becomes less willing to intervene in case of a Taiwan contingency. In this case, Japan's MSDF could double the size of its submarine fleet by extending the duration of each sub's service from fifteen to thirty years, which is the major navies' standard. Tokyo has long halved the life cycle simply to maintain its submarine-building capability. The new subs are equipped with Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) capability, reinforcing the inclusion of the SDF's sole semi-strategic capability in the calculation, particularly by Beijing, of the region's balance of power. Tokyo might even consider the addition of nuclear-powered attack submarines. It also could build a few medium-size aircraft carriers for fixed-wing airplanes for carrier battle groups, particularly if Beijing built a blue-water navy that included carrier battle groups. Most likely, Tokyo will follow a prudent and reactive approach aimed to prevent a regional arms race. But if Japan were faced with an overwhelming threat, it would be compelled to act quickly and decisively.

Sixth, Tokyo must conclude a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the United States,¹⁶ in the event that Washington should be unwilling to intervene on behalf of Taiwan. Washington has concluded similar agreements individually with Belgium, Italy, Germany, and Netherlands, which give Washington control over its nuclear weapons stored in these countries in peacetime through Permissive Action Links (PALs) but hand over control of the weapons to each party to the agreements in wartime.¹⁷ A similar arrangement between Japan and the United States would give Tokyo a limited yet effective nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis Beijing.

The preceding six options are step-by-step policy measures for Tokyo to consider implementing in response to the threats it faces. The worst-case scenario, which currently is improbable but still is possible, is Washington's losing its hegemony and subsequently withdrawing from the region's security, thus forcing Tokyo to revert to being strategically independent. These six

options, however, mesh with the worst-case scenario, because the sequential implementation of the options will be essential to meet it.

Notes

¹ See http://www.president.gov.tw/en/prog/news_release/print.php?id=1105499687.

² This refers to the fiction that the ROC has jurisdiction over all the territories inherited from the Qing Dynasty, which include not only the PRC's territory but also Outer Mongolia, Tuva, and other areas adjoining today's Myanmar and India, with its capital still in Nanjing, a major city on the mainland. Only twenty-three countries in the world recognize this claim and maintain diplomatic relations with the ROC.

³ See <http://www.mofa.gov.tw/webapp/ct.asp?xItem=33802&ctNode=1027&mp=6>.

⁴ "Hu Jintao Meets KMT Chairman Wu Poh-Hsuing," *Xinhua*, May 28, 2008, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-05/28/content_8269806.htm; and, Kichinosuke Ihara, "Seven Months of the Ma Ying-jeou Administration," *Kaigai Jijo: Journal of World Affairs*, Vol.57, No.1, January 2009, p. 9.

⁵ Jimmy Chuang, "DPP Condemns Wu's Comments," *Taipei Times*, May 28, 2008, available at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2008/05/28/2003413164>.

⁶ "Taiwan and China in 'Special Relationship': Ma," *China Post*, September 4, 2008, available at <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/china-taiwan%20relations/2008/09/04/173082/Taiwan-and.htm>.

⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_state-to-state_relations; and, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Country_on_Each_Side.

⁸ Faced with the imminent danger of a swine flu pandemic, Beijing has decided to tolerate Taipei's observer status in WHO's 2009 general assembly but not its formal membership in WHO. Because observer status requires annual renewal, it does not mean a permanent right to attend the meeting. See *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 30, 2009.

⁹ As of 2008, the last year of the Chen Administration, the mainland already was Taiwan's largest trading partner (US\$132.5 billion) and the largest recipient of its investments (US\$150 million–US\$200 billion). In addition, five million Taiwanese visited the mainland that year. See *Nikkei Shimbun*, May 4, 2009. As of April 2009, one million Taiwanese, 4.4% of the total population, reside in the mainland. See *U.S. Department of State Background Note: Taiwan*, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35855.htm>, accessed on May 7, 2009.

¹⁰ DPP President Tsai Ing-wen Made a Similar Observation. See *Sankei Shimbun*, April 10, 2009.

¹¹ *Sankei Shimbun*, March 13, 2009, available at <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/politics/policy/080313/plc0803131934007-n1.htm>.

¹² *Nikkei Shimbun*, April 15, 2009, evening ed.

¹³

See [http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%81%B2%E3%82%85%E3%81%86%E3%81%8C\(%E8%AD%B7%E8%A1%9B%E8%89%A6\)](http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%81%B2%E3%82%85%E3%81%86%E3%81%8C(%E8%AD%B7%E8%A1%9B%E8%89%A6)).

¹⁴

See <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%81%8A%E3%81%8A%E3%81%99%E3%81%BF%E5%9E%8B%E8%BC%B8%E9%80%81%E8%89%A6>.

¹⁵ *Sentakū*, May 2009, p. 99.

¹⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_sharing.

¹⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permissive_Action_Link.