

The Military Confidence Building Measures Strategy Across the Taiwan Strait

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Background

On December 31, 2008, the President of China, Hu Jintao, gave an important speech on the eve of the 30th anniversary of “A letter to the Taiwan compatriots” dated January 1, 1979, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. This letter announced an end to the shelling of Kinmen, an islet near China’s Fu Chien province, and asked Taiwan to be unified with China. This letter is a symbol of China’s Taiwan policy—from war to peace. Hu clearly pointed out that in order to stabilise the situation across the Taiwan Strait and decrease the problems of military security, both sides of the Taiwan Strait can continue to engage with each other at appropriate times, for putting in military confidence building mechanisms. Hu’s speech would not be hot news for cross-Strait relations because there have been increasing discussions over the last two years regarding military confidence building measures (CBMs).

The PRC ministry of defence spokesman, Senior Colonel Keng Yansheng, said on July 30, 2010 that in order to stabilise situations across Taiwan Strait and to ease military tension, both sides could engage in military exchanges when appropriate, and explore the establishment of military confidence building measures. He mentioned that it was even possible to discuss the removal of missiles, and to further military confidence on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. This was also highlighted in China’s defence report released on March 2011.¹

In 2011, some retired generals from China and Taiwan had frequent interactions. Although there were some opposing views in Taiwan on this issue, this military exchange and interaction led to a softening of stances.

With the tensions between China and Taiwan somewhat eased, there is no urgency to prevent conflict or war. In other words, even without military confidence

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building measures (CBMs), there are many communication channels between Taiwan and China to neutralise threats of conflict. Thus, in cross-Strait interactions, military (CBMs) serve the strategic purpose of maintaining stability, but do not entirely dispel the likelihood of military conflict.

Framework

Strategy is a choice, it reflects a preference for a future state or condition. Strategy confronts adversaries, but some things simply remain beyond control or unforeseen.² Strategy provides direction for the coercive or persuasive use of the power to achieve specified objectives. Objectives provide purpose, focus and justification for the actions embedded in a strategy.³ According to the Art Lykke model, strategy must balance ends, ways and means. If these are not balanced, the strategy would involve risks.⁴

This article evaluates the ends (objectives), ways and means of cross-Strait military CBM strategies adopted by Taiwan and China to maintain confidence building discourse and interaction, to reconcile the differences between Taiwan and China.

Taiwan and China's Strategic Objectives

Military strategy is based on the consistency and coordination among ends, ways, and means. In the process of interaction and exchange, Taiwan and China would certainly have long-term military strategic considerations and goals, for executing various military strategy and objectives. Before 2008, China's cross-Strait strategy was based, first and foremost, on Taiwan's fear of the consequences of moving toward independence. So the CBMs that reinforce China's view point are seen as being counter-productive for achieving this objective.

When the Kuomintang formed the government, the new president Ma Ying-jeou improved cross-Strait relations by adopting the "three nos" policy of "no independence, no unification, and no use of force." The tacit acceptance by both sides of the "1992 consensus," under which both sides essentially agreed to a "one China, different interpretations" policy, offered a new future for cross-Strait relations.⁵ But it is clear that China still holds on to the "Peaceful Unification, One Country Two Systems" strategic objective - however, the ways and means are flexible.

People's Liberation Army Major General Lo Yuan once put forward the nine major objectives of the cross-Strait military CBMs.⁶

- Realising peaceful unification and solidifying cross-Strait relations within the peaceful developmental framework of the “One China” principle.
- Stabilising the situation across the Taiwan Strait, decreasing concerns about military security and avoiding “accidents”.
- Engaging in cross-Strait negotiations and creating a good atmosphere for cross-Strait political negotiations.
- Communicating the sincere good will of China towards the people of Taiwan.
- Suppressing the demands for “Taiwan Independence”.
- Reducing role of foreign powers in Taiwan domestic affairs.
- Communication and interaction between military personnel from China and Taiwan to turn animosity into grace.
- Decreasing the national defence budget and using the money saved to improve people’s lives.
- Integrating national power and resources, so that Taiwan, Hainan Island, and Zhoushan Islands can form a triangular defence frontline that is mutually reliant with China, and cross-Strait armed forces can form a unified defence force to protect the Great China regional security.

Out of these, Taiwan would probably accept the one that supports stability in and across the Taiwan Strait, while the others would primarily benefit China. Taiwan stands to benefit only if it acknowledges and accepts the “One Country Two Systems”, formula but it would be at the cost of its sovereignty and dignity. Simply put, China’s military CBMs are meant to draw Taiwan closer, with the objective of promoting unification by actually creating a strategic situation that is conducive to peaceful unification negotiations.⁷ China has numerous other ways and means to unite with Taiwan. Military CBMs can be easily discerned and rendered ineffective.

Additionally, in order to avoid engaging in military confidence with Taiwan under a state-to-state framework, China has deliberately avoided the military confidence models with other neighbouring countries. On one hand, it emphasizes the uniqueness of the cross-strait situations; while on the other hand, it hopes to begin with military culture and interactions between retired generals to gradually establish military confidence. Such interactions provide a chance for China to carry out the cultural unification strategy. Chinese officials have made no secret of the fact that they see Chinese culture as a weapon by which to persuade Taiwanese to agree to annexation. Beijing is now seizing the opportunity created by the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou to impose a Chinese cultural template on Taiwan.⁸

Cross-Strait tensions between China and Taiwan have been eased, and the likelihood of an armed conflict or war has been greatly decreased. There is no need for China to persist with CBMs to dispel conflicts. There is no possibility of Taiwan attacking the Chinese mainland. Since Taiwan has worked hard to build military confidence, China has responded in kind which sets the stages for China and Taiwan to engage in political negotiations, to lower the level of Taiwan military preparedness, and to get Taiwan to reduce its purchase of weapons from the United States. China will not compromise on its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

In Taiwan, the primary objective of promoting military confidence is to maintain peace and stability on Taiwan Strait. Taiwan hopes to employ military confidence and exchanges to construct channels for avoiding conflict escalation, thus to obtain a commitment from China toward peace, and to maintain national security. Furthermore, it may even be possible to use this as a basis to enter into a permanent peace agreement with China. However, any excessive accommodation of China's military CBMs will have negative political consequences for the government in Taiwan which is why Ma's government has proclaimed that military exchanges before 2012 will be unlikely.⁹ However, since maintaining cross-Strait peace and stability is a way to retain popular support, it is necessary to continue military and political interaction. Before China shows a significant change of attitude with regard to either the removal of missiles or the "One China" principle, Taiwan cannot be afford to be naïve while engaging China.

Ways

The basis of current cross-Strait interactions, is not a breakthrough for the "One China" principle, but rather the accommodation of rhetoric. In the process of establishing cross-Strait confidence, all issues and aspects do not have the same significance. China has staunchly stood by the "One China" principle, and a stalemate occurs whenever in any political interaction or contact pertaining to politics or sovereignty.¹⁰ Although Hu Jintao has proposed the so called "military confidence", before the sovereignty agreement is reached, any military CBMs without concrete results will raise suspicions about the selling out of sovereignty. Moreover, China's differentiated discourse for the "One China" principle and its changeable position on others does not create confidence among Taiwan's people.

Military CBMs are highly political issues. If highly sensitive political interaction takes place before politically controversial or sovereignty issues have been resolved, there will be no clear accomplishments, and may even derail the enterprise. So the cross-Strait political interaction has often been listed as a possibility in the long-term; while culture, economy, tourism and society are discussed in the near term.

The visit to Taiwan by China's minister of culture Cai Wu also exemplifies such developing trends.¹¹

There has been much improvement in cross-Strait military measures engagement and political exchanges over the years.. The KMT-CCP platform has also become the primary channel between Taiwan and China for dealing with controversial issues. However, one cannot overlook the fact that China engages in surreptitious activities to confuse other countries and create the impression that Taiwan is a part of China.

China has not changed its intention and strategic objective with regard to Taiwan; the "One China" principle still has a different meaning on mainland China. Internationally, it still emphasises the immutability of the "One China" principle. Although China has maintained a low profile in politics, diplomacy, and the military, even gave some interests by ECFA, but it continues to restrict Taiwan's international participation and has never allowed Taiwan to play a greater role in international affairs.

However before China shows that it has changed its military strategy objectives, it is necessary to maintain the independent sovereignty of Taiwan in its current form and engage in other ways to maintain the strategy objectives. Therefore, both sides emphasise "Easy First, Difficult Second". Taiwan hopes to end high politics controversies and begin with "easy" measures to promote cross-Strait military CBMs.

However, according to the Chinese scholar Zheng Jian, if Taiwan and China must adhere to on "Easy First, Difficult Second", there are at least three points they must keep in mind: 1) insist upon the "One China" principle; 2) insist upon opposition to "Taiwan Independence"; 3) insist upon ultimate unification as the goal for Taiwan and China.¹²

Under the current situation, when Taiwan and China discuss this issue, it is necessary to explore how to establish political confidence first. This foundation of mutual confidence is necessary to proceed into real interaction and to begin constructing the concrete procedures for military CBMs. Otherwise, at the preliminary stage, it is pointless to discuss how to increase defence transparency, to conduct joint military exercises, or to create military hotlines.¹³

Furthermore, China has proposed that military confidence could allow the Taiwanese and Chinese military to engage in strategic collaborations to jointly use military means to protect Taiwan and China, as well as protect the joint military interests of the Chinese

race. Examples include joint operations to protect the sovereignty over the Diaoyutai Islands, East Sea, Spratly Islands and ocean rights, maritime security, people's livelihoods, and overseas interests. However, these unilateral claims will complicate the problem, or even cause the issue of military confidence to become international. It means that China has ulterior motives in its military CBMs with Taiwan.¹⁴

This also shows that even though both Taiwan and China assert "Easy First, Difficult Second", they have different approaches to engagement. Taiwan asserts that it is necessary to first resolve practical problems and set aside any controversies. However, China wants Taiwan to make the commitment first, which is also the premise and framework set by China, which may not be publicly acceptable in Taiwan.

Means (Resources)

Due to the massive differences between Taiwan and China in terms of overall national economic strength, and military power, the execution of military CBMs is naturally asymmetric. If the weaker side has no important bargaining tools, it can only fall into the framework designated by the stronger side, and will lose initiative. Therefore, Taiwan should understand that it is good that China has proposed the three conditions of "One China, Anti-secession, Promoting Unification" for military confidence building, to convince the Taiwan people of the currently unacceptable discourse on military confidence and maintain the current levels of progress. However, in order to refrain from influencing the next presidential election, a strategy of stable progress is being used. Otherwise, once China uses the dialectical consideration of agreeing to remove missiles, or even changes the conditions of the "One China" principle to "the 1992 Consensus", it will accelerate the process of military security confidence on Taiwan Strait, and Taiwan will lose its bargaining chips.

In the context of increased economic cooperation between Taiwan and China, how the Taiwanese industry maintains its momentum is the key point. If Taiwan economic model after the ECFA becomes more like that of Hong Kong, there will be even fewer resources for Taiwan to negotiate with China. If changes in national defence result in a smaller and weaker military, there will be no need for China to build military confidence with Taiwan, and will only give China another tool to push Taiwan into the trap of unification.

Thus, the military confidence problem, has enabled Taiwan to create resources and develop its means. Discussions on concrete military confidence should be used to promote concrete interaction between the two sides in terms of extending the negotiation process for military confidence, and creating a strategic space that

allows Taiwan to maintain the status quo. If China makes unreasonable demands in the interaction process, this can lead the government to seek support from the Taiwan people. In other words, through popular will in Taiwan, the breadth and depth of strategy should be expanded to create resources for political negotiation. More importantly, the possible political issues between Taiwan and China, or even an elevation in political confidence based on increased cross-Strait interaction must also entail integrative coping mechanisms. To grasp the movement of political issues immediately and effectively, Taiwan should increase its bargaining power in cross-Strait political interaction.

Conclusions

Within the package of unification or strategic usage in existing military confidence or military security confidence as emphasized by China, Taiwan and China should seek the military confidence not as a concrete way of resolving issues first and of constructing unique confidence measures between Taiwan and China. However, Military confidence is not a semantic trick, but rather a strategic means of transcending existing constraints and frameworks. The military confidence proposed by Hu Jintao is military confidence that is not a normal and state-to-state military confidence building measure. This form and framework have created obstacles for Taiwan and China to further implement military confidence building. However, genuine interaction and CBMs can help Taiwan and China to achieve a break through.

China wants cross-Strait military confidence to be unique, and an internal affair not a regional issue. As long as it can resolve controversies and conflicts without weakening Taiwanese sovereignty, uniqueness can actually help resolve problems. The Kinmen Agreement and Macau Negotiations are concrete examples. For Taiwan, this can resolve possible potential conflicts, and maintain peace and security across the Taiwan Strait. For China, this does not violate the "One China" principle, and can lead them into believing that the cross-Strait relations are going in the expected direction, and that the promotion of unification through military CBMs has also begun to produce real interests.

In order to cover multiple interests and perspectives, the establishment of cross-strait confidence building measures should be a process of stable development without fast advancements. The establishment of confidence mechanisms requires practical considerations of strategic security to achieve structural breakthroughs in both the domestic and foreign environment. For Taiwan and China to break through the military confidence obstacles, it is necessary to adopt new ideas and methods to construct a new discourse for the cross-Strait relationship to transcend

the sovereignty framework. Moreover, the military CBMs are a way of promoting cross-Strait confidence to dispel conflicts, rather than cross-Strait interaction. It is necessary to work delicately and move forward with stability, and not be over confident and compromise on sovereignty. 

Notes:

- 1 The Information Office of China's State Council, "China's National Defence in 2010", March 31, 2011, *Xinhua*, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-03/31/c_13806851.htm(2011/05/23)
- 2 Foster, Gregory D., "A Conceptual Foundation for a Theory of Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1990, pp. 47-48.
- 3 Ibid., p.50.
- 4 Lykke, Arthur F. Jr., "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy," in *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1989, pp.3-8.
- 5 Cossa, Ralph A., "Foreword," in Bonnie Glaser and Brad Glosserman, *Promoting Confidence Building across the Taiwan Strait*, Washington, DC :CSIS,2008, p. iv.
- 6 Yuan, Lo, "Nine advantages of Cross-Strait Military Confidence Building Measures," *China Review News*, January 5, 2009, available at http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/0_0_100848270_1.html accessed on June 25, 2011.
- 7 Chinese perspective of cross-strait confidence building measures see Glaser, Bonnie and Glosserman, Brad, *Promoting Confidence Building across the Taiwan Strait*, Washington, DC: CSIS, 2008, p.4.
- 8 Cole, J. Michael, "Beijing sees culture as a weapon," *Taipei Times*, March 5, 2010, available at <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2010/03/05/2003467197> accessed on June 25, 2011.
- 9 It also because the consideration of Taiwan presidential election in 2012. China and the KMT government agree that improving cross-strait relations generally might prevent DPP return to power. See Bonnie Glaser and Brad Glosserman, *Promoting Confidence Building across the Taiwan Strait* Washington, DC: CSIS, 2008, p.4.
- 10 Huaqiu, Liu "Step-by-step Confidence and Security Building for the Asian Region: A Chinese Perspective," *Asia Pacific Confidence and Security Building Measures*, Washington, DC: CSIS, 1995.
- 11 "China Minister of Culture Cai Wu visit Taiwan," *China Review News*, August 30, 2010, available at http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/7_0_101430712_1.html accessed on June 25, 2011.
- 12 Jian, Zheng, "To Attain Cross-Strait Military Confidence Building Measures by Strategic Cooperation," *Chinese Culture Development Association Forum*, available at <http://www.pcprc.org/show.aspx?id=411&cid=7> accessed on August 29, 2010.
- 13 Shen, Ming-Shih, "Study of the Cross-Strait Communication Hotline of State Leader," in *2007 PLA Forum Collection*, Taiwan, Taoyuan: National Defense University, 2007, pp. 387-418.
- 14 Shen, Ming-Shih, "Cross-strait Military Confidence Building Measures: Dilemma and Opportunity," in YC Wang, ed., *Cross-Strait Relations development: Tendency and Perspective*, Taiwan, Taoyuan: National Defense University, 2007, pp. 187-222.