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Associated Press Interview with President Ma Ying-jeou

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[09:17]

AP: The warming of ties with China has lowered tensions in the region. There are some concerns that better relations with China are coming at the expense of Taiwan's longstanding relationship with the United States. So the question we want to begin with is what assurances does Taiwan have of continued US support? And also, what assurances is your government having to give to the US?

[09:38]

President Ma Ying-jeou: In the last two and a half years we have greatly improved relations between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. Tension across the Taiwan Strait has been eased. Trade has increased, and the people-to-people contacts have also greatly increased. All these actually are in the interest of the United States. So, we receive very strong support from Washington as regards our current policy toward the Chinese mainland. And we have received many assurances that they will continue to support that policy, not only coming from the previous administration,

President George Bush, but also President Obama.

[10:26]

AP: Why should the US continue to help out Taiwan? There could be a lot of downsides for the United States in terms of its own relationship with China. So, what's in it for the United States?

[10:37]

President Ma: Before we took office, the cross-[strait] relations were very tense, and that worries Washington. And that also hurt the high-level trust between Taipei and Washington. Actually, even before I took office, I thought that it is a good policy to improve relations with the mainland and at the same time, to restore high-level trust between Taipei and Washington. We did exactly that.

[11:11]

AP: So, is there an opportunity here for Taiwan to act as a mediator between the US and China when tensions arise over things like currency or safe passage through the South China Sea?

[11:21]

President Ma: [Laughs] We haven't thought about playing that kind of role, but at least, we have our rapprochement with the mainland has created a situation which is described by many US-China scholars, China experts, that this is actually the best situation among Taipei, Beijing and Washington in 60 years. As we see it, this is probably the first time in the history of last 60 years that any one of the three could maintain good relations with the other two. As you can see, before I took office, there were very few flights between Taiwan and the mainland. Now, 370 per week, and it greatly facilitates the exchange. That certainly will contribute to peace and prosperity. I think this policy is not only welcomed by Washington, but also by countries in the region.

[12:35]

AP: Do you see the relationship between the mainland and the US at a high point for 60 years, or only in relation to Taiwan's position?

[12:44]

President Ma: Obviously, there are problems between Washington and Beijing, but it also is very obvious that they depend on each other to solve a host of problems that confront the world. So, relations may be more at a high point or low point, but I'm sure that it is a strategic relationship either side will cherish.

[13:12]

AP: Speaking of strategic relationships, matters of Taiwan's security are at the heart of the PRC's relationship to the United States, and there are some concerns in Washington that Taiwan's defense is now lagging behind China's. So how is Taiwan meeting the challenge of China's military buildup?

[13:30]

President Ma: Actually, the change of balance started before we took office, roughly around 2005, because the mainland increased its military budget in a way that actually made it impossible for Taiwan to follow. They increased it by double digits in the last 10 or 15 years. But, to defend Taiwan, military means is one of the ways to do that. The reason why we improved relations with the mainland to ease the tension, to reduce the threat, is exactly because, I think, by using other means it might be more effective, by increasing trade and contact. You see, as of the end of September this year, more than 2.6 million mainland tourists and visitors have visited Taiwan. This is unprecedented in the history, in the cross-strait situation. We are very impressed, but also appreciate very much that this has been going on very well. According to a recent poll, more than 95 percent of the visitors were satisfied with what they see and have in Taiwan. And actually, they are also a group that has contributed not only to the economy of Taiwan, but people-to-people contact. This is exactly what we want to see. The more contact will bring more understanding, and that is a key foundation for cross-strait peace. So, in order to defend Taiwan, of course we should strengthen our national defense. We should continue the security relationship with the United States in purchasing arms that we do not produce, but I think the most important strategy is to make the leadership in Beijing not even consider invading Taiwan, because that would hurt their interests as well.

[15:49:]

AP: Would the acquisition of the F-16 C/Ds not be a step too far? Why not cease and desist upon that strategic initiative in the interest of pursuing some of these other economic and other outreach programs that seem to have been very successful? It seems that the push for the F16 C/Ds is putting the United States in kind of a difficult position because it runs the risk of really angering China by taking those newer aircraft to Taiwan.

[16:18]

President Ma: Our request to acquire F-16 C/Ds is not to engage in an arms race with the Chinese mainland, but rather, to replace the aging fleet of F-5 series that will pose a threat to our defense of the sky. In other words, our military procurements are intended basically to replace the aging articles in our arsenal, but also to maintain peace. We are not seeking war with any country. This is, I think, very much understood in Washington. Of course, mainland China continues to oppose that. We also made it very clear that maintain[ing] the adequate defense of Taiwan is a very important policy of this country and we will continue to do that.

[17:17]

AP: Would it, though, violate the Reagan-era policy of phasing down the quality and quantity of arms that the US is providing to Taiwan?

[17:25]

President Ma: I don't think the provision of arms to Taiwan violates any international commitment of the United States. Actually, this is done exactly according to the provisions of [the] Taiwan Relations Act.

[17:41]

AP: Has the United States indicated that they are willing to provide the upgraded F-16s?

[17:45]

President Ma: We haven't received any positive response yet. We are notified that the US administration is still evaluating our defense needs, so we are still waiting for a response from Washington.

[18:02]

AP: Has Taiwan formally requested the upgraded F-16s?

President Ma: Oh, yes, long ago.

[18:11]

AP: Just to follow up if I may, you mentioned that already by 2005 the imbalance in the cross-strait military balance was becoming clear. Given that knowledge now and looking back to the opposition that the Nationalist party under your leadership when it was in opposition voiced to the acquisition of weapons from the United States during this period while you were in opposition, looking back at that now, do you think that that was a mistaken decision? That was a mistaken way of operating as the opposition party in a legislature?

[18:54]

President Ma: When I was elected chairman of the KMT in 2005, I made it very clear we that would continue to acquire weapons from the United States, adequate articles of weapons from the United States. I made it very clear in Feb 2006. Because, at the time, the request for approval on a budget matter in our Legislative Yuan was a little bit complicated, because the request was too simple to be evaluated. That is why many members of our party believed that the military's request was too high. At the time, it was more than NT\$600 billion and that is way beyond our financial capability. That is why we wanted to cut back to a smaller scale. We are actually doing that.

[19:57]

AP: With the F-16 C/Ds, China has indicated that, the Beijing government has indicated that this for them is a real red line. Don't you worry that acquiring these weapons, should Washington agree to provide them, would put your opening to the mainland at risk?

[20:20]

President Ma: Well, this is something that has to be determined by us and also by the United States. We believe that the acquisition of these weapons, as I said earlier, will replace the aging fleet of F-5 series. That is necessary to defend our sky, but we are not using that to start a war against the Chinese mainland. As I have said many, many times, we are

not engaged in an arms race with the Chinese mainland. So, it is for the United States to decide, to evaluate whether they are willing to sell these weapons to us, but, obviously, as I said, we, ourselves, cannot produce jet fighters, and we have to depend on the supply from the United States.

[21:24]

AP: Shifting gears a little bit, the harsh reaction in China to the Nobel Prize for Liu Xiaobo, China's recent actions in the South China Sea, and most recently, the thousands of anti-Japanese demonstrators we have seen taking to the streets of China's cities, are you concerned about the generally more assertive behavior that we are seeing from China? The more assertive behavior we seem to be seeing from China over the past couple months?

[21:49]

President Ma: The situation in East Asia certainly worries some people in the West. But, by and large, the countries in the region understand very well that peace and stability is the very important foundation for continued prosperity. Nationalistic feelings actually exist in mainland China, in Japan and in Taiwan.

The best way to approach these issues [is] to have a policy to settle the dispute through peaceful means. The issue of Diaoyutai, that the Japanese call Senkaku Island, has existed for 40 years. When I was a student, I also participated in these demonstrations in Taiwan, and I wrote three books on this issue. So I understand the best way to approach these issues is to settle them by peaceful means. I also watched TV and saw the nationalistic demonstrations in Beijing and in Japan. Those are very normal for a territorial dispute.

The best thing for the two governments to do is to seek resolving these issues through peaceful means. For other issues, obviously, the United States, Japan, mainland China, Southeast Asia are all very concerned about the East China Sea and South China Sea. I am cautiously optimistic the countries understand very well that now Asia is the growth engine of the world in terms of economic recovery. Neither country would do anything stupid to change that very prosperous future. So, they may have some very different feelings, about security issues, or other security

issues, but generally speaking, they will act very rationally in order to resolve these disputes.

[24:08]

AP: When the Taiwanese people see those demonstrations taking place, and see some of the actions that China is taking to respond, does it alienate any public support for your own outreach to China?

[24:17]

President Ma: We had that before in Taiwan, and also happened to our fishermen in the north seas off Taiwan. Because the waters surrounding the Diaoyutai Islands are a very rich fishing ground for Taiwan fishermen. That is why the dispute certainly will continue for a while. But, even when I wrote my dissertation, I called for a peaceful settlement by jointly developing the region's resources and to have a profit-sharing process. So, I think eventually, those issues should be resolved on the model created by the Europeans in the North Sea. They had similar problems more than 50 years ago, but they successfully resolved those issues and delimited the maritime zones so that they could jointly develop the petroleum resources now. The product has been a famous brand in the world petroleum market, the North Sea Brent. Right? So this is the right way to do.

[25:33]

AP: You should find your dissertation and send it to your counterparts in Japan and China as a...

[25:40]

President Ma: Well, it takes a while, because this issue was not brought up to [until] four years ago and there are complicated historical, geological and geographical issues involved. But, as I said, countries in the region know very well that conflict or competition only lead to very undesirable outcomes as you can see the leaders of mainland China and Japan met in the corridors of the United Nations and I am sure that they have reached some consensus on this issue.

[26:14]

AP: If I could just follow up on one of the points that Brian was asking

about, the data from the Mainland Affairs Council public opinion polls and other public opinion polls in Taiwan shows remarkable consistency in the opposition of Taiwanese from all walks of life to any kind of political process with mainland China, certainly including the United Nations. And I think part of that reflects worries over perceptions that people have about the Chinese reaction to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo and some perceptions of aggressive Chinese behavior not only in Diaoyutai, but also in the South China Sea, which the United States is also concerned about. I wonder if this continuation of opposition to a political process with China and certainly for unification is a source of concern for you?

[27:27]

President Ma: Yes. I made it very clear in my inaugural address that we will adopt a policy based on the Constitution of this country, on the no unification, no independence, and no use of force. By “no unification,” I mean that I will not talk with the mainland on unification issues during my term of office. “No independence” means that this administration would not pursue a policy of having a *de jure* independence of Taiwan. And “no use of force” needs no explanation. And this has been a policy supported, according to opinion polls, by more than 70 percent, and sometimes 80 percent, of the people.

In other words, the mainland of course wants to have unification with Taiwan. But obviously, the majority of the people here do not believe that they are ready for that. But they are willing to do business with the mainland. They are willing to exchange students with the mainland. They are ready to have cultural exchange and other contact with the mainland. So this is the foundation of my policy. Yes, we will have trade, even more trade and investment, but we’re not ready for any political discussions on the future of Taiwan or other unification issues. This is very much understood in the Chinese mainland as well. That is why several times I called for a long historic period for the two sides to engage each other in in-depth exchange so that they could understand more about each other.

For instance, I go for the recognition of diplomas and degrees from mainland universities, and we are having Chinese students coming to Taiwan to seek degrees in Taiwan beginning next year. Why do we want

to do that? I think the in-depth contact should happen as early as possible between the young people of the two sides. And this is the best way to have longstanding peace.

As I said, we need a long period to really understand [each other], because the peoples of Taiwan and the mainland have been separated for 60 years, and [thus,] the difference in political, economic and social systems. So we should provide this opportunity for them to understand each other and to decide where to go.

So, I also said many times that the future of Taiwan should be determined by the joint action of the 23 million people in Taiwan and I think people generally support that.

[30:17]

AP: Would the policy that you're spelling out carry through a second term, were you to be reelected? Is just this period that you're talking about—of economic outreach, travel back and forth but not political dialogue—does that carry through a second administration, or is that a commitment that you made for the first administration?

[00:30:34]

President Ma: Well, it depends on how fast we move with our relations with the mainland. For instance, now, we are almost two-and-a-half years into my presidency and we have achieved 14 agreements with the mainland. But we haven't finished the important ones, for instance, an investment guaranteeing agreement, a dispute settlement agreement. And for our trade, in terms of tariff concessions and non-tariff barriers, we have only reached the first phase on the negotiations—that is what we call the “early harvest.” So the two sides will return to the negotiating table next year to discuss the rest of the trade and other relationships. So we still have our hands full with all these economic issues because, you see, the two sides have a trade volume of over US\$100 billion and we haven't got any mechanism for dispute settlement and for a number of things that will exist between two normal economic entities. That is exactly what we want to do. We are not intentionally delaying the talks of political issues, but certainly, the economic ones are more important to people here, and people also support the idea that economy first, politics

later.

[00:32:04]

AP: So, do I understand you correctly that, if economic issues are resolved during your second term, during that term, you might move on to political questions?

[00:32:17]

President Ma: As I said, it depends on how fast we move, whether these issues are satisfactorily resolved, and of course all the policies regarding the mainland are very sensitive, and we certainly will also make decisions on generally whether the decision receives popular support. So usually when we lay out our general policy, we will say that: first of all, it has to be something needed by the country; secondly, it has to be supported by the people; and thirdly, that it will be supervised by the national parliament to make sure that this is a policy basically meeting the needs of the people.

[00:33:06]

AP: In that progression from economic issues to political issues, what about the security issues and perhaps moving towards confidence-building measures between the militaries, where does that fall in this process?

[00:33:21]

President Ma: The CBM issue is generally considered in the broad sense of political issues. And certainly as I said, that will come after all the major economic issues are resolved. But we're not in a hurry because the two sides, as a result of the efforts we've made, greatly reduced tension across the Taiwan Strait. When we talk about CBM—confidence building measures—when we signed, when we negotiated and signed an ECFA that was a very important CBM. And the process lasted for over a year, and during the process, the officials involved from the two sides also built mutual trust in some regard. And this is exactly what we would like to see. So they can just pick up a phone and call each other.

For instance, when we reached the agreement to have judicial assistance, mutual assistance in judicial affairs, the police from the two sides met and

jointly broke several rings of crime on fraud, and we have so far apprehended 1,200 criminals in this regard, and greatly reduced that crime, the fraud—even people told me that they used to receive many calls—which will affect fraud, but the number was greatly reduced. And so the cross-strait rapprochement did bring many benefits, not just economic, but also for our personal safety and all other things.

00:35:09

AP: So, just to follow up briefly. So you do not want very real and also sort of symbolic sign of tensions or threat from the mainland toward Taiwan, as of course all the missiles that are pointed toward here. So you don't anticipate any discussing this or any gestures from the mainland until you move beyond the economic phase?

00:35:35

President Ma:

I think you probably remember leaders of the Chinese mainland said several times that the issue will eventually resolve. But I also made a response during my National Day address that we certainly see that as a positive move in cross-strait relations, because the presence of more than 1,000 missiles, short-range and mid-range targeted against Taiwan, is obviously incompatible with the rapid improvement of relations between the two sides.

Now, on any given day, there are thousands of mainland Chinese tourists visiting Taiwan. This is really not a very logical situation, so we think this should be left, of course, for the mainland to decide, whether they want to keep that deployment. We made it very clear that this is not in the interest of cross-strait relations.

00:36:40

AP: What is the specific point in this process of warming relations in which you will put that issue on the table

President Ma:

You mean the missiles?

AP: Yes, when do you start engaging the Chinese leadership on that part?

00:36:53

President Ma: As I said, at the moment, our hands are full, and we [will] only make our intentions known to the world that continuing the current deployment is not in the interest of cross-strait relations, but I think the mainland side will make a sensible decision on that.

AP: So the discussions around ECFA, some of the conversations that are taking place, there's never any... the issue of missiles is never raised in any of those conversations?

President Ma: No, no.

AP: We had a couple of other questions on the Diaoyutai and the other disputed island. Taiwan also has claims to a lot of these islands and we're wondering, what is Taiwan doing to...

President Ma: North China... uh, South China Sea? And East China Sea?

00:37:42

AP: Yes. And what is Taiwan doing to assert its own claims to some of these islands?

President Ma: What is the basis?

AP: Yes.

00:37:50

President Ma: Well, on the East China Sea, for instance, the Diaoyutai or Senkaku [Islands], they were actually discovered and named by the Chinese more than 600 years ago, and during the process, they were used as navigation aids and that included the sea defense of Ming and Ching dynasties, ironically, against the Japanese. There are many historical records, particularly when the kings of the Ryukyus [acceded to the throne], they actually paid tribute to mainland China, to the Ming and Ching dynasties, for almost 500 years. So during the process, there were dozens of special envoys sent by the Ming and Ching courts to officiate

their inauguration, so there were [many] historical records on using those islands.

The Japanese actually annexed those islands in 1895 after they had already defeated the armies and the navy of the Ching court at the end of 1894. So when the islands, including Taiwan, were ceded to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, these islands were also turned over. That is why after the war, those islands were returned to the Republic of China under not only the Instrument of Surrender but also the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty of 1952.

But the Japanese say that they discovered those islands in 1895 as *terra nullius*, so we have historical records [that are] quite clear. But, you see, these islands have been in a state of dispute for over 40 years. And for all this historical, uh, territorial dispute, which is associated with natural resources, I think the best way is to shelf the issue and then try to jointly develop resources and to have some kind of sharing. This is probably the best way to settle our disputes.

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AP: It sounded, to me, though, like you were making a pretty good argument that there is a rightful territorial claim to those islands, and it's not Japan's.

President Ma: We believe these islands belong to us. Not only for historical reasons but also for geographical and geological reasons. They are geologically connected with Taiwan. They are separate from the continental shelf of Taiwan and the mainland, away from the Ryukyu Islands [Okinawa]. There is an Okinawa Trough, which could be as deep as 2,717 meters.

On the other hand, geographically they are also closer to Taiwan than to the Ryukyu Islands. If you look at the historical records of Ryukyu, they have only 36 islands, not including the Diaoyutai Islands. Actually, the Japanese name Senkaku means, "pinnacle," like a church pinnacle. These were actually named by the British sailors in the 16th, 17th century, when they sailed through those islands. The island has a mountain of 383 meters, which is rare in a volcanic island. And that has been used for centuries by sailors as a navigational aid. So we know that island very

well; it has been visited many times by Taiwanese fishermen. Near the island there are great fishing grounds.

[41:49]

AP: So does the geological continuity between Taiwan and these islands mean that the Republic of China's claim to these islands is superior to the claim of the People's Republic of China to these islands?

President Ma: Yes. These are islands geographically, geologically belonging to the island of Taiwan. Even historical records as early as the 16th century have had records of that. But the problem is, all these historical records were actually used by mainland China and Taiwan together because it's part of history.

AP: Aside from that, and, you know, in recent years we've seen that the mainland government has been rather, some would say, aggressively asserting its claim not only to the Diaoyutai but also to the South China Sea islands. They are very actively sending fishing fleets into these disputed waters and their coast guard and fishing administration vessels are arresting fishermen from Vietnam and the Philippines when they encroach upon these waters. Is Taiwan taking similar measures, or what measures is Taiwan taking to enforce its claims to these islands?

[43:16]

President Ma: The Diaoyutai islets aside, we also control the Pratas Islands—*Dongsha*—which is basically dispute-free. It's much closer to Taiwan. It's also between Taiwan and Hong Kong. For the Paracels, those are actually controlled by mainland China, particularly after their war with [South] Vietnam in 1974. For the largest group of islands in the South China Sea, actually almost eight or nine countries control part of it. Taiwan controls the largest one—Itu Aba—it has an area of roughly of half a square kilometer, and we have our Coast Guard stationed on that. Vietnam controls 25 islands and the Philippines control a dozen or so. So, all these islands spreading around are controlled by some country.

And there is an annual conference on how to deal with the issue that has been taking place for quite a while. That is why I believe that the countries in the region understand that this issue cannot be resolved easily.

It requires a joint effort. It's quite clear that, at the moment, efforts to exploit natural resources have been going on, often for decades, but with not very great results. Usually more gas than oil, and it's very expensive to do the drilling and everything. So I think, really, no country can control the area militarily. I mean, it's too far away from their territory. So I think in the future, obviously a joint action aiming at joint development is probably the best solution.

[45:20]

AP: Now, since you touched on the natural resources, the U.S. has voiced some concerns that, you know, there's the Diaoyutai and then there's the larger issue of the free passage of shipping through the South and East China seas and access to natural gas deposits or whatever might be down there on the ocean floor. And the U.S. has voiced concerns that the mainland is really trying to cut off access to foreign trade in that area, which would have, obviously, a poor effect on Taiwan, which really owes its existence to free access to those shipping lanes. So, do you share the concerns of the United States?

[45:53]

President Ma: Certainly. I think most of the waters in the South China Sea should be open waters, the so-called high seas according to the Law of the Sea. And they're open to international traffic for sure. Actually, as I said, countries started to occupy and garrison those islands a long time ago. So this is not a very new issue. We sent our troops, our Marine Corps, to station on those islands as early as 1956. Just 10 years ago, we changed that with Coast Guard instead of the Marines. I served in our Navy more than 30 years ago, and my unit had the responsibility to supply all these islands. So I understand this issue well.

AP: So is China trying to interfere with the open water policy?

[46:52]

President Ma: No. So far no. And I don't think mainland China would do that. You know, when they are becoming a power in the region, they also become more careful about those issues. Certainly, it wants to maintain its sphere of influence but I don't believe that will reach the level of interfering with international traffic.

[47:15]

AP: They often raise objections to the passage of U.S. military ships through the South China Sea and they have, at times, taken measures to block those ships from passing through. The argument that some people in the mainland make is that free passage does not extend to military vessels, that that can be considered to be preparing the battlefield for the future. Does your government believe that these types of military surveillance activities are normal and should be allowed?

President Ma: Well, certainly all the activities on the oceans, particularly in international waters, are regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, which came into effect in 1994. It's very important to note that there are rules of conduct. For instance, a warship is not supposed to sail through the territorial waters of other countries, but if the waters are too narrow in an international strait, then they certainly have to do certain things to make sure that it's an innocent passage. There are rules. I think that each country should follow the rules.

[48:54]

AP: So, the Republic of China has just celebrated its 99th birthday and is now headed toward the 100th anniversary. How long do you think the Republic of China can endure as a separate entity from the People's Republic of China?

President Ma: Well, as I said in my address on the 99th birthday, next year we are celebrating our centennial. This hundred years is full of war and destruction, particularly in the first half. But in the second half, we have created an economy, a democracy on Taiwan, which is the pride of many ethnic Chinese. Certainly, we want to have an even more, better and more prosperous second centennial. We will continue to do that.

AP: So you expect there to be a second centennial for the Republic of China?

President Ma: I won't live that long, but...well, I think our offspring will continue to do that. But, of course, the situation in the region we should certainly not overlook. We will continue good relations with the mainland.

As I said, the situation requires a long historical period for the two sides to resolve their differences.

[50:20]

AP: I guess what I'm getting at is, how long does that historical period last? Is it another century? Is there ever eventual full unification with the mainland?

President Ma: I'm certainly a political leader but I'm not a prophet.

AP: Well, you remember we had a conversation about one week before you were sworn in as president in May of 2008 and you said to me then that you doubted that in your lifetime we would see unification between Taiwan and the mainland. Is that a belief that you still hold? Or based on the experience of the past two-and-a-half years almost, have you become more optimistic?

[51:04]

President Ma: Well, you see the situation across the Taiwan Strait requires not only the changes of the political and economic system on the two sides but also the wisdom of the people and their leaders. Look at the history of mainland China in the last 61 years ever since they were established in 1949. The first 30 years were full of persecutions, war and starvation, everything, but in the second one, they have changed quite a lot. They vowed to quadruple their economic growth before the year 2000, and they made it. But their economic development, a very splendid one, has not brought some democratic reforms. So that is what some of the leaders are talking about that. And what happened to the Liu Xiaobo also demonstrate that they still have a long way to go. Taiwan is a democracy. We elect our president, we elect our parliament, and we run our own business. And given the geographic proximity between Taiwan and the mainland, and the cultural affinity, people obviously tend to take the mainland as a trading partner, as a place to do business, to study, to have other exchange of culture and education. But for the political side, the people of Taiwan are quite cautious. They want to make sure that their cherished freedom and democracy would not be affected as a result of rapprochement with the mainland. So this is a very clear message, and as the leader of this country I certainly make that as part of the policy to

safeguard that as much as I can.

[53:06]

AP: What do you say to your critics who say that what you say is all fine and good and that you're focused on protecting, preserving Taiwan's democracy, but yet in fact closer economic ties with the mainland are harming Taiwan's competitiveness and undermining the foundation for Taiwan's continued separate success and that politically, the closer relations are sort of turning Taiwan into the Finland of the region.

[53:41]

President Ma: If Taiwan is geographically located where Hawaii is, we might be able to claim that. We are so close to the mainland and the economies of the two sides are naturally linked together. You see, even before the government decided to legalize trade with the mainland, trade, underground trade, had been going on for quite a while. It just comes naturally. As long as the mainland gave up their policy of isolation, and started to trade with the rest of the world, in roughly the late 1970s, obviously the business opportunities were created as a result. So a leader of Taiwan should not overlook the reality. The problem of the previous administration is that they said as long as we just keep a distance from the mainland, we could maintain our democracy, our freedom and our economic prosperity. That's not the case. You see, the major problem of the previous administration, aside from their corruption, is that they overlooked the changes of the world. Remember, in the year 2000, we have a power change from the KMT to the DPP. They vowed to start the three links with the mainland but nothing happened during their term of office. And that is a terrible or even fatal delay because that is the period the whole Asia was changing so rapidly that we are being left behind. Look at what happened in the year 2000. There were only three FTAs—free trade agreements—among Asian countries. By the time we started negotiating ECFA with the mainland, there are 58, and Taiwan was out of the game altogether. There is only one country in this part of the world that is like Taiwan. Which one? North Korea. So we have been isolated to a point where our national interest is being hurt. That is why I think we should first of all start the interrupted negotiations with the mainland. It has been interrupted for 10 years even before the DPP took over. And so we started to do that when I took office. Barely a month into

my presidency we started doing that. And then cross-strait flights and then trying to make up for the lost eight years. And now we have reached a point where we don't have to rush. According to the opinion polls that the majority of the people, roughly 43 percent, believe that the pace is just about right, but there are 37 percent that believe it's a little bit too fast, and about 20 or 25 percent that [think] it's too slow. So now we could keep the current speed, there's no need to rush. So just gradually do things one at a time and do it well. And I think basically people approve what we've been doing. The satisfaction rate, approval rate of mainland affairs is the highest. But on the other hand, on political issues they are very cautious. As I said, they cherish our system, our value, our democracy.

AP: To what extent is the upcoming election a referendum on the support for those policies?

[57:27]

President Ma: National referendum. Well, I think opinion polls, if you do it on a regular basis, and by different institutions, I think you get probably the same result. And I don't believe that resorting to a referendum is the best way. Why even in the United States there's no national referendum. I think the...

AP: What I meant is did the results of the upcoming election and how your party does in it, to what extent does that reflect support amongst the Taiwanese people for the warming relations?

[57:57]

President Ma: Certainly, we believe that things like ECFA should be included in the discussion of the election. But our opposition doesn't seem to like that. They opposed that vehemently when we first said we want to have it. They said that will kill Taiwan. So that would affect 3 million people's jobs, and they said it's a humiliation to sign such a pact with the mainland. But after we released the real contents of the agreement a lot of people were very pleased, particularly in the southern part of Taiwan. The fish farmers of the grouper, you know they're very tasty fish, were very happy because that would greatly increase their sales of live groupers to mainland China as a result of the reduction and

elimination of tariffs. So people now understand that to have an ECFA will benefit Taiwan not only as a result of more trade but make Taiwan's economic position in the region very different from what it was. Now many countries that used to keep a distance from Taiwan now come to us and say whether we could have some cooperation. And while we start to negotiate the economic cooperation agreement with Singapore and we will start, we'll restore the negotiation of TIFA, Trade Investment Framework Agreement, with the United States. We're also discussing with the Japanese some forms of cooperation, and with Indonesia. Now we have a very booming situation as a result of the conclusion of ECFA. And certainly ECFA itself, we have completed only about one-fifth of it. We'll continue to complete the rest in the next couple of years and I think this is the best way to keep peace in the region by engaging the other side on trade, education and cultural exchanges.

AP: I wanted to circle back to something you said earlier. I think what I heard you say was that a truly democratic system of government in the mainland is the only way that the Taiwanese people will engage in a conversation about unification.

[1:00:30]

President Ma: I think that will help, that will help. In other words, but there's no guarantee how long it would take for the people of Taiwan to believe it's time to do so. And opinion polls show that the majority of the people support maintaining the status quo. And obviously this trend has been maintained for over at least 20 years. And given the high approval rate of the status quo I think we'll continue. So far, the mainland, aside from the economic side, the political reforms on the democratic side have made little progress.

AP: Very little progress. And so it's fair to say that democracy in China is the only thing that will allow ...

President Ma: I think one of the things that the people of Taiwan would consider.

[1:01:25]

AP: And you spoke of the history of mainland China in 30-year

increments. In what 30-year increment do you think that democracy will take hold in mainland China? Is that something that happens in the next 30 years or is it further out than that?

[1:01:36]

President Ma: Well, the leaders are talking about political institutional reform. We'll see whether and how much they will deliver. But, there is another interesting element we should not overlook—that is the advent of the Internet and the impact on mainland Chinese social, political and economic life. And I think this is probably the first time in their history that their leaders, whether willingly or not, paid much attention to the opinions that were expressed on the Internet. I think that this is a good development, though.

[1:02:13]

AP: You have said that you will not meet either president or chairman Hu Jintao during your first term in office. Is this a possibility during your second term in office?

01:02:33

President Ma: At the moment, I have no plans to meet with the leaders of mainland China and there's no timetable for arranging such a meeting. The reason being, as I said earlier, we have a lot of things in our hands to accomplish, which are closely related to the benefit of the people, primarily the economic issues. And people in general are relatively conservative about discussing political issues with the mainland, which is pretty compatible with what I have said, that people say it's okay, we have more trade, more investment, but do it gradually. This is the general feeling, general atmosphere. So we will probably follow that. In our view, what we've been doing in the last two and a half years is making up for the lost eight years, but for others, people say, "oh, how come you go so fast?" So there are different opinions in our society. That is why we want to maintain, maintain, a moderate speed, not too fast, not too slow.

[01:03:47]

AP: You, you have spoken often during the past two-and-a-half-years, not so much recently, about a peace treaty between mainland China and Taiwan. Is that something that you still favor and I wonder if there were a

peace treaty, how do you see its significance for the eventual question of unification? Does it delay the process of unification? And finally, does a peace treaty between Taiwan and mainland China, uh, undercut the rationale, the *raison d'être*, for the Taiwan Relations Act and the continuing provision of defensive weapons from the United States to Taiwan?

[01:04:44]

President Ma: The idea of a peace agreement began to emerge in 2005, when former chairman Lien Chan met with the Chinese Communist Party's secretary-general in 2005. So they have a five-point common vision for the future, and a peace agreement is one of them. So, as I said, the economic issues are probably the most important ones during this time, so we don't really at this time have any intention to do that before we get all the economic issues resolved. But the idea of a peace agreement is to maintain peace, is to end the state of hostilities, and we're actually doing that. You know, when we and the mainland are engaging in a trade of such a magnitude of economic, of educational exchanges, I think peace is part of it. That is why we think we are actually accomplishing some of the contents the peace agreement is intended to accomplish. But still, we keep that as something of a common vision.

01:06:03

AP: At the time of ECFA, did you think that by now the issue of the missiles pointed at Taiwan would have been addressed, or that the missiles would have been deprogrammed and no longer pointed at Taiwan? Are you disappointed that that, that piece of it hasn't happened yet?

[01:06:19]

President Ma: Well, I think if you ask the people, particularly through a series of opinion polls, generally, people believe that tension has been eased, but once you talk about the missiles, well people say, how come they still keep that?

[01:06:37]

AP: It would go a long way toward easing tensions.

[01:06:39]

President Ma: Yeah, I've seen interviews with mainland Chinese students who come to Taiwan to study; they also believe that it doesn't seem necessary. (Laughs) Well, as I said, this issue will eventually depend on mainland China's attitude, but we made it very clear that, as we move along, the cultural, economic, other improvements in relations, the deployment of missiles will look increasingly incompatible with the whole thing.

01:07:24

AP: You have said earlier, I believe, that the exact quote was that Asia was the growth engine of the world as the world emerges from the recession. What is Taiwan's role in that emergence, and specifically, what is Taiwan's role in ensuring that it's a global recovery as opposed to Asia outpaces the rest of the world in the recovery?

[01:07:46]

President Ma: Well let me just put it in a larger context. I want to make the Republic of China on Taiwan a peacemaker, first; second, a provider of humanitarian assistance; and number three, the promoter of cultural change; and number four, the creator of new technology and business opportunities. On the last point, Taiwan will play the role of an innovation center of the world and we are very strong in commercializing high technology into household appliances and computers, everything. So we could play a very creative role, constructive role in this part of the world. Taiwan is such a small island, with only 23 million people, but now most of the world's computers are manufactured, not in Taiwan, but by the Taiwanese around the world. And I think we can play a good role in that and so through cooperation with the mainland and other countries in the world. For instance, the Japanese...one of their leading think tanks discovered that, for the Japanese to invest on the Chinese mainland, their success rate is about 68 percent, but if they enter into strategic alliance with their Taiwanese partners, the success rate could be 78 percent. In other words, we become a place where our businesspeople understand the mainland the best. So, through the conclusion of ECFA and other agreements in the future, we can play an even more important role in the process: First of all, the regional hub for trade and investment. Now many foreign investors increase their interest in investing in Taiwan because

they could use Taiwan as a factory and then export to the mainland, and also as their regional headquarters. So improved relations with the mainland increase our international participation, not just in the World Health Assembly, but also, the GPA, the Government Procurement Agreement, from which we've been excluded for six years and we eventually joined last year. And we also maintain very stable relations with 23 allies of Taiwan. In the previous administration, they lost nine allies, gained three, the net loss was six, but so far we haven't lost any. We made it very clear to our allies that we'll continue the diplomatic ties, we'll continue the support, the cooperation in many fields, but if they want to maintain unofficial business ties with the mainland, we have no objections. So our idea is that, as I have said, you could deal with both, as long as you maintain diplomatic relations with us, and this policy also works.

[01:10:53]

AP: Thank you very much