

## The Political Mandate That Never Was, Taiwan

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.  
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It is a well known fact in Taiwan if not in the world, that the so-called "1992 Consensus" the same one that Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou likes to tout as reality was a total fabrication by Ma's good friend Su Chi the former National Security Council secretary-general. Well, it seems matters have not ended there. Not satisfied with one fabrication, it now appears that Su Chi is trying to invent a new term for Ma, the Mandate that Never Was, euphemistically called Ma's "Diminished Political Mandate."

According to a recent article by the China News Agency (CNA), Su Chi was speaking at the University of Maryland to commemorate the passing of a former Maryland professor Chiu Hungdah, a well-known professor of international law. In his speech Su announced that because of domestic differences in Taiwan, the Taiwan presidential candidate who will be elected in January 2012 will face more hurdles in negotiations because of the "diminished political mandate" that now exists. While one may be tempted to ask, what has recently happened to diminish Ma's previous political mandate, the reality is that the voters had never given Ma the political mandate vis-à-vis cross-strait relations that he claimed or pretended to have. Such talk is another fabrication that Ma has used in discourse outside Taiwan and in particular with the powers that be in China and the United States of America (USA).

For three years Ma has explained and/or justified his wide open rush to China as stemming from the political mandate of his 58 per cent win in the 2008 presidential elections. The unfortunate reality of that election is that there was no political mandate. The only mandate that Ma had was economic; voters expected him to deliver on his ill-famed 6-3-3 economic promise. It has been a delivery in which Ma has failed miserably as the economic fortunes of Taiwan (contrary to the predictions of Ma's pre-election economic advisors) tanked shortly after Ma entered office. No, if Ma had any kind of mandate, it was an economic one.

The mandate mix-up is in itself not even a mix-up, but rather an example of the two faces of Ma. On the one side there is the image that Ma had presented to the Taiwanese voters, that he is the one who would raise economic standards to a new all time high. His choice of Vincent Siew as Vice President was to bear evidence to this. Further because of its past one party state manipulative control, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) was allegedly the party with the golden economic touch. That face soon got covered with egg as the many efforts to reach 6-3-3 failed.

The other face of Ma is the one he presented to the world and in particular the leaders of China and the USA. Ma proclaimed to them that he would be the perfect middle man in the on-going

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disputes that fostered cross-strait tensions. Ma is the one that would bring peace; after all he had his "imagined" political mandate from the people. His policies would defuse tensions. Here too he failed in several ways. One because his "imagined" mandate was not based on reality, and two, because both China and the USA viewed him more as their errand boy who could serve their own separate ends. Ma lost in his imagined image of himself as the great peacemaker could not even see how he was being played. This is the reality behind Su's remarks that whoever wins in January 2012 will face many hurdles in the China talks. Su's words were a foretelling that the KMT themselves were becoming aware of failings of Ma's incompetence and his pseudo image. They also realized that the public was not buying his words. Ma could lose this election.

So where does this leave Taiwan voters? First, they do have to face the question of whether they want another four stagnant economic years under Ma. Despite having the perfect political set-up of complete control over the Legislative Yuan as well as the presidency, when he took office, Ma's policies have not worked as he promised. The open invitation for Chinese tourists, an invitation that even if realized in its full numbers would not have that significant an impact, did not even live up to the anticipated numbers. Second, the much-touted Economic Framework Agreement (ECFA) that Ma forced through without proper legislative discussion, participation and review is turning out to be a questionable shell game where it seems a few rich may profit, but the average Taiwanese will not. The average Taiwanese will not only not profit, but they will be in danger of losing big time. This is not just economically by being too dependent on China but even in questions of sovereignty. Because of this, in the area of cross-strait relations, Su was, at least, honest. Whoever is elected (blue or green) will have a hard time. The imaginary illusions and expectations that Ma and the KMT had created outside Taiwan will fall on the January winner.

Fortunately for the voters, however, the opposition has put forth a candidate who is both more knowledgeable in economic matters and is one who will not try to present one face to Taiwan and another face to the world. This is a healthy situation and a plus for democracy. If one candidate digs a deep hole for the nation, the people do not have to jump into it at the following election.

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