

Taiwan pays price of Ma's actions

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On the very same day that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) expressed her gratitude to her three direct predecessors, Lee Teng-hui (李登輝), Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), for their contributions to Taiwan — a noble sentiment — Ma turned around just a few hours later and slapped her in the face.

Nobody, he said, was talking about how many days Taiwan would be able to keep the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at bay should China decide to invade when he was in power two years ago. He also bragged about how his two terms in office marked the most peaceful period in cross-strait relations in the past 60 years, when at last there was no threat of an impending attack.

His comments were a little disingenuous, to say the least.

Not two years after he left office, it seems to have escaped Ma how his time in power ended in ignominy and collapse for the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). The year 2014 saw a substantial redrawing of Taiwan's political map, and two years later the KMT lost, for the first time, both the presidency and control of the legislature.

This year, KMT Chairman Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) has struggled to revive party morale because of the parlous state Ma left the KMT in.

As always, however, Ma thinks he put in a solid performance in office, and fears only that the pan-blue camp will forget who he is.

Ma's comment — that nobody was asking how long Taiwan could withstand a PLA offensive should Beijing decide to invade — is more reason to be ashamed than it is to be regarded as some kind of badge of honor.

It was not that the PLA was forced to think twice about invading during Ma's eight years due to the strength of the Republic of China (ROC) armed forces, it was because of Ma's policies of

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diplomatic and military truce, of surrendering to Beijing's insistence on the "1992 consensus," and of his opening the door to China's united front, Chinese spouses, Chinese students and Chinese investment.

When the president allows the enemy into the country, into its households and schools and into our hearts and minds, why would the PLA lift a finger?

Beijing could essentially continue along this path of eventual unification and annex Taiwan without firing a single bullet, without sacrificing a single soldier.

This is why there was no talk about how many days Taiwan could withstand an invasion. It would not take any time at all. Ma was essentially holding the door open for it.

For the past few years, Tsai's insistence on maintaining the "status quo" has brought the whole eventual unification roadshow to a screaming halt. Of course, the Taiwanese will be very keen on following how Taiwan can become a normalized country, but the fact is that it is out of their hands.

Ma has said that even the US is concerned about the deterioration in cross-strait relations, which are not progressing in the direction the US had anticipated.

Who exactly is this man trying to kid? When in office, Ma distanced himself from the US and showed himself to be pro-China. Now suddenly he has changed his tune and is spouting rubbish about it.

The fact is that, some days ago, American Institute in Taiwan Chairman James Moriarty said that the US thanked Tsai for her efforts in maintaining stable contact with China.

Ma, on the other hand, had kept the US at arms length while communicating with China on the quiet, culminating in his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) in Singapore, only

communicating these plans to the US five days before the meeting. The US was not kept up to speed on Ma's plans.

After the KMT was consigned to the opposition, Beijing made known its displeasure at what a mess Ma had made of pursuing its anti-independence, pro-unification agenda, and has taken the surprising — and rather odious — turn of employing a three-pronged approach combining the Chinese Unity Promotion Party, criminal gangs and its national five-star red flag.

With its redirection of efforts to its “three middles and the youth” (三 middle and the youth, referring to residents of central and southern Taiwan, middle and low-income families, small and medium-sized enterprises and young people) and “one generation and one stratum” (一 generation and one stratum, the younger generation and the grassroots stratum) policies, China has clearly given up on relying on intermediaries and has taken the bull by the horns, preferring a more direct approach.

One can imagine that, when the Chinese Communist Party's 19th National Congress is over, Xi is going to come up with a new approach to Beijing's Taiwan policy, and this will be the end of the tactic of using an intermediary that it has employed since 2005.

Naturally, this is not exactly good news for us, as it will entail a refinement of the carrot-and-stick approach that Beijing has been using in its efforts to annex Taiwan.

The bell has now tolled for those who benefited from the “peace dividend” of Ma's eight years in office, while other Taiwanese are going to be rudely awakened from the dream of “the most peaceful and prosperous period of the past 60 years.”

The ever-present question of how many days Taiwan can resist a PLA invasion, and of who will come to our aid, is an underhanded trick to intimidate Taiwan against announcing itself as a nation in its own right.

The result of this psychological warfare unleashed upon us is uncertainty over whether the ROC military is there to serve the country or whether it belongs to the KMT.

Transitional justice cannot exclude the military, and a crucial element of this will be to establish once and for all that the armed forces serve the state, not the party, that every level of the military hierarchy — the generals, the officers, the soldiers — are absolutely clear that their loyalty lies with the nation, and not with any individual political party.

Military discipline, military morale, military strength all may wax and wane, but the military must at all times be prepared for war. In this, it is far more efficacious to replace those at the top than the soldiery.

Only then can the military divest itself of the ridiculous proposition that safeguarding national sovereignty ought to be subjugated to adherence to the ideology of a political party, and only then can it answer the question of why it is fighting, and for whom it is fighting.

This is especially the case with the weakening of the military under Ma's watch, which has seen a reduction in generals and officers to the point that its very ability to function effectively has been depleted, and the introduction of the volunteer recruitment system has made it difficult to find sufficient numbers of recruits.

Ma's neglect of the ROC armed forces was not so much — as far as potential invaders are concerned — the extension of an olive branch as it was the hoisting of a white flag of surrender.

It is written in the posthumous teachings of ROC founder Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙) that a nation is built upon its ability to use military force.

Taiwan needs, more than ever, military strength to safeguard its government, its territory, its populace and its sovereignty against potential invasion.

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