

Taiwan is not only passive on cross-strait matters, it is at an impasse. Academics from Chinese think tanks made loud calls at a recent seminar in Taiwan for the two sides to begin political talks, while Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) proposed launching talks on a peace accord when meeting former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman Lien Chan (连战) at the APEC summit in Singapore.

Although neither a memorandum of understanding nor an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) has been signed, it is undeniable that China has an economic unification strategy.

Not satisfied with its progress toward economic unification, China hopes to move on to political talks. Is President Ma Ying-jeou (马英九) ready? During his election campaign, Ma mentioned a peace framework. The government recognizes the “one China” principle and is willing to engage in cross-strait political negotiations. Members of the Democratic Progressive Party have said that Ma wants to sign a peace agreement before the end of his term in 2012 in hopes that he and Hu would win the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Ma administration’s submissive attitude toward China has caused public discontent. Lien participated in this year’s APEC summit as a special envoy of a member state, and his meeting with Hu was deliberately arranged to take place after a meeting between Hu and Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang (董建华). The Lien-Hu meeting was on a party-to-party basis rather than on an equal footing between APEC members.

China is trying to give the impression that Taiwan is on the same level as Hong Kong and Macau. The Ma administration’s failure to object to this is unacceptable.

China and the Ma administration have misjudged Taiwanese public opinion and overestimated public support for Ma and the KMT. Ma’s approval ratings have hovered between 20 percent and 40 percent since the Morakot disaster. The Presidential Office has incited a strong backlash by its handling of US beef imports while trying to force through an ECFA with China. The KMT has been rattled by vote-buying allegations after its Central Standing Committee poll, the premier is fending off allegations that he has links to gangsters, several KMT legislators have lost their seats for vote buying and a top party hack has been caught having an extramarital affair. These events are draining the government and the legislature of their strength. The KMT will face massive opposition in the next month’s elections as the public reacts to the government’s mistakes. With the DPP now recovering from the scandals surrounding former president Chen Shui-bian (陈水扁), the KMT cannot be sure of winning the next legislative or presidential elections.

The KMT does not wield the total power it claims and it cannot do as it pleases on every political issue. Given the Taiwanese public’s skepticism toward China, if Beijing thinks the Ma administration is weak and wants to force early cross-strait talks on political issues, it will not be

Misjudging public opinion

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able to help the KMT consolidate its leadership or bring about unification. Instead, they will force the Ma government onto the road of political destruction.

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