

## Ma and Beijing's agenda

Written by Jei-Hsuan Huang  
Tuesday, 07 July 2009 09:05

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A Beijing-initiated rumor made its rounds last year regarding an aborted military plan to invade Taiwan in case the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) presidential candidate prevailed.

The fact that the innuendo was made public after — not before — the election, showed Beijing's lack of confidence in its effect on Taiwanese voters.

Undoubtedly playing a role was the memory of the two US carriers streaming toward Taiwan in response to Beijing's missile threat during Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996 and its aftermath — with Taiwanese voters coming out in droves to sample the first taste of their nascent sovereignty.

Given then Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou's strong showing in the public opinion surveys leading up to the official polls, Beijing could afford to be cautious last year.

The KMT leadership, however, harbors no such restraints — not while Ma is counting on the intimidation card to deliver at least a second four-year term.

Taiwanese elected Ma seemingly on account of his sales pitch on an economic pie in the sky and their belief that he can help improve cross-strait relations. In essence, Ma and the KMT successfully exploited the basic instincts of greed and fear in Taiwan.

Ma turned out to have no other plan for Taiwan than dependence on China.

Not unlike a drug dealer, Ma and the KMT are reaping huge benefits politically and financially by feeding this addiction. And, just like in the case of a drug addict, the health of Taiwan's economy plummeted.

That leaves fear as the only remaining venue for Ma to horse around in and explains why Ma is so intent on securing Beijing's nod as well as making an example of former president Chen Shui-bian and his family. To be specific, Ma wants to put Taiwanese in the grip of fear to the extent that they would succumb to the myth that Taiwan will have no tranquility without the KMT at the helm and that no one could garner enough impetus to seriously challenge Ma in the next presidential election. For this, signs indicate that Ma has a multifaceted plan.

Domestically, Ma has commanded the KMT-dominated legislature to draft laws allowing his government to define civil liberties as it sees fit. With the KMT's control over the judiciary, Ma aims to update the practice of old-fashioned martial laws. He wants to have the luxury of running a pseudo police state, while having no misgivings about signing an international covenant to uphold human rights at the same time. He is hoping that this would allow him to fend off international pressure while instilling dread in the opposition.

Still, he counts on Beijing to deliver the bulk of coercion.

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But, like a double-edged sword, fear can cut both ways.

Ma is handing China enough rope, including vital economic controls, to ascertain that Beijing can rein in Taiwan's voters if they ever ponder abandoning China's "favorite son." But other dynamics could spoil this "cozy" arrangement.

A de facto unification to ensure his and the KMT's perpetual rule and continuing plundering of Taiwan would suit Ma fine.

Beijing, however, ultimately wants Taiwan's annexation — something Ma is unable to deliver, neither in his capacity as the president of the Republic of China (ROC) nor as KMT chairman. Part of the difficulty resides in the fact that neither of the two entities holds Taiwan's sovereignty.

Beijing is under no illusion that taking legal possession of Taiwan would necessitate a war, of which the risks and consequences are issues Beijing prefers to eschew at the moment.

What Ma is doing rushes Beijing's timeframe considering that "the window of opportunity" might be fleeting at best, given Ma's gross distortion of the duty of his office.

If, in the end, Beijing leaders' angst over the fluidity of Taiwan's voter sentiment prompted them to miscalculate and launch a military invasion of Taiwan before the end of Ma's term, whatever Beijing threw at the Taiwanese at the beginning would have boomeranged.

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