

Chameleon Ma thinks he can fool Taiwanese

Written by Chen Shan-jung 陳善君

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Pity President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九). He has been a busy little beaver over the past few days, running around and shamelessly changing guises to suit his ends.

He embarked upon this chameleon spree in his bid to strike down legislative speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平). He already sees himself as emperor, with the legislature at his beck and call. Having laid his hands on a Special Investigation Division (SID) surveillance report on alleged illegal lobbying involving Wang and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus whip Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘), he has decided to go for the jugular.

From emperor he morphed into president, approving Wang's vacation in Malaysia, where Wang was to host his daughter's wedding. He then sat back and waited, biding his time until Wang was well out of the country before he pounced, blindsiding him with an SID press conference. Trap sprung, he feigned shock and regret at Wang's alleged abuse of power, but his basic intention of ridding himself of Wang was quite clear.

Taiwanese are not "bumbling" fools, and it was instantly apparent that this was all one big set-up. The three collateral victims of Ma's attempt to kill several birds with one stone — former justice minister Tseng Yung-fu (曾榮光), Taiwan High Prosecutors' Office Head Prosecutor Chen Shou-huang (陳有煌) and Lin Shioh-tao (林錫耀), the prosecutor in charge of Ker's original breach of trust case — immediately issued clarifications, refuting the SID's frame-up. The opposition also cried foul, berating the illegal use of surveillance and the re-emergence of the imperial-era secret police.

Seeing his abortive attempt flounder, the chameleon president shifted into Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman mode, ordering Wang — whose vacation he had some time ago approved as president — to return without delay. This rather harsh, even sacrilegious, treatment was rightly met with disdain among the public.

His sights now locked on his adversary, Ma moved to the next stage, changing clothes once more to call a press conference as president. Imagining himself as a supreme court judge, he proceeded to give an Oscar-winning performance, holding aloft the incriminating evidence handed him by the Supreme Prosecutors' Office, acting as judge, jury and executioner for a man who has yet to appear in court to answer the charges.

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If this is not a performance, then what is? If these are not the actions of a dictator, what actions are?

Ma is a democratically elected president, but he also doubles as the chairman of the ruling party, keeping an iron grip on his underlings. He is simultaneously playing Xiandi (獻帝), hapless last emperor of the Han, and the ruthlessly ambitious Cao Cao (曹操), Xiandi's puppet master. He is using SID's illegal surveillance data to destroy a powerful feudal lord whom he does not trust.

Ma might be able to fool one person, or perhaps several, but he certainly cannot fool everyone.

If he does not desist from the behavior of allowing the abuse of surveillance to violate human rights, of attacking his political rivals and fawning to Beijing, he is not qualified to speak of honor. It was Ma, after all, who first crossed the red line.

In the 1920s the KMT forces in China embarked upon the Northern Expedition to end the rule of local warlords. One warlord, Wu Peifu (吳佩孚), apparently berated another, Duan Qirui (段祺瑞), and his words could well be aimed at Ma.

“When a country is so vast, can one man have it all? With such plenitude in frontier officials, can one party own them all? When the people are so many, can one man whip them all?” Wu asked.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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