

Tsai's interpretation of 'status quo'

Written by Shih Chih-yu 謝志偉

Wednesday, 29 April 2015 07:46

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has proposed maintaining the "status quo" as the DPP's policy guideline for handling its relations with China. In doing so, she has set a pivotal focus for next year's presidential and legislative elections. To put it in a nutshell, she is questioning who is really undermining the "status quo" in cross-strait relations.

Up until now, commentators outside the DPP have been worried about its pro-independence platform and Tsai's firm support for Taiwan's independence, believing that she would damage the cross-strait "status quo" if she became president.

Washington appears to be particularly concerned about this. Following DPP Secretary-General Joseph Wu's (吳敦義) recent visit to the US for consultations, the DPP and Washington emerged spouting similar rhetoric about maintaining the "status quo."

If the DPP takes maintaining the cross-strait "status quo" as a policy guideline, from a defensive point of view, it can dispel the outside world's worries that the party would damage the "status quo," while, from a more offensive standpoint, it can induce voters to think about who is really responsible for undermining the "status quo" in cross-strait affairs.

This policy pivot is an extension of the DPP's orientation in past election campaigns, arguing that it is the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) that keeps disrupting the "status quo" by constantly strengthening cross-strait ties.

On the contrary, the DPP's standpoint is that by upholding Taiwan's independence, it is actually maintaining the "status quo," making it the more responsible party in this respect.

That so, the series of forums held between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and their leaders can fit neatly into the DPP's future narrative as irrefutable evidence that the KMT has been upsetting the "status quo" all along. Blaming the KMT for changing the "status quo" is likely to send voters a signal that Taiwan's independence is the real "status quo."

Tsai's interpretation of 'status quo'

Written by Shih Chih-yu 謝志宇

Wednesday, 29 April 2015 07:46

Regarding Washington, the DPP's promise to maintain the "status quo" is a blank sheet of paper, on which it can write freely. The US government can even assure China that the "status quo" includes the so-called "1992 consensus," even though Tsai has said no such thing.

The "1992 consensus," a term former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) admitted that he made up in 2000, refers to a tacit understanding between the KMT and Chinese government that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge there is "one China," with both sides having their own interpretation of what "China" means.

If we compare Tsai's promise to maintain the "status quo" with Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je's (柯文哲) statement that "there is no problem with one China," the two leaders' political purposes are quite different. Ko intends to promote his governance of the city, so he has more flexibility in regards to what specific wording he wants to use. Any statement he makes is acceptable as long as it does not cross either side's line.

Furthermore, the two sides — Taipei and Beijing — have an unspoken agreement not to intentionally adopt policies that challenge or violate the terms on which they have established a consensus.

However, for Tsai the goal is to win the presidential and legislative elections, so she needs to take a rather more evasive approach.

If Tsai is elected president, she would most likely free herself from the constraints of the "status quo" step by step. First, as she already hinted long ago, Taiwan's independence would be a "natural element" of the DPP's governance.

Second, she would remain alert regarding the KMT. By keeping cross-strait relations as they are, or even backtracking on steps that have already been taken, she could then expose the collusion between the KMT and CCP to dismantle the "status quo." Under such circumstances, would the US see her as having gone back on her word and intervene in some way? Probably not, because the party truly and directly responsible for backtracking on cross-strait relations would certainly be China.

Tsai's interpretation of 'status quo'

Written by Shih Chih-yu 謝志宇

Wednesday, 29 April 2015 07:46

Tsai's assurances to Beijing, via Washington, that she would maintain the "status quo" actually helps her to reach a tacit understanding with the US. In her presidential campaign, this would enable her to freely promote her concept that Taiwan's independence is the real "status quo."

It would allow her to give assurances to the pro-independence camp and mobilize those in the younger generation who dislike China and oppose unification, boosting their morale in the face of a common enemy.

That is because they would come to see more clearly how the KMT has been colluding with China, giving them firm confidence in the real "status quo" and consolidating a "Taiwan consensus" among them.

Shih Chih-yu is a political science professor at National Taiwan University.

Translated by Eddy Chang

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2015/04/29](#)