

Dispelling the ‘1992 consensus’ lie

Written by Jerome Keating
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The so-called “1992 consensus” never happened. It is a joke, a sham, a fabrication, or as some more bluntly might put it: a “fabricated lie.”

It is time to bury the term and say goodbye to all that gibberish. Then, once that is done, the deeper questions need to be asked, such as why did former Mainland Affairs Commission head Su Chi (蘇起) invent this term in 2000, why do some people insist on trying to perpetuate “this lie” and what next?

First, let us examine what really did happen in 1992 in Taiwan.

In many ways, 1992 stands as a clear dividing line in the nation’s history. It marks the demonstrated ballot-box beginning of Taiwan’s democracy, for in that year, the people elected their legislators for the first time.

Up until then, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislators who had been elected in China in 1947 had kept their iron rice bowl one-party state positions. They never had to face a single election from then on, but now they had to give up their positions. That is the first thing that should come to mind in Taiwan when the year 1992 is mentioned.

Second, in the previous year, 1991, the KMT one-party state government officially put to rest a different longtime albatross, the “Mobilization Period for the Suppression of the Communist Rebellion.”

Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) had instigated that period 44 years earlier, also in China, in 1947.

One could say that by this action, the KMT, in exile, was officially ending the Chinese Civil War from its side. Because of this declaration, future leaders of the Republic of China (ROC) could subsequently declare that they would not use force against China.

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However, there is an ironic twist here. The KMT pledged not to use force, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the other party in that civil war, never reciprocated with a similar pledge. The CCP response has been quite the opposite from the KMT's. The CCP has always and unilaterally maintained its option to use force on the KMT and on Taiwan. Somehow this does not spell consensus, no matter whatever else one wants to talk about.

What also happened that year? The KMT's dreaded Garrison Command was disbanded in 1992, and 1992 is the year that the KMT's one-party state blacklist of political dissidents was reduced from 282 to only five.

Finally, in 1992, China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) met with the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), a private organization financially supported by the KMT government. What did these two organizations discuss? They handled issues related to document verification and indirect mail service; that is all.

Not a big deal, but definite discussion of documents and mail service.

With that background, it is easy to see why many consider all the hoopla about the so-called "1992 consensus" and certain overt efforts to use it to tie Taiwan into a "one China" principle to be an illustration of the big lie theory.

That theory, attributed to Hitler and promoted by his chief propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, is this: If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people eventually come to believe it.

Here, this lie has worked so well that even the CCP, which never admitted anything other than mail delivery from the past, has realized that it can be used to its advantage.

For locked into the current skewed invocation of the "1992 consensus" is the question of how the Chinese Civil War ended and the Rashomon effect that pervades all future explanations.

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In the fantasies of some people, the invocation of the “1992 consensus” suggests and even justifies that the Chinese Civil War never ended. Or it proposes that it ended in a kind of draw with each side having its own controlled area and interpretation of who won.

This answers the question as to why Su felt it necessary to invent the term eight years after 1992.

The year 2000 was the year that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won Taiwan's presidency for the first time.

Since the DPP was a political party in opposition to the KMT, like any freely elected party, it would have its own thoughts on the nation's future. Many commentators speculate that Su invented the term to lock Taiwan's future presidents and/or political parties into the nebulous and often misinterpreted “one China” principle, a different inglorious remnant of that civil war.

The “1992 consensus” as the KMT attempts to voice it today never existed. All that existed was talk between two one-party state advocates — the KMT and CCP — about how to exchange mail and find mutual agreement on certain credentials. As the two organizations talked, the KMT sensed it was about to embark on a new perilous period where it could no longer rely on one-party state control over Taiwan.

Admitting to the reality of this “consensus fabrication” does not mean that talks cannot continue or that there cannot be a possible future consensus between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

It does, however, indicate that from this point on, all sides must face the truth that a democracy exists in Taiwan and so at least a minimum of three parties have to participate in any push toward consensus — the CCP, the DPP and the KMT.

This is the situation that the KMT finds itself in. Instead of trying to justify its actions by a bogus past consensus, it is time for the KMT and even the CCP to face the reality that any consensus must include Taiwan's democracy.

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In pursuing this consensus, all must also eventually deal with the thorny issue of interpreting what the “one China” principle means to each and how it fits in.

So if you hear someone bandying about the term “1992 consensus,” you can run through the following scenarios:

First, they might be uninformed or ignorant of 1992.

Second, they might have heard the “big lie” and easily became part of it.

Third, they might be part of the propaganda machine that wants to spread the big lie.

And fourth, they might just be unable to face the need for negotiations over any consensus.

Whatever the case, do not encourage their ineptitude.

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