

Ma sows the seeds of chaos

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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While many have condemned the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — whose presidential candidate, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), is considered a shoo-in in the presidential election in January — for a lack of action against what it calls President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) undemocratic decision to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平), Tsai is certainly right that Ma has foisted a political framework upon democratic Taiwan and its people.

The statement Ma gave before the doors closed on the meeting on Saturday was written beforehand and the Central News Agency (CNA) posted it online right after Ma finished his brief talk. However, it was curious that the words “one China principle,” uttered by Ma, were not included in CNA's copy.

Speculations abounded, including that CNA calculatingly removed it, but the most likely version of events, based on revelations later made by the president of a think tank that helped to arrange the meeting, was that Ma's addition was an impromptu one.

It was revealed that the two sides had agreed beforehand that in the televised portion of the meeting neither of the leaders would utter “sensitive phrases.”

For Xi that would be “the two sides belong to the same China,” “one China,” or “against Taiwanese independence;” for Ma it would be the “respective interpretations” of the so-called “1992 consensus.”

Xi talked about the two sides of the Taiwan Strait being the same Chinese ethnic nation (zhonghua minzu), but “one China” was not brought up.

Ma, probably to the surprise of his aides, decided to champion the “one China principle” in Xi's stead, which he and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) have — until Saturday's meeting, that is — touted as a clever gambit for its “ambiguity” by attaching “one China, with different interpretations.”

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The Ma-Xi meeting allowed Ma to send out a misguided message to the world that Taiwan agrees that cross-strait ties are the “Chinese people’s own business” and the Taiwan-China relationship is a “domestic one,” as announced later by China’s Taiwan Affairs Office Minister Zhang Zhijun (張志軍).

There is little doubt that Xi, by agreeing to meet with Ma in the final months of his presidency, was exploiting Ma’s desperation to establish a “legacy” and targeting Tsai.

Xi has said that “the [Taiwan] problem cannot be passed from generation to generation,” indicating he has strong intentions to break the “status quo” during his 10-year term. With the KMT likely to be absent from the corridors of power for the next four or even eight years, the “bridge” set by the Ma-Xi meeting is likely to be a roadblock to Tsai’s cross-strait policy.

Thanks to Ma, there can be no ambiguity about the “1992 consensus” anymore, despite its low support rating with the public. It is no longer a KMT-Chinese Communist Party agreement; Ma has chained the KMT’s spiraling fate to Taiwan’s future.

Cross-strait exchanges have become a zero-sum game in which the next president would have to either walk the “bridge” or risk being accused of breaking the “status quo.”

The new development also sows the seeds of strong polarization in Taiwan.

The KMT is now less a defender of the Republic of China than a proponent of the “one China principle.” By equating the Republic of China with “China,” which the rest of the world recognizes as the People’s Republic of China, Ma and the KMT have given up the “Republic of China/Taiwan” rhetoric and forced a political dichotomy on the nation that has until now been deliberately kept obscure.

It is understandable that Xi is indifferent about, or might even benefit from, the possible chaos this would cause in Taiwan, but Ma?

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