

By President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) calculations, as president he can do anything he wants. He can take matters into his own hands, fly off to Singapore, and hold the highest-level cross-strait meeting in 66 years, shocking the international community, while his supporters push for him to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Finally, he has managed to book his place in posterity.

However, there is a difference between fact and fiction. The public is not so easily duped and international media are not so easily manipulated. The most common commentary after the meeting between Ma and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) said that a certain "Mr Ma" revealed himself all too clearly. Domestically, he has been called A-Q — a slang expression describing how one avoids reality by inventing excuses to believe one has scored a victory — horse thief, traitor, or betrayer of Taiwan; while international media have characterized him as a "bumbler," and to this epithet have now been added loser, yesterday man, buffoon, cipher and so on.

Embarrassing oneself is one thing, embarrassing the whole nation is quite another.

How could this happen? Simply, the public believes that the president went back on his word and breached their trust. For the Ma-Xi meeting, Mr Ma dropped all three conditions which he himself had set for any meeting with China's leader: national necessity, public support and legislative oversight. In fact, the legislative speaker only found out about the meeting from a telephone call from a journalist in the middle of the night.

International opinion felt Taiwan had fallen into the "one China" framework trap, and public opinion polls show that most people do not believe that Ma defended national sovereignty and dignity and thus could not represent Taiwanese. The Ma-Xi meeting, which was surrounded by a lack of transparency and clearly damaged Taiwan, was of course lambasted by the public.

The total lack of honesty in the process did not only remove any shred of legitimacy from the meeting, it also stripped Ma of any remaining credibility. He left early in the morning for a long journey to meet Xi, and then he did not speak up for Taiwan and made a spectacle of himself, becoming an international laughing stock. He wore a suit that did not fit the situation, could not hold his wine and made drunken statements, and generally acted like a clown. He did not dare to raise the most serious issue — "one China, different interpretations" and the Republic of China — and also kept silent about the universal values of democracy, human rights and

freedom of expression that Taiwan enjoys.

As to his opponent's "one China" principle, he backpedaled of his own accord and just accepted it. Ma was supposed to represent the people of Taiwan or the Republic of China as their head of state, but in Singapore he just turned into China's little brother, docile and quiet for fear of upsetting big brother.

Worse, he and China were singing from the same hymn sheet. He stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the enemy, emanating hostility to people in Taiwan holding a differing opinion, confusing enemies with friends and dividing the nation.

In Ma's words, the Chinese missiles and military exercises aimed at Taiwan metamorphosed into "just a pretext for the opposition to give unnecessary criticism." He and China colluded in using the so-called "1992 consensus" — which late Straits Exchange Foundation chairman Koo Chen-fu (辜振甫) rejected — to rope and hobble Taiwan, attempting to deny the right of Taiwanese to self-determination.

Taking China's point of view, he wants his successor to follow the pro-China route that the nation has spurned in an attempt to lock Taiwan in the "one China" cage that Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have built together. The head of state who has a moral duty to take care of the nation's interests went so far in pursuit of personal vanity that he did not hesitate for an instant to act as Beijing's accomplice in dividing Taiwan.

With a president like this, the nation is playing straight into China's hands, and after the meeting, the view that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait both belong to "one China" has become the new KMT-CCP consensus. China made things worse by announcing that cross-strait relations are an internal Chinese issue so that Beijing can bully Taipei behind closed doors as much as it likes.

In front of the international community the two men shook hands and ate and drank together, and although China did not make a single concrete commitment, the whole world has seen the "reconciliation."

## **Making sure Ma is yesterday's man**

Written by Liberty Times Editorial  
Friday, 20 November 2015 06:51

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For Taiwan, trapped in the false impression of peace created by Ma and Xi, it might become difficult to escape Chinese control and get other countries to sell arms to Taiwan.

Due to Ma's collaboration with China, Taiwan now finds itself in an even more dangerous position.

The meeting also marked the beginning of Chinese intervention in January's presidential election. Not once over the past 20 years has China stayed away from a presidential election. As the meeting wound up, the KMT's and the CCP's propaganda machinery clicked into gear as the parties tried everything in their power to set the tone for Jan. 16 and put pressure on the Democratic Progressive Party. The Chinese intervention will only become more obvious as campaigning heats up.

Ma's dire performance confirms all the issues that Taiwanese worry about. With a president who ignores public complaint and lacks all credibility, but is hell-bent on pursuing his personal place in history, no one knows what he might come up with during his few remaining months in office. The meeting was a big shock to Taiwanese and many are saying: With a head of state like Ma, who needs enemies?

The only proper response is a strong reaction in the election to crack down on Ma and his accomplices and block their efforts to join hands with China and continue to harm Taiwan.

Translated by Clare Lear

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2015/11/20](#)