

Are there really three tickets in the presidential election race? This is a question that demands attention.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is in trouble.

First, there were the internal power struggles and jockeying for position ahead of its presidential primary; the ouster of its former presidential candidate, Deputy Legislative Speaker Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱); and its bungling of the legislator-at-large list, criticized as a “historic worst” within the party.

Then there is the controversy over military housing transactions, which has thrown KMT presidential candidate Eric Chu’s (吳敦義) running mate, Jennifer Wang (王心恬), into the media spotlight. These incidents demonstrate that the party is running a campaign machine that is far from being well-oiled.

It was only last week, when Chu held a meeting with Hung and employed her as his top election adviser, and named former Taichung mayor Jason Hu (胡志強) his campaign manager, that the party belatedly placed itself on a war footing.

However, with the apparent public consensus that the KMT is set to lose the election, each member of Chu’s team has their own ax to grind.

Hung’s policy of “rapid unification” and Wang’s alleged speculation in military housing have left the impression the KMT is going through a meltdown.

Would the party under Chu and President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), with the help of Hu and Wang, be able to outperform Hung? The public will need to wait to find the answer.

Beijing, Ma attempt to trap Taiwan

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With the KMT looking increasingly weak and marginalized, the Chinese Communist Party is using every tactic at its disposal to manipulate the electorate, making it the third contender in the race.

The meeting between Ma and Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) in Singapore was clearly the result of Beijing realizing that Taiwan is about to undergo a change of government. Xi wanted to make use of Ma's remaining political capital to bind Taiwan more tightly into the "one China" framework and confine its next president within the "status quo" defined by Beijing.

The next step in Xi's plan is using Chinese investment in Taiwanese technology and media industries, for which Ma has already started laying the groundwork.

What sort of attacks would be staged by Ma and Xi until May 20, when presidency would be formally handed over to the next incumbent? Potential risks should not be overlooked.

It seems that Ma, a president who has inflicted considerable damage during his seven years in office, intends to cling on to power until the very last minute and make the most of his final days in office. Taiwanese must place their trust in democracy, but they must also be on guard against the president's intentions.

This third force can be given the title "Team Chinese Beijing." It has waded into Taiwan's presidential election: The Ma-Xi meeting was simply the team's opening act.

China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits Chairman Chen Deming (陈德明), along with a delegation, was in Taiwan for an eight-day visit. The delegation's statements appeared to follow a carefully prepared script. It was an attempt to create a new political situation different from a simple change of government: to place a political strait-jacket around Taiwan and draw the country into China's fold through economic means.

The goal is to weaken Taiwanese democracy and pull its economy into a Chinese vortex, so that democracy is eventually hollowed out and becomes nothing more than an ornamental shell. In such a situation, there would be nothing to prevent Taiwan from becoming de facto

Chinese territory, similar to the experience with Hong Kong.

The cross-strait political and business interests — protected by Team Chinese Beijing — would be nourished and strengthened by China following a change of government, so that they would be waiting for an opportunity to “take back Taiwan.”

Chen holds Taiwanese democracy in great contempt. During a particularly sensitive time, with a presidential campaign ongoing, he said that he believed the Taiwanese “will make the correct decision, although it sometimes takes time to arrive at the right decision.” Then, using the example of Nazi Germany during World War II, Chen went on to say that the German public voted for Adolf Hitler to become their leader, which caused unimaginable suffering throughout the world, including to Germans themselves.

Chen is attempting to create a sense of fear to threaten voters with veiled threats. The implied meaning behind his words is that, from last year’s Sunflower movement to the nine-in-one elections, Taiwanese have been making incorrect choices.

On the other hand, Chen poured praise on Taiwan’s pro-China media, saying, “Speaking the truth is an important mark of human progress,” while saluting Taiwanese media organizations which supported the cross-strait service trade agreement that triggered the Sunflower movement.

Chen launched an even more thinly veiled attack on Taiwan’s democratic process when he said: “Only when cross-strait relations are good will Taiwanese be able to live happily. I think [Democratic Progressive Party] Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) should understand this.”

This is the age-old formula that Beijing uses when launching a fresh political offensive against Taiwan: Accept the so-called “1992 consensus” and relations with China would improve and Taiwanese would live happily and prosper.

However, Ma’s “Team Chinese Taipei” has accepted the “1992 consensus” — and boasts of cross-strait relations being at a historic high — yet life in Taiwan is getting worse. The

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cross-strait political and business interests have monopolized the so-called “peace dividend,” while the economy has stagnated. The higher the educational level, the higher the unemployment rate; while wages have fallen back to where they were 15 years ago and the disparity between rich and poor has continued to increase. Furthermore, the “red supply chain” is gobbling up the “peace dividend.”

Team Chinese Beijing and Team Chinese Taipei are conducting a coordinated campaign to trap Taiwan in a pincer maneuver. It will soon become apparent whether this strategy receives support at the ballot box.

Contrary to Chen’s claims, the lesson of the past seven years is that the public made an error in judgement in the 2008 and 2012 elections by placing their trust in pro-Taiwan lies which allowed Team Chinese Taipei to neuter Taiwanese democracy, break its political system, drain its economy and force its people into unemployment.

From the Sunflower movement to the nine-in-one elections, irrespective of political leaning, ethnicity or social class, a new civic consciousness is blossoming in every corner of the nation.

Ma is saying that his overall direction has not been a failure and Chu said that even if the KMT loses the election, Taiwan’s cross-strait policy would not be changed. This shows just how marginalized the party has become — and has led to Team Chinese Beijing’s attempts to provide assistance behind the scenes.

It is easy to predict where this road would lead: Team Chinese Beijing’s barging into Taiwan’s election would have little effect other than to throw more oil onto an already raging fire.

Translated by Edward Jones

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