

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) national congress on Sunday adopted a new policy platform that calls for the signing of a peace pact with China. It also changed its definition of the so-called “1992 consensus,” retaining the phrase “one China” (一個中國) and leaving out “with each side having its own interpretation” (各自表述), bringing the possibility of unification with China one step closer. It was not a universally popular move and only confirmed fears that KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) was seeking to align the party with the New Party. This resolution could hasten a split in the KMT and consign it to a future as a marginalized political force.

Given the predicament President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have found themselves in on cross-strait policy with their rejection of the “1992 consensus,” the KMT believes it has found an opening to pursue a peace agreement with China. The KMT has been aggressively promoting the idea, using its acceptance of the “1992 consensus” and opposition to Taiwanese independence to assuage Beijing’s fears. Given the uncertain nature of cross-strait peace, the KMT is hedging its bets, putting itself forward as the party Beijing should be working with, while playing up its differences with the DPP.

However, the KMT’s political calculation only shows that it has not changed. It remains unapologetically pro-China — a stance that has already been resoundingly rejected by the electorate. The KMT is sailing against the wind. Its position is politically untenable at home and it has fully ceded the mainstream to the DPP, just as it has turned its back on the majority within the party and the wider electorate, who prefer the more moderate stance of maintaining the “status quo.”

Promoting a peace agreement is not guaranteed to calm Beijing’s nerves. Does the KMT think it is enough to win Beijing’s unreserved trust, especially given the slack it cut former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) administration?

After eight years of Ma, Taiwanese have only become more suspicious of China, and have nothing but disappointment and complaints about the KMT. The KMT is risking throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

The talk of a peace agreement will also reinforce US concern that the KMT is nothing but an extension of Beijing and enhance worries that should the KMT win back power, it might agree

KMT still clinging to China

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to unification. With the US pivot toward Asia, it will not want to see a KMT aligned with Beijing.

With the peace agreement, the KMT is attempting to take the initiative, but the move is more likely to damage the party and expose its cracks. At home, it is going to lose the hearts and minds of supporters of democratic freedoms. It is betting on being able to continue its role as the de facto intermediary promoting “cross-strait peace” with China, but Beijing is unlikely to see the KMT as anything other than a pawn in its pursuit of unification: It will never view the party as an equal.

The peace agreement scheme is a declaration that the KMT is siding with China, precluding the US’ inclusion of the party in its strategic plans.

Hung is hoping the peace agreement will consolidate her control over the KMT. In reality, it may well be the very thing that brings her crashing down.

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