

## Tsai, DPP need to raise their game

Written by Jerome Keating  
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Time and tide wait for no man, and for no political party in Taiwan. The first year of President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) time in office has come and gone, and things are not bad, but they are not good either.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) also has its problems. It has just chosen former vice president Wu Den-yih (吳敦義) to be its chairman for the next four years. Given the options, Wu was no doubt the best choice. However, that does not necessarily bode well for the KMT. What does all this mean? It is time to take stock.

Begin first with the KMT and Wu's selection. Out of 144,408 KMT votes, Wu received 52.24 percent among those cast for the six candidates.

His majority is even more telling when contrasted with the second and third-most popular candidates: Neither KMT Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱, 53,063 votes) nor former Taipei mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌, 44,301 votes) were even close to Wu.

Hung carries the baggage of being strongly pro-unification; she represents the old school within the KMT, which is fading fast. She was not a good choice.

Hau, on the other hand, had been mayor of Taipei for eight years, a position that, with the exception of Tsai, has been considered the stepping-stone to the presidency.

Unfortunately, Hau's performance as mayor was not spectacular; in addition he both lacks charisma and carries additional baggage from his father's China-centric thinking. It is easy to see why he was not the party's choice for its standard-bearer.

Despite his win, Wu's selection is problematic. He seems to be the lesser of six evils rather than anything outstanding. True, he does have the advantage of Taiwanese lineage, but he also carries the taint of old-school corruption and cronyism.

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This puts all the focus back on Tsai and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). If the KMT is not doing well, why is her popularity flagging?

Tsai's falling popularity can largely be attributed to the tremendous expectations put on her after her election. That is in addition to the many problems that need to be resolved.

Unlike former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), who faced a hostile KMT-dominated legislature, Tsai was blessed with a DPP majority in the Legislative Yuan.

Therefore, the many dispossessed and needy groups that coalesced within the DPP to help her win the presidency now expect her to not only solve their problems, but to do so immediately. That is a difficult challenge.

In addition, Tsai is not a charismatic leader. However, lack of charisma does not mean that Tsai is not or cannot be a good leader. Former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) had charisma, but that was not enough to make him a good leader; his charisma began to wear thin early in his second term when his performance failed to meet the needs of the people.

On the other hand, someone like German Chancellor Angela Merkel stands out. She is not known for charisma, but represents strong, sensible and pragmatic leadership. She not only governs Germany well, but is also considered the foremost leader of the EU.

So what skill sets and abilities must Tsai foster to meet the needs of Taiwan?

Tsai is no stranger to government. With a doctorate from the London School of Economics, she has served Taiwan in positions like Mainland Affairs Council minister and legislator from the presidency of Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) onward. It was under her stewardship that the DPP staged its comeback.

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However, the presidency demands a wider range of skills. In addition to setting goals, one needs to be versed in the strategy, tactics, vision and coordinated effort that running a nation demands.

These are the practical skills and knowledge treated in works like Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* and Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Coordinating the many challenges that Tsai faces requires such practical skills. Among the challenges are a flagging economy, pension reform, transitional justice, judicial reform, a belligerent hegemonic neighbor, as well as the many specific and challenging needs of the many groups within Taiwan.

Tsai's government certainly has goals in all of these areas, but how detailed and how prioritized in strategy are they? Are there strategies for each of them and is there an overall plan? This problem is not evident to the public and this is where Tsai and the DPP need to raise their game.

To borrow a military metaphor, in strategy and implementation, Tsai must be a generalissimo leading many divisions, each with its own general and assignments. For reasons of strategy, each national goal and challenge needs its own task force, team or division, along with a responsible leader or general. Are things clearly marshalled in that way?

"Division leaders" must be able to separate and prioritize the broad long-term goals of end-game achievements and the more visible goals of short-term achievements.

One has the impression that the Tsai government is working on many projects and goals, but how well these are prioritized, coordinated and linked together is not evident or communicated via the media.

In golf, there is a saying: You drive for show, but you putt for dough. The many "generals" under Tsai must be able to do both. They can utilize the media as they work to achieve their goals in these two ways. They need to be able to proclaim and demonstrate ambitious drives

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for show, but at the same time incorporate and show attention to detail to ensure that the results will be profitable.

Some challenges and goals are long-term, like that of joining the WHO's World Health Assembly and facing threats from China. They will always be there and as Taiwan does not have control over outside factors, its case can often only be advocated.

Goals need a strategy of alliances and communication to continually chip away at end results while China's hegemony demonstrates itself to the world as it badmouths the Dalai Lama, and imprisons booksellers and those who fight for human rights.

The Tsai government has so far deftly avoided kowtowing to China and maintained Taiwan's de facto independence. That can be done.

When China reduced its tourism to Taiwan, that loss was countered with promotion and increases from other countries.

The economy presents both long and short-term challenges for Tsai's generals. Goal-setting needs to be done in each area; benchmarks and priorities in the "new southbound policy" must be established, especially as South and Southeast Asia were neglected during the eight years of Ma's presidency.

Alliances also need to be made, both with other nations and within Taiwan. The New Power Party (NPP), with its galvanizing force, is sympathetic to change and the Taiwan Solidarity Union, while it has no legislative seats, can still be courted for background support. They should not be seen as adversaries. In the strategy game, even the media, who always want a story, can be an ally.

Finally, the history of warfare has long demonstrated that staff generals can and should be replaced if they are not up to the job. After one year, Tsai has had time to evaluate her staff and make decisions.

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As the DPP looks to the future, Tsai's goals are clear, but her strategies, team building and communication need work. It is time for the DPP and Tsai to raise their game.

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