

The Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) Central Standing Committee on Wednesday passed the party's new platform draft, which readopted former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) old platform of "no unification, no independence and no use of force" (不獨、不統、不武).

KMT chairman-elect Wu Den-yih (吳敦義), who is to be sworn in on Aug. 20, stressed that the party would never change its name and added that it will adhere to the "1992 consensus" and to "one China, with each side having its own interpretation of what China means," while continuing to oppose Taiwanese independence.

Notably, the idea of trying to reach a peace agreement with China, as proposed by former KMT chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱), has been removed from this platform draft and Wu explained that the US might stop selling arms to Taiwan if a cross-strait peace agreement were to be reached.

On the other hand, China's Taiwan Affairs Office on Wednesday expressed its gratitude for the help and support Taiwan offered following the Sichuan earthquake, but the statement only mentioned the KMT, while skipping President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her government.

In addition, Chinese state-owned media have been ordered to redefine the "1992 consensus" more narrowly and to minimize the room for the "consensus" being interpreted as "one China, with each side having its own interpretation of what China means."

What Wu is attempting to do with the party is barely any different from the cross-strait policy Ma followed. However, the political situation on both sides of the Taiwan Strait has become very different.

With the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) now controlling both the Presidential Office and the legislature, the cross-strait relationship has reached a standoff. This has made Beijing decide to treat Wu differently from how it treated Ma.

‘ROC independence’ not realistic

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Monday, 14 August 2017 06:44

The KMT is of course still an enemy of Beijing’s, but Beijing needs its help to nudge out its primary enemy, the DPP. However, Beijing will probably leave a smaller gray area for Wu than it allowed in the past.

Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference Chairman Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声) has warned against any attempts to promote any form of Taiwanese independence.

In addition, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has said the nation would not allow “anyone, any organization or any political party to take away any part of China in any form at any time.”

Both remarks were meant to include supporters of Taiwanese independence as well as those who support Republic of China (ROC) independence, including Wu.

While Ma and Wu have both been strongly opposed to Taiwanese independence, they may not know that from Beijing’s point of view, they are still supporters of ROC independence.

For Beijing, the idea that there is “one China, with each side having its own interpretation of what that means” is apparently an attempt to seek ROC independence, which is little different from pursuing Taiwanese independence.

To Beijing, the KMT’s only worth lies in the fact that by continuing to move toward “one China,” it can to a certain extent push the DPP toward giving in to Beijing’s “one China” principle, and perhaps even make it agree to Beijing’s terms.

In the past several years, Ma’s platform of “one China, with each side having its own interpretation of what China means” has pushed Tsai to pledge that she will adhere to the ROC constitutional system, thus preventing her from challenging China’s bottom line.

However, the younger generations that have grown up under the “one China, different interpretations” policy are naturally inclined to see Taiwan as independent.

Xi's anxiety over this generation's political leanings and his ambition to annex the nation have made him less tolerant of the gray areas created by Ma's old platform, which Xi worries may be used to prepare Taiwan for becoming a normalized nation.

This is why Beijing has remained suspicious of Tsai's promise to maintain the "status quo" and feels that it is a way to keep Beijing at arm's length. For the same reason, Beijing will observe Wu's words and actions very carefully.

While some internal disagreements over a party's new platform are always inevitable, the resistance against Wu within the KMT is certainly something that Beijing was hoping to see, as it will put more pressure on Wu to cooperate with it.

Now that the KMT has lost control of the Presidential Office, the Executive Yuan and the Legislative Yuan, Ma's platform has become a major threat to Beijing.

Late last year, former director of China's Institute of Taiwan Studies Yu Keli (余克力) criticized Ma for having led Taiwan away from the path of unification.

"His 'no unification, no independence, no use of force' is meant to make Taiwan's de facto independence a fixed and permanent thing," Yu said of Ma, adding that "even today, he is still insisting on that position — which is ridiculous."

As an effect of the preparations for the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) upcoming 19th National Congress, Xi's attitude toward Taiwan has become firmer and more rigid, with cross-strait relations becoming locked in an even tenser standoff.

Even if both Wu and Tsai were to readopt Ma's old platform, Xi would not be happy. Things on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have changed considerably since the Sunflower movement and in the run-up to the CCP's 19th National Congress. Wu's attempt to go back to the way things were will not do the party any good, as things are not the same anymore.

The biggest difference between Hung and her supporters on the one hand, and Wu and his supporters on the other is that the first group are not bothered with presidential elections and that they see the push for unification as a campaign, while the second group are taking aim at the presidency and want to see the KMT back in government.

This is the power of democracy, and the restrictions provided by democracy are certain to give Wu and his supporters a stronger feeling of presence as well as more pressure than the restrictions imposed by Beijing.

Before 2004, former vice president Lien Chan (連戰) was still contemplating a presidential bid and he was therefore still paying attention to public opinion, but after having been soundly defeated in the following elections, he abandoned his concern with elections, turned his back on Taiwan and turned instead toward Beijing to control Taiwan.

From Lien to Ma, and in particular after the party's collapse in last year's presidential and legislative elections, a clear division has appeared within the KMT between one faction that wants to contest elections and one that does not.

Today, Beijing is becoming increasingly dependent on the faction that does not want to contest elections to constrain those who want to and it is easy to see how this will all end.

Beijing will in the end have to subdue the KMT as well, but by working together with its secondary enemy to defeat its primary enemy, Beijing has made the KMT think that they will always be partners and the party therefore has come to see its connection to China as the way to survive.

Since it became reliant on Beijing's economic and political support, the KMT has found itself at an impasse, as its direction, discourse and political program and views were neither pro-China nor pro-Taiwan.

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Still, the KMT does not lack clever people and they are very clear on the fact that even if they are giving the impression of being used, they still need to have sufficient support among the Taiwanese public lest they become completely dispensable.

In the end, the KMT must find a way to appear to be the Taiwanese Nationalist Party, and while it is opposed to Taiwanese independence, it still has to make voters associate them with ROC independence, while eventual unification remains in a distant, indeterminate future.

Was that not what Ma did? What will Wu do? Everyone is waiting to see how this battle between Taiwanese independence and KMT independence will develop.

Translated by Tu Yu-an and Perry Svensson

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2017/08/14](#)