

As the Russia-Ukraine war continues, barely a day goes by without a report of a bridge being blown to smithereens by one side or the other. The tactical destruction of bridges is as old as war itself, with structures dismantled or dynamited to slow the progress of advancing forces, cut off supply lines or pin down a retreating army.

Amid the destruction, new bridges are also built during conflict to rapidly ferry troops and materials across rivers. During peacetime, bridges are economic corridors, linking population centers separated by nature. Bridges can also be used to advance diplomatic goals, such as the Sino-Nepal Friendship Bridge.

Given the strategic importance of bridges, it is bizarre that Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) should display such scant regard for national security by proposing the construction of a link between Kinmen County and China's Xiamen.

Ko, who is also chairman of the Taiwan People's Party, made the proposal at the opening ceremony of the party's office in Kinmen on Saturday.

After he was challenged over the national security implications of a permanent land link with an enemy state, Ko said: "Try it first and deal with the problems if they arise."

Ko's blase riposte almost eclipsed the idiocy of the proposal. Did Ko have a similarly cavalier "try it and see" attitude toward his patients during his former career as a surgeon at National Taiwan University Hospital?

However, Ko is no dunce. As he is fond of saying, he has an IQ of 157. So what is he up to? There are several possible explanations:

Ko might have dreamed up a deliberately provocative policy to steal headlines and garner much-needed attention for his political party, buying into the idea that "there is no such thing as bad publicity."

Ko's bridge a road to nowhere

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He might also have been following a “dead cat strategy,” making a deliberately shocking announcement to divert media attention away from a scandal over an alleged cyberdisinformation unit operating inside the Taipei City Government.

Or the bridge proposal might have been in response to the high-profile visit to the US by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Eric Chu (吳敦義), during which Chu attempted to distance his party from Beijing and woo Washington. Ko might be playing political games, throwing out a pro-China “initiative” as red meat to poach disillusioned pro-China KMT voters.

He has a history of adopting contradictory positions designed to love bomb both sides of Taiwan's political divide — a cynical “triangulation” strategy that seeks to appeal to pan-blue and pan-green voters.

There are two types of politicians: Those who want to do something, and those who want to be someone. Ko appears to fall into the latter category. He is fixated on becoming president to satisfy his own vainglorious pretensions. Lacking any firm political convictions, in the top office he would be as pliable as plasticine, and before long, well and truly under Beijing's thumb.

Another possibility is that Ko actually favors unification and really does believe that Taiwan and China are “one family” — which he controversially said during a speech at a Taipei-Shanghai forum in 2015.

If this is the case, Ko should run on a joint ticket with former KMT chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) and see how far that gets him.

Ko's madcap bridge policy looks like nothing more than a cheap political stunt. It might go down well with a subset of pro-China voters in Kinmen, but it will sink like a lead balloon with the wider electorate.

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