

What a Re-elected DPP Should Do

| By Shih-chung Liu

Recent debate between the pan-green and pan-blue camps on whether CLSA Asia-Pacific Markets correctly predicted that “the 2012 presidential election is the KMT’s [Chinese Nationalist Party’s] to lose,” as well as rumors that the KMT might seriously consider an alternative candidate to President Ma Ying-jeou have revealed a most “inconvenient truth” about the KMT’s potential loss of power in 2012.

Comments made by some US academics further highlighted the possibility of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) returning to power in 2012. Ironically, the feeling that the DPP might be re-elected earlier than had been considered possible created more concern than expectation in the international community.

Attention has focused largely on whether a future DPP government would honor agreements signed by a KMT government with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). A second question leveled at the DPP is whether it can come up with a compromise formula on the “one China” issue that will enable it to continue talking to China. Most importantly, the debate centers on the extent to which DPP leaders are able to address these questions in the party’s planned “10-year policy platform.”

As the US largely attributes the deterioration

in Taiwan-US relations to former president Chen Shui-bian’s maneuverings on Taiwan’s sovereignty, it remains concerned that the next DPP leader or presidential candidate “will follow in Chen’s footsteps.” With this in mind, some US experts have called on the DPP to seriously consider renouncing the clause in the party platform that calls for “the establishment of a Republic of Taiwan.” Some suggest the DPP revise its “1999 Resolution on the Future of Taiwan” by downplaying the issue of sovereignty and recognizing “the constitutional Republic of China” as Taiwan’s version of the status quo.

These arguments are one-sided, misleading and fail to respect Taiwanese democracy. If the DPP wins the 2012 presidential election, it would unquestionably have the authority to review all bilateral agreements signed by the KMT government with the PRC. It is unlikely to suspend or annul those that were transparent, subject to legislative oversight and widely supported by the public, but it would naturally reserve the right to seek revisions or wholesale renegotiation of agreements that do not meet with Taiwan’s interests. The question is more one of whether the DPP can do this in a responsible way that takes into consideration the impact on cross-strait relations and international expectations.

Second, why does the DPP have to face up

to the “one China” issue alone? Should not China also have to acknowledge the “status quo” in Taiwan, especially if a DPP president is elected with a new mandate in 2012? Chen appealed to Beijing with the notion of a “future one China,” “political integration” and “1992 spirit” — a reference to agreements allegedly made at a meeting between the two sides in Hong Kong — but Beijing rejected numerous olive branches from the DPP government. Shouldn’t the DPP’s focus be to safeguard the democratic right of Taiwanese to determine the nation’s future at the ballot box?

To alleviate international concern, the DPP should first undertake a wide-ranging debate with party members as well as society in general when drafting cross-strait policy as outlined in the “10-year policy platform.”

Unlike the KMT’s top-down decision-making process and the propaganda of its Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement agenda, the DPP must engage in a comprehensive dialogue with the public to generate mainstream ideas about Taiwan’s future, which can then be used as basis for future negotiation with Beijing.

Moreover, such a policy platform must also involve a re-examination of what went wrong with DPP cross-strait policy in the past and a serious review of the downsides to the Ma administration’s current policy toward China. In order to ensure the DPP’s dialogue with the international community is candid, constructive and mutually beneficial, it must

also take into account recent changes in the global strategic environment.

Finally, Washington should see the potential return of a DPP government as a positive sign in US-Taiwan relations. It should also think about what changes it could ask China to make in negotiating with a future DPP administration.

The bottom line is that Taiwanese have earned the right to determine the nature of their relationship with China on their own terms. Both the DPP and US government should work hard to ensure that all cross-strait negotiations are conducted in a way that promotes peace and democracy. **BT**