

## *The American Interpretation of the Results of Taiwan's Five Special Municipality Elections*

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Since President Ma Ying-jeou took office more than two years ago, the Taiwan issue seems to have vanished from the political radar screen in Washington political circles. The end of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government in 2008 temporarily relieved Washington of a thorn in its flesh. The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) has rapidly promoted and implemented pro-China policies after coming to power, vigorously trying to remove the image of Taiwan as a “trouble maker” from American impressions and to play a good kid from whom “no news is good news,” so that Washington may not have haunting worries.

Such a scene has undergone subtle changes after Taiwan's five special municipality elections. A series of seminars held by important think tanks to analyze results of the five special municipality elections has almost focused entirely on the question as to whether the DPP may return to power “earlier” than expected. This concern reflects the statistical reality of the DPP's having gradually garnered more votes and support than the KMT over the past two years, and is not just about the KMT's face problem after the party sweated to retain three seats in the latest elections.

Most American observers still believe that Ma's chances of winning the 2012 presidential election and a second term are greater than any green-camp candidates. Nevertheless, Ma's glamour of capturing 7.6 million votes in the 2008 presidential election and of his domestic support has suffered a loss of nearly 2.2 million votes over the past two years, and this phenomenon has deepened the U.S.' concern about Taiwan's future political development. Although the Sean Lien shooting incident on the eve of the five special municipality elections altered the DPP's optimistic estimations of the seats and votes the party might win, it has further proved that the DPP has risen from the rock bottom it hit after its electoral debacle in 2008.

Politicians, academics, and observers in Washington focused on three main questions regarding the DPP's future development: Who will be the DPP candidate to run for the 2012 presidential election? How will the DPP outline a concrete China policy in the next phase? How will the DPP and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) carry out substantial contacts and interactions?

After elections, media in Taiwan has habitually discussed and judged who might rise to power, step down, or become

candidates in the DPP according to who the “heroes” are—according to individuals’ electoral victories, defeats, or high or low numbers of garnered votes. But the media neglected the fact that the nomination process of presidential elections has not been clearly ironed out yet. Rather than lining up, teaming up, or rashly surmising who the candidates might be, it would be better to take up a magnifier and carefully examine who can better meet the expectations of the majority of the Taiwan people and of the international community as well as providing cross-strait policies that can take better care of Taiwan’s national security interests and strategic changes in this region than the current Ma government.

During election campaigns in Taipei City and Xinbei City, the DPP had deliberately toned down cross-strait issues and the blue-green confrontation, adopting strategies that manifested personality features and administrative capability. This certainly has much to do with the consideration about the “predominantly blue, minor green” constituency structure in these two cities. However, when DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen mentioned “the creation of a DPP that is somewhat different from the old DPP” and when Su Tseng-chang, the DPP Taipei City mayoral candidate, emphasized “a new paradigm” after the elections, people

in Taiwan and the international community have received solemn messages from them and are looking into these messages with positive anticipation. In other words, they are to see whether DPP leaders will be able to extend this pragmatic, temperate, rational, and policy-oriented new path to both the formation of major policies in the future and the enhancement of Taiwan’s political culture.

The U.S. side is pleased to see the recent exchanges and dialogue between DPP-friendly think tanks and Chinese academic circles, believing such interactions would help both parties to have accurate and practical communication. The DPP headquarters is planning to establish a think tank as a center to collect and solidify the green camp’s cross-strait policy statements, so as to clarify the party line and the confusing messages sent out after individual party members or factions contacted China, prevent future debates on China policies within the party from losing focus, and even provide formal representatives for contacts and dialogue between political parties in the coming days. In addition, in promoting the DPP’s “10-year policy platform,” Chairperson Tsai needs to enlarge party members’ participation in the proposal, to increase the level of transparency as the party conducts dialogue with the public, and to explain the platform to the U.S. clearly.

Besides, the U.S. is highly concerned

about how the DPP will handle the various agreements the Ma administration has signed or will sign with China if it returns to power, especially the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). Tsai's earlier statement about "continuing the previous administration's policies (if the DPP returns to government)" has slightly relieved the U.S.' apprehension, but the DPP's keeping the commitment to not exclude the possibility of reviewing the executive results of these agreements in the future still causes Washington's uneasiness. Although the DPP has formerly criticized the ECFA, it has not been able to offer a concrete and foresighted cross-strait economic and trade policy to replace the pact. Therefore, this issue will become a focal point of the DPP's internal discussions in the coming days.

Since Washington has recognized that the DPP's chances of returning to government in 2012 have increased, it can be expected that Washington will exert further pressure on the DPP, such as inquiring whether the party can propose a "political foundation" different from the KMT's "1992 Consensus" to be the base for future dialogue between the DPP and the CCP. If this potential political foundation is to be rooted in the original spirit of the 1999 Resolution on Taiwan's Future, can it have any ingenuity?

During a seminar held at the George

Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs on Dec. 9, Center for Strategic and International Studies scholar Bonnie Glaser said the Obama administration has always considered the depth and breadth of the Ma government's briefings to the U.S. on cross-strait negotiations, including those on issues such as Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly and the ECFA, to be insufficient. This reveals that although Washington appears to be satisfied with the improvement of cross-strait relations, it has had certain concerns about the negotiation process between the KMT and the CCP.

Before the five special municipality elections, Ma has publicly clarified that he will not conduct political negotiations with China during his term in office. Now that the KMT has won a "Pyrrhic victory" and that Ma's leadership is not severely hurt, the focuses of observation are on whether an opportunity for the KMT and the CCP's negotiation on political issues will emerge and whether an atmosphere for Ma to carry out political negotiations with China after his re-election will be intentionally built up during the 2012 presidential campaigns. These concerns of American academics have reflected a sense of uncertainty, and the DPP should continue to demand transparency and democratic nature from the Ma administration's decision-making process of cross-strait policies in the future. **BT**