

## *The 1992 Consensus and Taiwan Politics*

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The five special municipality elections at the end of last year had not resulted in significant changes in the blue and green camps' political landscapes as expected. Ma Ying-jeou's government was spared from seeing a split Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), and Ma has strengthened his leadership within the party as well as his chances of securing the party's nomination to seek a second term in the next presidential election. Shortly after the special municipality elections, Ma, in an exclusive interview with the United Evening News in late December, brought up the "1992 consensus" question with the intention of forcing potential Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidates to make clear their stand on this issue.

Ma's strategy was to take advantage of the period before the DPP mapped out rules for presidential primaries and nominations to widen the party's internal divisions over its China policy and to disrupt the party's unity. Exploiting DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen's remarks that the party will "continue the previous government's cross-strait policies if it returns to power," Ma demanded Tsai to explain whether this means the DPP will also

continue the "1992 consensus," the political foundation of the KMT's cross-strait policies.

Ma then ambiguously quoted Deputy Chairman of China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Li Yafei's statement last August that the "1992 consensus" was a consensus reached by the ARATS and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) in 1992 on respective verbal interpretations of the adherence to the "one-China principle" by both sides of the Strait. Ma further cited Chinese President Hu Jintao's remarks during the latter's phone conversation with former U.S. president George W. Bush in March 2008 that "it is China's consistent stand that the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan should restore consultation and talks on the basis of 'the 1992 consensus.'" These two facts were used by Ma to distort the "1992 consensus" and to create the illusion that except for the DPP, the U.S., the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) all accept the consensus. Ma's attempt was to "isolate" the DPP.

In fact, if Ma adopts Li's language, it proves that the KMT accepts Beijing's definition of the "one-China principle" rather than the "Republic of China" referred to in

Ma's mantra "one China, each with its own interpretation." In 1992, the SEF and the ARATS reached a consensus on "one China, each with its own interpretation," but Beijing has never accepted the KMT's unilateral claim that the "Republic of China" represents the "one China." Hu, in his 2011 New Year address, again reiterated the old line of "peaceful reunification" and "one country, two systems."

It goes without saying that the "1992 consensus" has never been part of the U.S. policy toward Taiwan. The U.S., consistent in its policy for both sides of the Strait to solve differences peacefully, has never expressed any opinion about the "political foundation or framework" on or within which the peaceful solutions should be carried out, nor has it ever demanded one of the two sides to accept any "political foundation or framework." Ma, no doubt, was misleading the public when he quoted some Bush-Hu hotline conversation to create the false impression that "the U.S. also accepts the '1992 consensus.'" In his political calculation, Ma believed that, as Beijing would not publicly oppose his making such a statement and as Washington has been pleased to see the current cross-strait dialogue, he would be able to artfully fabricate the illusion that both the CCP and the U.S. accept the "1992 consensus." On the other hand, through

reiterating that "Taiwan's future lies in the hands of its 23 million people" in his New Year address and through celebrations of the Republic of China's (ROC) 100th anniversary, Ma has endeavored to build his image as a president who "loves Taiwan" and is dedicated to defend the sovereignty of the ROC.

It is undeniable that Ma's maneuverings of the "1992 consensus" have affected the DPP's presidential primaries. DPP headquarters cited evidence to refute the existence of the "1992 consensus," saying the concept is purely an invention of former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi under the KMT government and therefore there is no question about accepting "the consensus" or not. The DPP further questioned Ma whether the ROC exists under the "1992 consensus" and whether China accepts the ROC. The DPP's official stand still adheres to the basic position of the Resolution on Taiwan's Future passed in 1999, namely that "Taiwan is an independent and sovereign country, with the "Republic of China" as its national title. Any change to the 'status quo' of independence should require the approval of the people of Taiwan in a national referendum."

But several DPP politicians intending to run for the party's presidential primaries have expressed views different from the party's official line. Frank Hsieh, the DPP's

presidential candidate in 2008, proposed to use the principle of “respective interpretations of the Constitution” to replace the “1992 consensus.” Former vice president Annette Lu put forth the “1996 consensus” as the foundation for the “DDP-CCP dialogue.” Hsieh has always maintained that the political foundation for the “DPP-CCP dialogue” should be sought under the “one-China” framework of the current ROC Constitution, whereas Lu has suggested that Taiwan’s first-ever popular presidential election in 1996 should be established as a consensus on Taiwan’s sovereignty and independence and serve as the social consensus for Taiwan to seek dialogue with China.

Since the DPP decided on January 22 to let public polls determine its presidential election candidates, potential contenders have one after another proposed their views regarding the “political foundation” on which the DPP should conduct dialogue with China, so as to gather more public support. It is likely that debates on this issue will last until the polls begin.

Beijing also took this opportunity to influence the debates on China policy within the DPP. ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin said Beijing’s economic policy toward Taiwan is based on a political premise, which is Hu’s statements on “opposition to Taiwan

independence” and on the “1992 consensus.” “Without this two-point premise, China might have to reconsider all its cross-strait economic measures,” Chen noted. It is unclear whether Chen was implying that China will cut cross-strait economic and trade exchange if the DPP returns to power in 2012 and refuses to accept the “1992 consensus.” However, it is fairly evident that he intended to “confine” the present debates on China policy within the DPP to the “one-China framework” and the “1992 consensus.”

The DPP can make at least three kinds of responses. First, it falls into the political trap of the “1992 consensus” set up by the KMT and the CCP. Second, it accepts flexible concepts similar to the “1992 consensus” but not the term “1992 consensus.” Third, it integrates more opinions on this issue to form a domestic consensus and to seek to establish a “new political foundation for dialogue” with China. As the party has yet to decide its presidential candidate and as the presidential election has not begun, the DPP should make the third kind of response, adopting this pragmatic strategy to cautiously consolidate party and social consensus rather than rashly announcing its position due to pressure from the KMT and the CCP. **B**